AWAKENED SAVAGES: LADINO/MESTIZO RACIAL CATEGORIES IN HONDURAS IN TRANSITION TO THE 20TH CENTURY

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Abstract

Officially declared a “pluricultural and multiethnic” state in 1994, Honduras has long experienced the systematic dispossession of its human and non-human diversity through land concessions, resource extraction, violence, and displacement. Public discourse often frames these processes as affecting only “ethnic minorities” leaving the “majority” population unaddressed and broader social structures unexamined. Yet in a country shaped by centuries of *mestizaje* (racial mixture), how do certain populations come to be defined as racial minorities or majorities? And how have state instruments such as censuses produced, naturalized, or obscured these distinctions?

This thesis examines the logic and function of racial categorization in Honduras during the liberal nation-building era, focusing on national censuses between 1880 and 1950. Rather than tracing biological or genealogical notions of racial mixture, it analyzes how categories like *ladino* and *mestizo* were deployed to structure national identity and mediate integration into global economic circuits. It asks: What role did these categories play in the political and economic ordering of the nation at the turn of the 20th century? Could an “Indian” also be a “Ladino,” and under what conditions? How did official censuses of the period between 1880 and 1950 intersect with notions of “mestizaje” and “national identity”?

The central argument is that racial classifications in Honduran censuses during this period, particularly *ladino* and *mestizo*, functioned less as markers of phenotype or ancestry and more as relational markers of economic position, forms of land tenure, and cultural assimilation. This challenges prevailing assumptions, particularly in Anglophone contexts, that emphasize ethno-racial identity over class and material relations. By analyzing the intersection of racial ideology, economic structure, and state enumeration practices, the thesis sheds fresh light on the material foundations of racial identity and the historical construction of the Honduran nation.

Keywords: mestizaje, ethnicity, race, national identity, class, indigeneity

Introduction – Racial Categorization and Nation-Building in Honduras, 1880–1950

This thesis interrogates the function of racial categories such as *ladino* and *mestizo* in Honduran nation-building since the late 19th century until mid-20th century. The core question guiding this research is: What was the relationship between official racial categorizations and the construction of national identity in Honduras between 1880 and 1950? More specifically, this thesis argues that the key racial categories deployed in official censuses—*ladino*, *mestizo*, and *indio*—did not correspond to biological or phenotypic difference. Instead, they mirrored underlying economic distinctions and forms of land tenure, entangling race with class and state formation in ways that structured majority and minority identities.

Rather than dwelling on the complex details of biological mestizaje or lamenting the historiographical neglect of Honduras's racial heterogeneity, this study focuses on the mechanics and functions of racial categorization within the liberal nation-building project. Subsidiary, more specific questions that it asks are: What roles did the categories of *ladino* or *mestizo* serve in the dual project of nation-building and integrating Honduras into the world economy around the turn of the 20th century? Could an "indigenous" person also be classified as "ladino," and on what basis? How did official racial categories intersect with ideas of national progress, modernity, and backwardness?

The thesis argues for and employs a more materialist approach to understanding ethnicity and race, reframing their function as markers of specific socioeconomic relations rather than mere bio-cultural identities. It insists that racial categorization must be understood in tandem with social class relations, land ownership, and labor regimes. In doing so, it critically interrogates the widely accepted paradox of "racial mixture" or *mestizaje* as a discourse of inclusion premised on the erasure of Indigenous and Afro-descendant histories.

By analyzing censuses, official texts, and elite discourses from 1880 to 1950—the Central American "liberal era" characterized by land dispossession and land concessions, foreign investment, banana exports, and growing state institutionalization—this thesis demonstrates how racial categories produced and regulated social realities, defining who belongs to the nation and who is excluded. The Honduran *mestizo* might or not have been a demographic or biological fact, but most importantly, it was an ideological construct crafted to reconcile colonial legacies with capitalist modernity's demands. Understanding this historical process is crucial for unpacking contemporary national identity and ongoing socio-political conflicts in Honduras. It also situates Honduran and Central American racial ideology within broader hemispheric and global patterns of racial-capitalist state formation.

The chapters that follow first clarify key theoretical concepts before examining the content and function of official censuses and elite discourses, revealing how the racial ordering of the population was central to Honduran nation-building and continues to shape inclusion and exclusion. This thesis proceeds in four parts. First, in the rest of this chapter, a brief contextualization takes place. Second, racial categorization is situated within broader theoretical debates on race, nation-building, and political economy in Central America. Third, it presents an idiosyncratic analysis of Honduran censuses and official discourses from 1880 to 1950, highlighting how racial categories like *ladino* and *mestizo* functioned as instruments of social ordering. Finally, the study reflects on the ongoing legacies of these racial formations in contemporary Honduran identity and the international politics of racial difference. Methodologically, this work combines historiographical and archival research and critical discourse analysis. Primary sources mainly include official censuses from 1880 to 1950 and related state documents, which are analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to uncover how

racial categories were constructed, operationalized, and linked to economic and land regimes. This approach aligns with a materialist framework that emphasizes state power, class relations, and racial formation.

1.1 Racial Categorization, National Identity, and Liberal Reforms (1880–1950)

In this thesis I examine racial categorization in Honduras during the transitional period between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. I focus on official censuses produced between 1880 and 1950 to analyze how the racial data they contain intersect with contemporaneous notions of *mestizaje* and national identity. The temporal delimitation of this period responds not only to the availability of published census data but also to significant transnational and local historical developments. Notably, this timeframe corresponds to the epoch commonly referred to as the liberal reform era across Central America, marked by profound political, economic, and ideological transformations.[1]

The liberal reforms that swept through the isthmus during this era found their ideological and political origins in earlier upheavals across the region.[2] The triumph of Benito Juárez's Mexican Republic, following the expulsion of the French and the execution of Emperor Maximilian, sent ripples of republican liberalism into neighboring countries. As Honduran historians Oyuela and Oquelí note, "the triumph of the Republic of Juárez in Mexico was

[1] This period of Central American history is commonly understood to encompass the years 1870-1944.

[2] The "liberal revolution of 1871" in Guatemala is often regarded as the heralder of the broader liberal reform period in Central America. Both Ramón Rosa and Marco Aurelio Soto took part in the government of Justo Rufino Barrios, president of Guatemala from 1873 to 1885. These reforms are understood to have included a large number of sociopolitical, administrative and economic changes. Among their principal consequences was the dispossession of communal land from peasants, numerous land concessions, and the opening to foreign capital, especially but not exclusively from the United States.

impatiently pounding on the walls of Guatemala, inciting rebellion against the conservative regime established by Rafael Carrera thirty years earlier."[3] In Honduras, liberal reformers such as Marco Aurelio Soto and Ramón Rosa embraced this tide of change, initiating reforms starting around 1876 with comparatively less resistance at the political elite level than seen in Mexico or Guatemala. Conservative elites, rather than opposing, actively supported many of these changes, signaling broad elite consensus behind the liberal modernization project.

During this period, Honduran liberal intellectuals and government officials devoted considerable effort to articulating a national identity consonant with the political-economic transformations underway. The reforms aimed to integrate the Honduran economy into global markets, prompting the state to define its population and territory in ways that supported modernization and international connectivity. Across the Central American isthmus, liberal elites often expressed themselves clearly with respect to state policies towards indigenous populations.[4] Through the coming decades, as different worker-migrants arrived and foreign capital encroached in the region in relation to the liberal reforms, the role of national identity in the public sphere gained increasing centrality.[5] At least at the level of the governing elites, it was

[3] Leticia de Oyuela and Ramón Oquelí, "Notas Sobre Ramón Rosa," in *Documentos Para La Historia de Honduras,* ed. Roberto Sosa, vol. 2. (Tegucigalpa: Litografía López, 2002), 425.

[4] David Díaz Arias, "Between caste war and mestizaje: images of indigenous people in liberal Central America, 1870-1944," *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, no. 26 (April 1, 2007): 58–72; Stephen Palmer, "A Liberal Discipline: Inventing Nations in Guatemala and Costa Rica" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1990).

[5] This took many complex forms, sometimes strongly xenophobic in relation to Asian, African, and West Indian populations which had different roles as merchants, capitalists, or day-laborers in mines and agricultural plantations. To mention only three relevant cases for reference: The most well-known Honduran author and intellectual of the early 20th century, Froylán Turcios, wrote against North American imperialist policies in the *National Defense Bulletin* (1924) in the context of the so-called 2nd Civil War of Honduras. In Nicaragua, most intensively from 1927 to 1934, anti-imperialist nationalist discourses were championed and taken into practice by revolutionaries such as Augusto César Sandino, leader of the Army in Defense of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua (EDSN). In El Salvador, Agustín Farabundo Martí was one of the most well-known names involved in the 1932 Peasant Uprising supported by the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) in response to the deplorable situation for peasants and Nahua communities after many years of liberal reforms, indigenous land expropriations, and the decline of coffee prices. The direct consequence of these events was later known as "La Matanza" ("The Massacre") ethnocide.

also during this long period that most Central American states embraced *mestizaje* as both an empirical biological reality and an ideological project.[6] In Honduras, the dominant narrative endorsed by intellectuals and officials depicted the nation as "Indo-Hispanic"—a synthesis between the mythical Mayan civilization and Hispanic colonial heritage.[7]

For example, Eduardo Martínez López (1867–1954), a prominent historian and director of the National Archives (ANH) in the early 1920s, treated indigenous history largely as an archaeological artifact in his *Honduras: Geológico-Etnológica* (1923). The state's endorsement of mestizaje was formalized in the 1930s, when it officially declared the population "mostly mestizo," after the 1930 national census. Further intellectual contributions, such as those by Federico Lunardi—an Italian Catholic archbishop, ethnologist, and archaeologist—who in 1948 published *Honduras Maya: Etnología y Arqueología de Honduras,* positioned Honduras as the key center of Mayan civilization.

While scholarly and official interest in indigeneity increased throughout Latin America during this period, this thesis centers not on the indigenous subject itself but on the category positioned against it: the "ladino." In Honduran republican discourse from the 1880s onward, especially since the 1887 national census, *ladinos* and *indios* emerged as mutually exclusive racial categories. I argue that this binary was not a neutral reflection of social reality, but a deliberate ideological division aimed at fostering a sense of national unity aligned with liberal

[6] According to the concluding essay in the arguably most comprehensive book to date about mestizaje in Central America, only Guatemala does not follow this model. There, elites had no interest to talk about an ethnically homogenous society, and the tension between the "indigenous" and the "ladino" is still central to its national debates. See: Carol A. Smith, "Las Contradicciones del Mestizaje en Centroamérica," in *Memorias del mestizaje : cultura política en Centroamérica de 1920 al presente*, eds. Darío Euraque, Jeffrey L. Gould, and Charles R. Hale (Guatemala: CIRMA, 2004), 579-617.

[7] For a discussion of this phenomenon, also known as "mayanization," see: Darío A Euraque, "Antropólogos, arqueólogos, imperialismo y la mayanización de Honduras: 1890-1940," *Revista Yaxkin, órgano de divulgación del Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia* XVII, no. 1 (1998): 85–101.

state-building and capitalist integration. This racial dichotomy served as a political technology that obscured the complex realities of indigenous persistence and cultural hybridity, as we will see in this study.

1.2 Central America in Context: Regional Specificities and Global Ties

The historiography of Central America presents certain challenges that require specific contextualization. It is helpful to mention the two most salient issues in relation to this thesis. First, Central America's historical trajectory is shaped by a paradox: though geographically central, it remained politically peripheral during the Spanish colonial period vis-à-vis the regions of México or Perú.[8] It basically functioned as a colonial periphery whose institutional thinness amplified global capital's influence on racial formation. The sparse administrative infrastructure, epitomized by a single audiencia in Guatemala City governing the entire isthmus, the low indigenous population density under Spanish control,[9] and the failure to establish robust tribute systems, fostered localized racial regimes that operated with minimal Crown oversight. This colonial legacy created weak post-independence states that would interact with foreign capital in ways that would inevitably shape Honduran republican racial categorization. Thus, for very good

[8] The five inner countries of the isthmus were all previously part of the Federal Republic of Central America (1824-1841), together with the current states of Belice, Chiapas and Soconusco. Further back, the provinces under the Captaincy General of Guatemala (including current Guatemala, Belize, Chiapas, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica) declared independence from the Spanish Empire in 1821, joining the First Mexican Empire by annexation. In July 1823, the region declared its full independence. By 1842, Central America was a region configured into five independent states. Several efforts to reintegrate the region politically have flourished and decayed since then.

[9] Lovell and Lutz wrote that on the eve of independence (1821), the native population of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica that survived conquest and colonization "constituted less than eight percent of their contact size." Specifically in current Honduran territory, estimates of a population of around 800,000 to 1 million natives ca. 1520 (Linda Newsom's numbers), turn to estimates of around 47,544 inhabitants ca. 1700. This represents a decline rate of almost 94% in 180 years. Needless to say, this was catastrophic. The estimates ascend to 62,692 in 1800. By 1804, nonetheless, the governor of the Province of Honduras, Ramón Anguiano, reported that out of a total population of 128,863, 4.3 percent were Black, 6.5 percent White, 27.4 percent Indian, and the overwhelming majority, 61.8 percent, Ladinos. See: W. George Lovell and Christopher H. Lutz, *Demography And Empire: A Guide To The Population History Of Spanish Central America, 1500-1821* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 1-17.

reasons, Central American history often challenges broader continental tendencies, reflecting what the politically peripheral and geographically central nature of the region affords. Second, it is vital to understand that human classification systems in the American continent were not entirely uniform during the colonial or republican period, not in criteria nor the usage of categories themselves. As much as we wish today to paint the history of "Latin America" as a block, it is rather ahistorical to do so. These dynamics will be most clarified in section 2.3 *Ladinización: a uniquely Central American Process?*

These two remarks coalesce clearly in the presence until today of the "ladino" as a racial subject, especially in Guatemala and Honduras. This racial category has less or no import at all throughout most of the territories that were once occupied and administered by the Spanish Empire. Unlike the biologically defined "mestizo" dominant in Mexico and the Andes, the "ladino" emerged in Central America as a cultural category marking Hispanized Indigenous populations as early as the 16th century. Lovell and Lutz are of the opinion that the term was current from the late 17th century on.[10] We trace the use and meaning of the term in section 2.3.1 *The "Ladino" Through Time*.

There exist nonetheless, several aspects of Central American history that inextricably tie the region and its inhabitants to both global and continental currents, such as *mestizaje* as national ideology throughout most of the 20th century, the push for integration into the world economy since the latter part of the 19th century, and most recently, the region's multicultural turn since the 1990s. All in all, these dynamics necessitate complicating homogenized "Latin

[10] Lovell and Lutz, *Demography and Empire*, 14.

American" models, which we explore in greater depth in section 2.1 *Imagined Communities and the Racial Foundations of Latin American Nationalisms.*

1.3 Historiography and the Politics of Racial Difference

The study of racial difference has long occupied a central, if contested, place in both academic and popular discourse. Historical interpretations of race are always shaped, most often unconsciously, by the political and intellectual climates in which they emerge. Over time, historians reflect on these shifting contexts, gradually clarifying the material and ideological conditions that shaped earlier accounts. This thesis situates itself within that ongoing process of historiographical self-examination.

A central point of departure is the work of Darío Euraque, whose sustained interrogation of mestizaje in Honduras has profoundly influenced how scholars approach questions of race and national identity. His core argument is that dominant historiography has long propagated an image of Honduras as a culturally homogenous "mestizo" nation, derived exclusively from Spanish and Mayan roots. This narrative erases the racial heterogeneity that persisted long after the colonial period.[11] For Euraque, such erasure is not merely an academic oversight but an ideological maneuver with political consequences.

Euraque's challenge to the myth of harmonious and total racial mixture has not gone uncontested. Critics have accused him of introducing "foreign conceptions" into the analysis of local history. Yet it is precisely this tension between the production of national myths and the global dynamics of racial thought that makes his work peculiar. His intervention demonstrates

[11] Darío A. Euraque, "Apuntes para una historiografía del mestizaje en Honduras," *Iberoamericana* V, no. 19 (2005): 105–17.

that racial ideology in Honduras is not only shaped by internal histories but also by transnational debates about identity and citizenship. His influence extended beyond the academy when he became director of the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History (IHAH) in 2006.[12] During his tenure, and in line with the thinking of other historians such as Dr. Pastor Fasquelle, he reshaped national heritage policy to explicitly include Indigenous and Afro-descendant histories as integral to the Honduran nation.[13] While I will not detail these institutional reforms here, they underscore the broader stakes of historiographical debate—how historical narratives literally shape national identity and public policy.

The notion of Honduras as a mestizo nation remains dominant. Contemporary surveys report that around 87% of Hondurans self-identify as "mestizo." At the same time that the mestizo recognizes a mixed heritage, Indigenous peoples are often described as "ethnic minorities," creating a paradoxical division between national and ethnic identity. This paradox is echoed in international legal frameworks. For instance, the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, ratified by Honduras, defines Indigenous peoples as distinct communities within nation-states—thus affirming their separateness even while acknowledging their foundational presence.[14]

The 1990s were pivotal in this regard. Beyond the adoption of ILO C169 in 1989, the decade witnessed a surge in Indigenous and Afro-descendant activism across Latin America. In

[12] Euraque's tenure as Director of the IHAH ended in 2009 as a result of the coup d'état against then liberal politician and president Manuel Zelaya. Euraque wrote alongside Yesenia Martínez a book that registers the vicissitudes of Honduran identity and cultural heritage in the context of the coup. See: Darío A. Euraque and Yesenia Martínez, *El golpe de Estado del 28 de Junio de 2009, el patrimonio cultural y la identidad nacional de Honduras* (San Pedro Sula, Honduras: Centro Editorial, 2010).

[13] Victor M. Ramos, ed., *Diccionario de las lenguas de Honduras: español, chortí, garífuna, isleño, miskito, pech, tawahka, tolupán* (Tegucigalpa: Academia Hondureña de la Lengua, 2013), viii.

[14] C169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169

Honduras, this included the founding of organizations such as CONPAH (1992), COPINH (1993), and the official recognition of Honduras as a "pluricultural and multiethnic" nation in 1994.[15] Earlier, in 1978, OFRANEH had already begun mobilizing Garífuna identity and rights. As Jorge Alberto Amaya argues, it was precisely this wave of activism—especially by Garífuna groups—that helped push the state toward acknowledging racial and ethnic plurality.[16]

Since the 1990s, both public discourse and critical scholarship have undergone a paradigm shift: referencing "Latin America" or "the Americas" without engaging terms like *Abya Yala*—an Indigenous toponym that rejects the logic of coloniality—now signals a critical oversight.[17] Competing designations such as "Latin America," "New World," and *Abya Yala* map rival historical memories and epistemologies onto the same geography. The 1992 quincentenary of Columbus's arrival crystallized this clash: while many state institutions celebrated "discovery," Indigenous movements across the continent declared "500 years of resistance." In this context, the United Nations General Assembly's declaration of 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People marked not just symbolic recognition, but the consolidation of a new global discourse of Indigenous rights and identity.

This thesis engages critically with these developments—not simply to describe them but to analyze the ideological work throughout the 20th century that shaped them to any extent.

[15] Acuerdo Presidencial 0719-EP-94, or Executive Order No. 0719-EP-04 was ratified by Decree No. 93-97. This Presidential Order of August 3, 1994, established the legal basis for the institutionalization of the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program for members of eight ethnic groups in the country: the Misquitos, Garífunas, Pech, Lencas, Tolupanes, Chortis, Nahuas, and Creoles (or "Islanders"). https://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/amsudant/honduras-accord_pres1994.htm

[16] Jorge Alberto Amaya, "Reimaginando la Nación en Honduras: De la Nación Homogénea a la Nación Pluriétnica. Los Negros Garífunas de Cristales" (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2004).

[17] "Abya Yala" is a term from the guna language that means "land in complete maturity" and was allegedly introduced by Takir Mamani in the context of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1977. Other anglophone writers such as Jack D. Forbes use different terms, such as "Anishinabe-waki"

Following the lead of Euraque and others, it challenges dominant assumptions about homogeneity and harmony by tracing the institutional and discursive formations through which racial categories have been constructed, enforced, and contested in Honduras from the late 19th to mid-20th century.

1.4 Race as social relation or economic factor

The emergence of Indigenous and Afro-descendant movements, the legal recognition of a pluriethnic Honduran nation, and the historiographical interventions by figures such as Euraque, form a crucial backdrop to this thesis. However, my concern is not with documenting heterogeneity. Rather, it is with understanding how racial categories themselves operate as tools of classification, differentiation, and governance. In this regard, I depart somewhat from debates centered primarily on the "ethnic" composition of the population. My interest lies not in determining who truly belonged to an "Indigenous" or "mestizo" group at any given time, but in analyzing how such identities were constructed and mobilized in specific institutional and economic contexts. The categories of "ladino" and "mestizo," I argue, should be treated not as stable descriptors of demographic fact, but as historically contingent markers linked to shifting relations of land, labor, and national ideology.

This analytical orientation reflects a broader historiographical turn that views race not simply as a descriptive label or identity, but as a dynamic social relation—one deeply entangled with processes of economic restructuring, political centralization, and cultural homogenization. In the following chapter, I map out the conceptual tools that guide this analysis. Drawing from theories of national identity, racial formation, and mestizaje, I propose a framework for interpreting census data not merely as demographic records, but as ideological texts that both reflect and shape the material structures of the societies that produced them.

2 Theoretical Framework

Si la historia sirve de contexto formador a la identidad, esta última actúa como conciencia testimonial y viva de la historia.
Marvin Barahona, 1991.[18]

This chapter undertakes a critical elaboration of three foundational yet contested concepts central to this thesis: *imagined community*, *mestizaje*, and *ladinización*. These concepts, as much theoretical constructs as historical processes, frame the core inquiry into racial classification in the context of national identity formation in Central America on the cusp of the 20th century. Rather than presenting fixed definitions, I aim to map my reading of their intellectual genealogies and situate their interrelations with broader and equally fraught categories such as nation, race, and ethnicity. This articulation is essential not necessarily to settle debates but to clarify the conceptual lens through which this project reads racial categories, which is, not simply as descriptive labels but as dynamic tools that naturalize socioeconomic relations embedded in socio-political projects of governance and identity-making.

In this chapter, I first reframe imagined community to foreground the contested and power-laden nature of nation-building in Latin America. Next, I interrogate mestizaje beyond its conventional gloss as "racial mixture," emphasizing its theoretical and historiographical elasticity and its entanglement with shifting and malleable notions of race and ethnicity. Finally, the notion of *ladinización* connects racial classification to specific socioeconomic and political structures, revealing the intricacies of indigeneity as a lived and contested category. I clarify these terms' intellectual histories and their theoretical relevance for the Central American context. Together, these frameworks establish a scaffold for the historical analysis that follows,

[18] Marvin Barahona, *Evolución histórica de la identidad nacional*, 2a ed. (Tegucigalpa: Editorial Guaymuras, 2002), 42.

situates the project within ongoing debates in much academic historiography as well as global public understandings of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity. linking archival readings of official censuses to broader debates about the production and circulation of racial categories across bureaucratic, discursive, and geographic registers.

2.1 Imagined Communities and the Racial Foundations of Latin American Nationalisms

At the heart of this theoretical chapter—perhaps only because of the undeniable pull that this theory of nationalism has had throughout academic spaces—lies an engagement with Benedict Anderson's concept of the *imagined community*. This is a framework for understanding how "the nation, whose figure has dominated all contemporary history for at least two centuries,"[19] is culturally and politically constructed. Anderson posits that nations are socially imagined political communities, limited and sovereign, brought into existence through an almost "fortuitous" convergence of shared language, print capitalism, and collective memory.[20] This idea shifted scholarly attention away from primordial or essentialist views of the nation, offering a powerful lens through which to understand national consciousness as a modern cultural construct. Anderson's formulation, while widely influential, requires rigorous adaptation for Latin America, as critics like Claudio Lomnitz have argued and Nicola Miller compellingly documented. Their critiques point to the limitations of a model rooted in elite print cultures and suggest that in Latin America, national identity was forged through processes deeply embedded in colonial hierarchies, racialized governance, and fragmented "post"-colonial state formations. This more granular and historically specific reading allows for a deeper understanding of

[19] François-Xavier Guerra, "Introducción," in *Inventando La Nación: Iberoamérica Siglo XIX*, ed. Antonio Annino and François-Xavier Guerra (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), 7.

[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 46.

mestizaje and *ladinización* not only as elite discourses but as socio-political processes negotiated across class and racial lines.

Nicola Miller's historiographical intervention offers a critique of the Eurocentric framing that has long dominated the theoretical study of nationalism. She argues that Latin America has been largely excluded from comparative models developed by figures such as Gellner, Smith, and Breuilly, not because the region fundamentally diverges from these frameworks, but because "everything partly applies" in ways that disrupt their underlying assumptions. Identifiers of nationalism, such as language for instance, are present but in complex and contradictory ways.[21] Among the few major theorists to consider the region, she says, Eric Hobsbawm acknowledged Latin American nationalisms as politically constructed and rhetorically inclusive but claimed they remained "largely immune to modern ethnic-cultural nationalism." Miller challenges this assertion directly, emphasizing that state-sponsored violence such as the Mapuche dispossession in Chile, Argentina's *Conquista del Desierto*, and genocidal campaigns in Guatemala, renders such a characterization untenable. She notes that ideologies of *mestizaje*, while invoking inclusion, were embedded in racialized state structures and national iconographies that persistently excluded Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. In this context, even Benedict Anderson's model of "imagined communities" is a useful but insufficient cultural lens. Miller critiques his claim that Latin American independence movements exemplified early forms of nationalism, arguing that his reliance on thin empirical evidence and overemphasis on elite print cultures oversimplifies the historical processes at play. Nonetheless, she recognizes that

[21] Nicola Miller, "The Historiography of Nationalism and National Identity in Latin America," *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 2 (April 2006): 203.

Latin Americanists have productively extended Anderson's conceptual tools to analyze how national identity was articulated and contested across class, gender, and racial boundaries.

Anderson's emphasis on print capitalism as the primary mechanism forging national consciousness assumes a rupture from pre-modern forms of collective identity. However, Enrique Florescano challenges this by theorizing national identity in Latin America as a "palimpsest," or a layered reconstruction of pre-Columbian, colonial, and postcolonial myths. For instance, Mesoamerican cosmogonies (e.g., the Aztec *Legend of the Suns*) and colonial-era mestizo chronicles (e.g., Inca Garcilaso de la Vega) were strategically resurrected by 19th-century elites to legitimize independence movements and postcolonial state-building.[22] These myths functioned not merely as symbolic tools but as epistemic frameworks that shaped how communities were practically affected by different notions of territoriality, temporality, and belonging. This critique aligns with Claudio Lomnitz's argument that Spanish American nationalism operated as a "practical system" rooted in the materiality of local governance rather than abstract imagination. For example, in Mexico, the persistence of indigenous *cacicazgos* (chiefdoms) and colonial-era administrative structures necessitated a nationalism negotiated through daily practices such as land disputes, tax collection, and ritual

[22] Enrique Florescano, "Los Mitos de Identidad Colectiva y La Reconstrucción Del Pasado," in *Para Una Historia de América II. Los Nudos (1)*, ed. Marcello Carmagnani, Alicia Hernández Chávez, and Ruggiero Romano (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999).

Several historians are helpful in elucidating these points, and especially for Mexico, they have come up with the notion of "patriotic epistemology. See: Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford University Press, 2004), Chapter 4 "The Making of a Patriotic Epistemology," 204-265. Arguably, Central America passes through a very different process, or at least at a very different time, instead of Jesuit Francisco Clavijero trying to document and recover pre-Columbian history in the 1780s, Central America, or at least Honduras, has a couple of erudites in the early to mid-20th century attempting to uncover the history of the Mayan civilization. The key takeaway here is the use of archives to legitimize power and political identities, all while reconstituting notions of identity. This meant in practice including or excluding many, especially indigenous populations who were placed as subjects of a distant past, into the national idea.

performances, rather than solely through print media.[23] Lomnitz thus reframes nationalism as a lived process where state and subaltern actors engaged in constant bargaining, complicating Anderson's top-down model of elite-driven imagination.

Subaltern or popular contributions to this negotiation have been most clearly articulated by scholars such as Rowe and Schelling, who emphasize popular culture as a site of counter-hegemonic practice. Through oral traditions, syncretic religions, and festivals, Afro-Latin and Indigenous communities have long articulated alternative visions of nationhood. In Peru, for example, Indigenous rebellions redeployed Inca symbolism to resist liberal land reforms, asserting subaltern agency within the symbolic grammar of the nation-state.[24] Rather than passive recipients of elite ideologies, popular actors redefined national narratives in ways that reflected their own social realities. Nationalism, then, must be reframed not as unidirectional elite "imagining", but as a dialectical process—where state-imposed official imaginaries coexisted with, and were sometimes subverted by, vernacular forms of political and cultural expression. This view emphasizes the region's distinct trajectories of racial and cultural mestizaje.

Hence, the incisive critiques by Claudio Lomnitz and others compel us to move beyond Anderson's largely idealist and print-centered narrative toward a more materialist, power-sensitive understanding of nationalism as a practical system of governance, one that foregrounds the tensions between inclusion and exclusion, and between ideological discourse and political

[23] Claudio Lomnitz, "Nationalism As a Practical System. Benedict Anderson's Theory of Nationalism From the Vantage Point of Spanish America," in *The Other Mirror. Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America*, ed. M. A. Centeno and F. López-Alves (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 329–59

[24] W. Rowe and V. Schelling, *Memoria y Modernidad: Cultura Popular En América Latina* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1995)

practice. Lomnitz contends that nationalism in Spanish America was not simply the product of cultural imagination or elite invention, but a set of institutional practices and symbolic strategies aimed at managing diversity and legitimating creole elites' control over fragmented populations.[25] Although Lomnitz and most of the authors referenced here deal with Mexican and Peruvian nationalism, this fragmentation is especially evident in Honduras. As noted in Section 1.2 *Central America in Context*, Honduras's national development cannot be simply equated with cases like Mexico or Peru. The Honduran nation-building project unfolded in a context marked by weak state reach and deep regional fragmentation. Large swaths of the country—especially in the east, where Pech, Tawahka, and Miskitu communities resided and still do—remained beyond sustained colonial and postcolonial state control well into the 20th century. In these areas, the very notion of national identity rang hollow, and the official project of *ladinización* encountered complex forms of resistance, negotiation, and partial incorporation. The literature on Honduran nationalism is marked by this sense of fragmentation and disillusion, offering important lessons about the limits of state cohesion.[26]

This broad body of scholarship makes clear that the production of national identity in Latin America cannot be understood apart from its racial matrix. Nation-building projects regularly redeployed categories like *mestizo* and *indígena* in order to enact elite visions of modernity. These categories both reflected and reshaped existing hierarchies, serving as flexible tools of governance in diverse and often contested territories. The following section turns to the liberal era's racialized

[25] Claudio Lomnitz, "Nationalism As a Practical System. Benedict Anderson's Theory of Nationalism From the Vantage Point of Spanish America," in *The Other Mirror. Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America*, ed. M. A. Centeno and F. López-Alves (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 329–59

[26] Perhaps the most well-articulated discussion of Honduran national identity and its fragmentary and slow development can be found in: Marvin Barahona, *Evolución histórica de la identidad nacional*, 2a ed. (Tegucigalpa: Editorial Guaymuras, 2002). This book was published at the very beginning of the 1990s, similarly to the initial work of Darío Euraque.

public sphere, where elite actors institutionalized classifications such as *ladino* in statistical, educational, and juridical domains. By examining how these categories were operationalized across census data, public discourse, and legal regimes, we can better understand how racial typologies were constructed to produce governable populations—and how they functioned within a broader logic of national cohesion, exclusion, and symbolic violence.

2.1.1 The Racialized Public Sphere, Archives, and Counterpublics

The official use of racial categories in Central America during the liberal era (1880–1950) took place in the context of a racialized public sphere. This was not an inclusive, deliberative space as Habermas might conceive it; rather, it was an exclusionary terrain where political elites, intellectuals, and state institutions crafted and projected definitions of national identity, political legitimacy, and modern citizenship along racial lines. This racialized public sphere was constructed through diverse yet interconnected sites: churches, exploitative workplaces, the national education system, bureaucratic mechanisms such as censuses, and symbolic institutions like the Honduran National Archive founded in 1880. Far from neutral repositories, these institutions functioned as active instruments in the production and naturalization of racial hierarchies.

The National Archive's establishment must be understood as a strategic effort in Honduran state-building. By curating historical narratives, selecting which records to preserve, and framing past events, the archive helped institutionalize a vision of the nation premised on liberal ideals tightly interwoven with racialized conceptions of progress and civilization.[27]

[27] The publications of the *Revista del Archivo Nacional* during this period would be a rich repository to analyze in order to evidence this argument. I suspect most specifically that discourses on Spanish conquest in this repository hold evidence of the ways the past was framed in civilizational terms by those with access to the archives.

Similarly, the censuses—most notably the 1887 enumeration—did more than count individuals; they inscribed racial identities onto populations, rendering them legible through a binary logic of ladino versus indigenous that erased the complex realities of mixed identities, Afro-descendant communities, and culturally distinct Indigenous groups such as the Tolupán (then referenced as Xicaques) and Pech. This binary classification was far from descriptive: it was a racial logic embedded in elite understandings of civilization and backwardness, a political instrument forged in the emergent public sphere to delineate who belonged within the modern nation and who was excluded as backward, pre-modern, savage.

This sphere was saturated with racial discourse. The liberal press, school curricula, and elite intellectual networks disseminated a vision of Honduras as a nation striving toward whiteness, modernity, and global integration. Look no further than the *Guide to Honduras* of 1904, analyzed in the following chapter. Within this imaginary, *ladinos* became the emblem of national progress, and they were defined not by shared ancestry, but by opposition to the *indios* imagined as atavistic, rural, and unfit for the magnificent evolutions of progress.[28]

Yet this project was never total. If the public sphere functioned to naturalize elite racial ideology, then counterpublics such as “rebel” Indigenous communities offered alternative ways of imagining identity and political life. These groups often operated outside or against the liberal state’s discursive frameworks, articulating belonging through communal landholding, oral tradition, local governance structures that refused assimilation into ladino modernity, and

[28] The negative logic that gives substance to the *ladino* identity, nonetheless, was going to hold anti-indigenous, anti-black, and even anti-spanish attitudes, leaving it in a much difficult to escape void, as Guzmán-Böckler and many other theorists thought about since at least the 1970s in Central America. We explore this further in section 2.3.2 *Theoretical Models of Ladinización*. This characterization of the *ladino* has also been accorded to the *mestizo* identity to a great extent, see for example: Jack D. Forbes, "The Mestizo Concept: A Product of European Imperialism" in *The Latinx Philosophy Reader*. Routledge, 2025. 109-123.

sometimes violence.[29] Their resistance was not always visible in print, but it persisted in material and cultural practices that challenged the very terms through which the state defined progress, race, and nation. This was very annoying for external and local elite observers, decrying at what they thought were lost chances to put the "Indians to work." It is recurring throughout censuses, for example in Anguiano's 1801 report or the *Guide to Honduras* of 1904, to express something along the lines that because "indians" had whatever they wanted satisfied, it was a pity that they were not excited at the prospect of being "taught" how to work by Europeans.[30] The pity was, clearly in our eyes today, that the directors of the state at different conjunctures could not treat themselves or foreign elements the vanity to offer the work of the "Indians" with full assurance of its return.

Framing racial categories like *ladino* through the tension between public spheres and counterpublics highlights their function as technologies of power and markers of socioeconomic relations, not reflections of self-evident difference. These classifications were produced, or at least functioned, through liberal state-building and elite discourse, but also challenged by indigenous and peasant life-worlds. Understanding them in this way also clarifies their afterlives. Today, public discourse in Honduras and across Latin America often treats racial violence, dispossession, and cultural erasure as problems affecting "ethnic minorities"—a framing that obscures how the entire national project was built through the construction of racial difference. This thesis returns to the liberal era not to critique its exclusions from a moral standpoint, but to reveal the mechanisms by which racial classifications were institutionalized, legitimated, and resisted;

[29] This violence was often directed at the destruction of municipal archives, as will be noted with very interesting documentation in the next chapter, 3.

[30] Both of these sources are analyzed in Chapter 3 *National Censuses and the Ladino/Mestizo Puzzle.*

mechanisms that continue to shape the social, political, and statistical representation of diversity in the present.

However, understanding the cultural logic that underpinned these racial formations requires engagement with a broader, deeply embedded conceptual framework in Latin American political and cultural thought: *mestizaje*. The next section addresses how *mestizaje* has operated far beyond a mere historical process of racial mixing, but as a powerful ideological narrative across Latin America, one that both concealed and reproduced racial hierarchies by celebrating mestizo identity as the nation's unifying symbol while suppressing living Indigenous and Afro-descendant identities.

2.2 Mestizaje as History and Ideology in Central America

Mestizajes en la cocina, en la creación literaria, en la música… la lista es interminable y refleja lo que siempre fue y será el istmo centroamericano: un inmenso caleidoscopio de culturas, experiencias y aventuras humanas.
— Héctor Pérez Brignoli, 2012.[31]

In Latin America, any academic or popular engagement with the question of race inevitably passes through the dense, ideologically saturated terrain of *mestizaje*. Few concepts in Latin American historiography carry such symbolic heft or political weight. Since the 1960 colloquium regarding mestizaje in Ibero-America, coordinated by Silvio Zavala and Magnus Mörner in Stockholm, scholars have struggled to pin down its meanings, oscillating between cultural celebration and political critique. Mörner warned early on against the conflation of

[31] Héctor Pérez Brignoli, "La diversidad cultural y las lógicas del mestizaje en América Central," in *El Caribe como paradigma. Convivencias y coincidencias históricas, culturales y estéticas: un simposio transareal*, ed. Ette Ottmar et al., Edición Tranvia, Verlag Walter Frey (Berlin, 2012), 87 (19).

biological, cultural, and class-based interpretations, an analytical confusion that continues to haunt both academic and popular usage of the term.[32]

Mestizaje is at once a historical process which describes the forced and negotiated racial mixtures initiated in the 15th and 16th centuries, and a 20th-century state ideology that claims national unity through racial hybridity. As such, it operates both as a descriptive category and prescriptive fiction, designed to reconcile colonial violence with liberal nationalism. This section presents various perspectives from historians and anthropologists to illuminate how *mestizaje* functions as a master narrative that naturalizes inequality, erases difference, and enshrines a myth of racial harmony, while also functioning as a technology of accumulation and control under capitalism. In doing so, I highlight the historical and conceptual slippage between race, ethnicity, and class in discussions of indigeneity and nationhood. In addition, I place my understanding in conversation with materialist literature which has resurfaced in past few years and which points directly to the economic reality of *mestizaje.*

Rather than a biological fact or cultural blending, *mestizaje* is best approached as an ideological formation. Drawing on José Carlos Mariátegui's foundational insight that the so-called "Indian problem" in Peru was never racial but structural, rooted in land dispossession and political domination, this thesis interprets *mestizaje* as a class project masked as racial harmony.[33] In Central America, this logic was taken up by state elites who deployed *mestizaje* as a national myth to obscure persistent exploitation under the guise of racial-cultural synthesis. Authors discussed at more length in the next section, like Carlos Guzmán-Böckler and Severo

[32] Silvio Zavala et al., "El Mestizaje En La Historia de Ibero-América," *Revista de Historia de América* 53/54 (1962): 127–69, 171–218.

[33] José Carlos Mariátegui,"El Problema del Indio," *7 Ensayos de Interpretación de La Realidad Peruana*, Tercera Edición, Colección Clásica 69 (Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2007), 26-38.

Martínez Peláez extend this critique to Guatemala, highlighting how *mestizaje* operated through a whitening logic: elevating European elements (typically masculine) while silencing, feminizing, or absorbing the Indigenous. This racialized patriarchy, embedded in national discourse, served to reproduce colonial hierarchies under the framework of modern nationhood.[34]

Carol A. Smith offers a comparative regional lens. In countries like Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras, she argues, *mestizaje* functioned ideologically precisely because Indigenous peoples had been largely dispossessed, "de-indianized," and politically marginalized by the early 20th century.[35] Here, the project did not incorporate Indigenous difference but rather erased it from the national imaginary. By contrast, Guatemala, with strong, much more numerous autonomous Indigenous communities, saw a more fragmented and regionally uneven project of *mestizaje*, where elites simply had no interest to talk about an ethnically homogenous society as national ideology, and the tension between the "indigenous" and the "ladino" is still central to its national debates.[36]

Forsell Martínez's recent intervention, *Mestizaje in Mexico and the Specter of Capital*, provides a powerful materialist counterpoint to culturalist readings of mestizaje. Forsell argues that mestizaje is not merely a cultural ideology or aesthetic project but a racialized technology of capitalist accumulation. In this reading, mestizaje organizes dispossession, land redistribution, and labor control through the racial coding of populations. Rather than interpreting mestizaje as

[34] See Carlos Guzmán-Böckler, *Colonialismo y Revolución* (México: Siglo XXI, 1975); First published in 1970, an English translation of Martínez-Peláez work was published around 15 years ago as Severo Martínez Peláez, *La Patria Del Criollo: An Interpretation of Colonial Guatemala*, ed. W. George Lovell and Christopher H. Lutz, trans. Susan M. Neve and W. George Lovell (Duke University Press, 2009).

[35] Carol A. Smith, "Las Contradicciones del Mestizaje en Centroamérica," in *Memorias Del Mestizaje: Cultura Política En Centroamérica de 1920 al Presente* eds. Darío Euraque, Jeffrey Gould, and Charles Hale, 579-617.

[36] This paragraph also falls well in line with the documentation regarding the numbers of indigenous populations compiled by Lovell and Lutz and referenced in Chapter 1, *Demography and Empire.*

national reconciliation, Forsell shows how it has been used to smooth over contradictions between labor exploitation and liberal state-building. In other words, rather than resolving tensions between identity and class, *mestizaje* produces their ideological reconciliation. The key observation in his work is that it is not only the "liberal elites" that produce *mestizaje* as a discourse or aspirational project, but part of the "market disciplinary logic" that makes both the dispossessed and the landowners to act in accordance with its social norms of reproduction.[37] So, mestizaje is not only the famed elite top-down phenomenon, but popular classes have been constituent parts of its existence. His insights extend well beyond Mexico, offering a framework to understand how mestizaje in Honduras operates through and within economic structures of inequality.

Carmen Bernand, in her preface to Eduardo França Paiva's *Nombrar lo Nuevo*, echoes this perspective by critiquing the tendency in late-20th-century scholarship to abstract identity from its material foundations. Bernand is of the opinion that sometime along the last third of the 20th century, "ethnic differences and race replaced class differences in academic discussions."[38] She notes that race and ethnicity are often moralized or symbolically framed, with little attention to how they intersect with power and exploitation. This problem is also present in Honduran historiography although perhaps less than in anglophone one, where race and culture have too often been treated apart from questions of labor and class, or vice versa.

Euraque proposed three registers or historical dimensions of *mestizaje* in the Honduran context: 1) Biological register: the most literal interpretation of gene mixture and phenotypic variation, used superficially in state rhetoric and census classifications. 2) Ideological register: a

[37] Alfonso Forssell Méndez, "Mestizaje in Mexico and the Specter of Capital," in *Beyond Mestizaje*, ed. Tania Islas Weinstein and Milena Ang, trans. Ellen Jones (Amherst College Press, 2024), 189.

[38] Eduardo França Paiva, *Nombrar Lo Nuevo: Una Historia Léxica de Iberoamérica Entre Los Siglos XVI y XVIII (Las Dinámicas de Mestizajes y El Mundo Del Trabajo)* (Editorial Universitaria de Chile, 2020), 9.

state discourse that codifies cultural homogeneity and encodes racial hierarchy. Florencia Mallon theorizes these state-generated narratives as "official discourses," which not only prescribe cultural homogeneity but also help encode racial hierarchies in the grammar of nationalism.[39] 3) Cultural-Societal register: the everyday production, negotiation, and contestation of *mestizaje* by elites, civil society, and subaltern actors.[40]

In a dense but similarly insightful discussion of Mexican *mestizaje,* Zermeño Padilla chooses to do an "archaeological" exercise to uncover the discursive and ideological layers that shape and conform the notion of mestizaje. and he talks about layers, among which he finds at least five.[41] We do not need to get into the details of his elaboration here, but one of his key takeaways proves to be one of our key starting points. He sees the conceptualization of mestizaje in its deeper layer occurring within the framework of the emergence of the economic and political forms we know today. He goes further to say that *mestizaje* as a concept that articulates national identity is a product of both conservatives and liberals, as it is part of a process that transcends both: the formulation of a national identity "presupposes distancing itself from the colonial past

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[39] Florencia Mallon, "Constructing Mestizaje in Latin America: Authenticty, Marginality, and Gender in the Claiming of Ethnic Identities," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 2 (1) (1996): 170-180.

[40] Darío A Euraque, *Estado y Etnicidad En La Historiografía, Historia y Futuro de Honduras*, Colección Del Bicentenario (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2021), 25.

[41] The author talks first about the layer we know the most in historical academic contexts, which is the social-scientific inaugurated by the 1960s. As a second layer, he places the "philosophical" amongst which he includes extremely relevant literature such as José Vasconcelos *La Raza Cósmica*. The author attributes Vasconcelos with the transformation of the term "mestizo" into the generic term "mestizaje." As a third layer he describes an "ideological-political" substratum, having to do with public celebrations and national myths, such as the October 12 celebration in Mexico. In the fourth layer he places Andrés Molina Enríquez study of 1909 titled *Los Grandes Problemas Nacionales*. He traces how the "mestizaje" in this work owes its origin to the political economy developed by Francisco Pimentel, which he explains as the fifth and deeper layer. Interestingly, he differentiates Vasconcelos' influences in a similar way that David Brading does in his own study of Mexican mestizaje, which is as inspired by the Universal Geography of Elisée Reclus and the anthropology of Eugene Pittard (who would later influence global understandings of race, such as with the UNESCO 1950 Statement on Race). He points nonetheless, that both were based on philosophy of racial history, one in a naturalistic and the other in a spiritualist vein, a contrast equivalent to the questionable theses of racial and/or cultural mestizaje. See: Guillermo Zermeño, "Del Mestizo Al Mestizaje: Arqueología De Un Concepto," in *El Peso de la Sangre:Limpios, Mestizos y Nobles en el Mundo Hispánico*, eds. Nikolaus Böttcher, Bernd Hausberger, and Max-Sebastián Hering Torres (El Colegio de México, 2011), 283-318.

and the desire for a different future."[42] We will see this tension live intensely through the writings and aspirations of Ramón Rosa in Chapter 3.

All in all, the ethnohistory of racial and ethnic issues and their impact on human development problems is practically unknown in Honduras.[43] Despite this complexity, Honduras remains under-theorized by Hondurans. Darío Euraque's *Apuntes del mestizaje en Honduras* is one of the few works to interrogate the celebratory mythology of mixture. He shows how the state selectively included, erased, or ignored Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Arab populations based on shifting ideological needs.[44] Rather than a demographic reality, *mestizaje* in Honduras has operated as a flexible tool for crafting symbolic unity at the expense of lived diversity, especially during the liberal reforms of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His work emphasizes the need to de-essentialize indigeneity and revisit the layered formations of race and memory that official discourses flatten.

No one exposes this ideological violence more directly than Breny Mendoza. In her essay on the *demythologization* of mestizaje in the Honduran context, Mendoza exposes how *mestizaje* operates ideologically to erase Black and Indigenous identities by elevating the figure of the *mestizo/ladino* as the singular embodiment of the nation. This mythologization conceals structural inequality and normalizes exclusion, even as it gestures toward inclusivity. *Mestizaje* in Honduras demands not only cultural assimilation but a disavowal of historical memory, structural violence, and dispossession. Mendoza warns that the project of mestizaje is not simply

[42] Zermeño, "Del Mestizo Al Mestizaje: Arqueología de un Concepto," 303.

[43] Darío A Euraque, *Estado y Etnicidad En La Historiografía, Historia y Futuro de Honduras*, Colección Del Bicentenario (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2021), 25.

[44] It is only necessary to mention as an example the anti-immigration law of 1929, which registered as "races" the following, among others: "Negros, chinos, árabes, turcos, sirios."

descriptive but prescriptive. The homogenizing ideal it promotes is patriarchal, whitening, and classed, thus reinscribing the very hierarchies it claims to overcome.[45]

As explored, efforts to understand *mestizaje* frequently encounter a fundamental ambiguity: is it best understood as a racial, cultural, or class-based phenomenon? The following subsection examines this tension by revisiting historical debates surrounding the so-called "indigenous problem," focusing on the shifting and contested boundaries between race, ethnicity, and class. These debates are crucial for understanding how *mestizaje* has been deployed to manage social difference and legitimize inequality. The conceptual slippages among race, class, and ethnicity are not merely theoretical—they are embedded in legal frameworks, census classifications, and the lived realities of exclusion. Together, these categories constitute the scaffolding of national identity. As I argue in the next section, the Honduran case offers a particularly revealing lens through which to examine this ambiguity, especially through the figure of the *ladino*, whose status has historically been defined less by ancestry or phenotype than by their relational position to the Indigenous "other."

2.3 Ladinización – A uniquely Central American process?

> Pues al cielo no le plugo / que salieses tan ladino / como el negro Juan Latino
>
> For heaven did not please / that you turned out as cunning [*ladino*] / as the black Juan Latino.
> **Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, 1605.[46]**

Debates over national identity in Latin America have long turned on the category of ethnicity. In Central America especially, the figure of the *ladino* and the broader process of

[45] Mendoza, Breny, "La Desmitologización del Mestizaje en Honduras: Evaluando nuevos aportes," *Mesoamérica* 22, no. 42 (2001): 256–78.

[46] Edición del Instituto Cervantes, 1998. https://cvc.cervantes.es/literatura/clasicos/quijote/edicion/parte1/versos_preliminares/urganda_la_desconocida/default.htm

ladinización has emerged as a distinct and historically complex way of organizing racial, cultural, and political hierarchies. While *mestizaje* appears across Latin America as a trope of racial mixture and national cohesion, the Central American concept of the *ladino* has developed a more contingent, multivalent, and often contradictory character.

In order to clarify what the overwhelming majority "ladino" category encompassed by the end of the 19th century and consequently in the censuses after the 1880s, a brief exploration of Iberian and American archives proves helpful although perhaps not definitive. It is worth noting that the meaning of this term in the Spanish or Castilian language has changed considerably during its nearly 1,000-year recorded history. In Honduras and Guatemala, most notably, usage of the term has been further complicated due to its generally interchangeable quality vis-à-vis the term "mestizo." For this particular reason, I think that approaching the category from a conceptual history perspective might be fruitful, besides perhaps innovative.

2.3.1 The "Ladino" Through Time

Parsing the term "ladino" through the online databases of the General Archive of the Indies (AGI) and the Center for Documentation of Historical Research of Honduras (CIDHH), a view of its use throughout the past five centuries can be constructed.[47] Among the digitized microfilms of the "Ethnohistorical Archive" we find for example the complaint case of Alberto Ríos, a "ladino indian" who in 1721 accused an hacienda owner in the town of Santa Ana (within the Alcaldía Mayor de Tegucigalpa) of violent assault.[48] A document like this holds many valuable details. Most

[47] The AGI was created in 1785 at the request of Carlos III, with the aim of centralizing in a single place the documentation relating to the administration of the Spanish Empire in the Americas and Asia, which until then had been dispersed in various archives, located in Simancas, Cádiz and Seville. On the other hand, the CIDHH was established in 2007, comprising the Ethnohistorical Archive, the Jesús Núñez Chinchilla Specialized Library, both of the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History (IHAH), and the National Archives of Honduras (ANH). The CDIHH houses the largest and most diverse documentary collection in Honduras.

[48] Caso AHN 1721.

pertinently for the purposes of this text, it testifies to the possibility of colonial documentation in the 18th century to simultaneously classify a person as an "indian" and a "ladino". Only 150 years later, as was explained above, these terms would be considered exclusive, if not opposing. Without delving too deeply into the inner workings of colonial administration, this dual classification in an 18th century criminal case most likely responds to the possibility that Ríos frequently used the Spanish language. This could accommodate for the non-exclusive possibilities that he lived in a locality of *indios* and was thus considered one too, or simply that he was visibly "not Spanish" but assimilated enough cultural practices to be considered a Hispanicized subject. Perhaps, as this section will clarify and argue as we go on, this points to the wholly cultural meaning of the "ladino" category. A second example from this archive registers a petition made by the mayor of the same town of Santa Ana at the end of the 18th century. Writing in 1795, the mayor asks "to be allowed to form a population [*población*] separate from the mayoralty [*alcaldía*] itsself and the ladino individuals who live with them."[49] This sentence might not be particularly obvious to most readers today, but what the document reveals is the existence of a system whereby being classified as a "ladino" might prevent one from being "reduced" into "indian populations" or *enclosures* with specific tributary requirements. The decision to include any "ladino indian" of the time such as Alberto Ríos in the separate population must have been ridden with arbitrary considerations related to cultural proximity and outward appearance. It is a subtle but important note to remark that in such a case, someone like Ríos could partially control this deliberation to the extent that he could convince others that he was more indian or more ladino, most likely an impulse tied to his individual and familial interests or prospects.

[49] Caso AHN 1795.

Another case from this archival repository, namely a census or "registration of the enclosure [...] of the ladinos which it includes, there being no spaniards in it," documents the inhabitants of the valley of Agalteca (also within the jurisdiction of the Alcaldía Mayor de Tegucigalpa) in 1811.[50] If it was not previously obvious, this document and particular sentence are clear testimonies to the limitations of certain categories: despite the possibility of "indians" or other caste[51] groupings to be concurrently labelled "ladino." this was never the case for the "spanish." There is simply no "Spanish Indian," or "ladino spanish." In Central America, as most likely throughout the occupied territories of the Spanish Empire as a whole, "ladino" was a term specifically defined in oppositional relation to that of "spanish." It should not be a controversial issue to state that even though the term implies closeness to Hispanic cultural identity, it necessarily also denotes a negation of what is "Spanish." This negation occurs along the logic of "perhaps Hispanic enough" to understand cultural codes such as Christianity and the Spanish language, but "never S*panish* enough" to be considered an equal. This oppositional condition could not, by definition, show any signs of a possible transition into an affirmative identity with its own cultural understandings. The "ladino" category seems thus as a category that mirrors another one which it can only ever aspire to, so to say. It does not hold the capacity to be equal or to exist outside the scope of its negative connotations because the difference it contains is in fact its most definitive quality.

[50] Caso AHN 1811.

[51] The use of the term "caste" and a linked "caste system" in the broad context of the Spanish Empire whereby subjects to the crown were racially categorized is not free of controversy. The existence of "caste paintings" in the 18th century notwithstanding, the notion of a rigid system of racial classification was proposed by the likes of Ángel Rosenblat and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán in the 1940s. Later in the 20th century and notably in contemporary scholarship, the notion has been highly questioned, proposing two main observations: 1. categories were more fluid than much historical scholarship, especially anglophone, had considered; 2. colonial societies in the Spanish Empire were based more so upon class than racial distinctions. These are ongoing debates.

To say that the "ladino" is a term that inherently—and damnably perhaps—denotes difference is not gratuitous. It is evident, or at least faintly familiar to anyone living in or interested in the Americas, that the colonial period of Spanish America has an immense and complex racial history which weighed upon the 19th century and its people in its own right. Going further back in time to the 16th century, an example from the AGI illustrates how the "ladino" term was used in the context of early Spanish conquest and colonization in Central America and the Caribbean. This case from 1527 documents a royal licence issued to the "general accountant of La Española," granting him permission to "pass a ladino berber [*berberisco*] slave for the service of his person and house."[52] Curiously, this type of early colonial or royal documentation testifies to the fact that "Amerindians" were not the first groups of people to be considered "close enough but not there, not ever yet." In fact, much before the incursion and invasion of the Americas—and of course also during its course—a ladino could also be an enslaved person, and a North African at the same time. The ladino could be almost anything, but surely not "Spanish," or in this case simply "Hispanic" or even "Iberian." This type of royal license points us closer to one of the known uses of the term in the Iberian region before the so-called "Reconquistas" and the invasion of the "New World" by 1492. Recorded already by the 13th century in the *Primera Crónica General Estoria de España* (ca. 1284), we can conclude that the term denoted cultural competence or closeness, as opposed to describing any phenotypic or biological characteristic:

> "And this [*faqīh*] was very useful since he was the mayor of the moors of Valencia, in advising them and in keeping their rents well standing; and he was such in himself, and of such good understanding and so good sense, **and he was**

[52] Caso AGI 1527. La Española refers to the island under the sovereignty of the Dominican Republic today.

> **so ladino,** that he seemed a Christian; and for this the Cid trusted and loved him."[53] [54]
>
> [*Et este alfaquí aviel mucho servido desquel fiziera alcayde de los moros de Valençia, en asessegarlos et en aver sus rentas bien paradas; et era tal en sí, et de tan buen entendimiento et tan de buen seso,* ***et era tan ladino****, que semeiava cristiano; et por esto se pagava el Çid del et amaval.]*

Changing in time with respect to its exact meaning, there is one observable constant throughout the use of the term "ladino" in the Castilian language which is that it usually denotes non-physical attributes. In the most chronologically distant examples discussed here, it seems that the term marks a particular relationship to religion. As the term is consequently deployed in other geographies such as Central America, it seems that it marks proximity to overall cultural traits, not limited to religion but language as well. Arguably, religious and linguistic aspects were always relevant in order for the word "ladino" to appear or be used in both medieval Iberia and colonial Abya Yala. What is more difficult but vital to ascertain for our argument, is the connection to labor that the word might connote throughout history and of course most specifically during the turn of the 19th into the 20th century in Honduras. From the early example of 1527 we notice that enslaved people could be also classified as ladino ("ladino berber slave"), while in Central America just

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[53] *Primera Crónica General Estoria de España*, edición de Ramón Menéndez Pidal, 1906, Colección Leyes Históricas de España (Madrid: AGENCIA ESTATAL BOLETÍN OFICIAL DEL ESTADO, 2022), 660. Emphasis is mine.

[54] It is not immediately clear from this use of the term that "ladino" denotes any racial element. According to a conventional understanding (the Spanish understanding as opposed to the Central American one for instance), the term was originally used to mean that someone was "astute and clever, although with no pejorative element." Pancracio Celdrán Gomáriz explains in his *Inventario General de Insultos* that its "modern meaning as a synonym for a shrewd and cunning person" begins in the 16th century. He writes: "the fact that the language spoken by Jews and Moriscos at the end of the 15th century was called Ladino, in contrast to the non-Latin languages spoken in their final places of settlement, such as Greece, Turkey, North Africa, etc., after their respective expulsions, made the term become synonymous with "Jew", thus burdened with the negative semantics that those of that religion and race unjustifiably received. The wrongly assumed rapacity and caution, cunning and manipulation of the Jews, who spoke Ladino, made the term loaded with negative aspects. Hence, calling someone "Ladino" was equivalent to calling them an untrustworthy person, with whom it was advisable to keep one's distance and take precautions." See Pancracio Celdrán Gomáriz, *Inventario general de insultos* (Madrid: Ediciones del Prado, 1995), 139-140.

before the region's political independence from Spain we notice the existence of documentation for whole populations such as the "registration of the ladinos which the enclosure and valley of Agalteca.includes" What appears most relevant in the latter observation, although not explicitly stated, is that by then the "ladino" was not simply categorized in relation or opposition to the "spanish" but of course also the "indigenous" or "indio." This detail hints at the controversial issue that while cultural markers were at the crux of the "ladino" category, the process of *ladinización* itself was not an accident. By the 1880s and much more forcefully until the mid-20th century, a protracted process of "de-indianization" took place, which was part of a political, intellectual and economic program that was established under the prospect of republican unity and much coveted "national progress."

This historical shift from relational oppositions between *ladinos*, *Spaniards*, and *Indios* to a deliberate political project of *de-indianization* demands closer analytical attention. What was at stake was not merely a cultural transformation, but a systematic reordering of social hierarchies and identities under the banner of modernization. To understand the ideological and structural underpinnings of this process, the next section turns to theories of *ladinización*. These frameworks offer critical insights into how racialized and classed subjects were reconfigured through education, law, labor regimes, and public discourse, not only in Honduras but across postcolonial Central America.

2.3.2 Theoretical Models of Ladinización: Functionalist, Marxist, and Beyond

For long throughout the 20th century thinkers like José Carlos Mariátegui and Severo Martínez Peláez have argued that categories such as "indio" are not ontological descriptors of racial or ethnic essence, but rather expressions of historically specific socio-economic relationships. Of course, too, we understand that the "Indian" moniker itself is a colonial

creation, but that is not the central focus here. Rather, as Mariátegui emphasized already by 1928:

> "The indigenous demand lacks historical concreteness as long as it remains on a philosophical or cultural level. To acquire it - that is, to acquire reality, corporeality - it needs to become an economic and political demand. Socialism has taught us to pose the indigenous problem in new terms. We have stopped considering it abstractly as an ethnic or moral problem to recognize it concretely as a social, economic and political problem. And then we felt it, for the first time, clarified and demarcated."[55]

For Mariátegui, the so-called "indigenous problem" was inseparable from material conditions and most fundamentally, the system of land ownership and labor exploitation. This insight is crucial for understanding the function of the *ladino* category.

As explored in the last section, ladinos in Central America were Indigenous people who adopted Spanish language and customs to distinguish themselves from non-assimilated groups. Over time, the term expanded to refer to biological mestizos, foreigners, whites, and others, depending on the prevailing colonial or postcolonial power arrangements. In many contexts, ladinos were marked by ambivalence, viewed as illegitimate, rootless, even more suspect than Indigenous people. Yet paradoxically, they were also positioned closer to the state and its civilizational ideals.

The term's elasticity reveals its deeper function: to be *ladino* was not primarily about phenotype, culture, or descent, but about position within a racialized social order. Those who

[55] José Carlos Mariátegui, *7 Ensayos de Interpretación de La Realidad Peruana*, Tercera Edición, Colección Clásica 69 (Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2007), 27.

ruled, managed, or distanced themselves from Indigenous communities could be rendered *ladino*, regardless of origin.

Census classifications offer a striking window into this dynamic. In the 1887 Honduran census, for instance, Garífuna were included under the category *ladino*; by 1895, they were listed as *moreno*; and in 1916, Bay Islander Garifunas were categorized as *indios*—though elsewhere in the same census, they were *ladinos*. Even as early as 1801, Spaniards could appear under the *ladino* category. These slippages suggest that *ladinidad* operated as a relational category defined less by identity than by social positioning, particularly one's relation to indigeneity and the state.

Thus, *ladinización* should be understood not as an ethnic transformation but as a process of political assimilation into a state-aligned identity. It functioned as a flexible classificatory logic: to be *ladino* was to *not* be Indigenous, to embody the civilizational ideals promoted by the liberal nation-state. This negative definition of identity, grounded in exclusion and hierarchical differentiation, resonates with critical theories of race that emphasize its situational and relational nature. As in Mariátegui's framework, the racial category is not a stable essence but a mutable effect of structural domination, reproduced through legal regimes, census practices, and ideological discourse.

The process of *ladinización* has been especially theorized in Guatemala, where Indigenous visibility and the contested nature of state formation have fueled intensive academic debate. Although Honduras has generated less scholarship on the subject, these Guatemalan frameworks offer useful conceptual tools for understanding how *ladinización* operated regionally. These models clarify that *ladinización* is not simply a matter of cultural change or individual assimilation, but a historically situated, ideologically loaded, and politically motivated process tied to nation-building, capitalist modernization, and racial classification.

Early anthropological treatments, particularly by North American scholars working in the mid-20th century and connected to organizations like the WHO, approached *ladinización* as a linear process of cultural transformation. Richard N. Adams, drawing on functionalist anthropology, famously developed a typology that classified individuals along a continuum from "Traditional Indian" to "New Ladino," based on dress, language use, and occupation. This model framed ladinization as a quasi-evolutionary path toward modernity, implicitly naturalizing the disappearance of Indigenous identity and failing to account for coercion, structural violence, and the role of the state.[56]

This culturalist model was sharply criticized in the 1960s and 1970s by Guatemalan sociologists such as Carlos Guzmán-Böckler and Humberto Flores Alvarado. Influenced by Marxist analysis, they rejected the idea that cultural traits could explain the persistence of inequality and argued that *ladinización* could not be understood apart from capitalist expansion, land dispossession, and the class-based subordination of Indigenous populations. In their view, cultural change was epiphenomenal; what mattered was the political economy of the liberal state, which systematically expropriated Indigenous land and labor. The *ladino* figure was not a static cultural hybrid but a product of liberal reforms that violently restructured Indigenous life. They emphasized that *ladinización* was not an adaptive process but a mechanism of class domination. Guzmán-Böckler, for instance, insisted that the *ladino* emerged as a transitional figure within the capitalist expansion of the liberal state, so the *ladino* was someone produced through dispossession, labor exploitation, and the internalization of a racialized worldview. In this way, he explained, in Guatemala ladinos are an alienated class that requires awareness in order to "de-

[56] Richard N. Adams, *Cultural Surveys of Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras* (Washington D.C.: Pan American Sanitary Bureau, 1957), 267-292

ladinoize." The alienation of the ladino is one of the most complete achievements of Spanish colonization. Their de-alienation would imply a greater knowledge of their history and an awareness of their relationship with the Indigenous community as the result of a dialectical process.[57] Similarly, Severo Martínez Peláez's *La patria del criollo* historicized racial domination as a founding element of both the colonial and republican orders, whose effects remained fully operative in the present. These thinkers transformed the concept of *ladinización* from a sociocultural description into a critique of state power and class domination. *Ladino* identity, in their accounts, was not a neutral descriptor but a classificatory tool that obscured relations of exploitation.

In a 1994 retrospective, Adams responded to these critiques by acknowledging their force, while also proposing an alternative model. Drawing on ecological and evolutionary theory, he proposed a "coevolutionary" framework in which Indigenous and *ladino* groups mutually adapted to pressures from global capitalism and.the national state, integrating elements from state modernization while reproducing distinct cultural logics.[58] Adams' model foregrounded ethnic identity not merely as a residue of the past or an effect of economic structures, but as a dynamic and reproductive force in its own right. It was thus capable of rearticulation, revival, and resistance. His approach, nonetheless, still risked softening the asymmetries of power and downplaying the violence of state formation, but it remains valuable for its recognition of Indigenous agency and the uneven character of identity change.

[57] Carlos Guzmán-Böckler, *Guatemala: una interpretación histórico-social* (México: Siglo XXI Editores, 1970), 186.

[58] Richard N. Adams, "Guatemalan Ladinization and History," *The Americas* 50, no. 4 (1994): 527–43.

Though these models were developed in the Guatemalan context, where the demographic weight and visibility of Indigenous populations shaped political and academic agendas, they offer useful insights for understanding racial classification in Honduras. Like Guatemala, Honduras underwent liberal reforms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that reconfigured land tenure, labor regimes, and state institutions. These changes were accompanied by elite discourses that mobilized categories like *ladino* and *mestizo* to justify the new order. Yet in contrast to Guatemala's recognition—however distorted—of a persistent Indigenous presence, Honduran elites often claimed a distant indigeneity (the "disappeared" Maya of western Honduras), constructing a national narrative of *mestizaje* predicated on the erasure of living indigenous presence. In this context, *ladinización* operated not only as a process of cultural transformation, but as a technology of invisibilization.

Adapting these models to the Honduran case thus requires careful attention to historical specificity. The Marxist emphasis on land and class is particularly useful for analyzing elite discourse during the banana enclave period in Honduras and the racialized management of labor. At the same time, Adams' coevolutionary approach suggests how identity could be negotiated, redefined, or disavowed under conditions of structural pressure. In Honduras, as in Guatemala, individuals navigated census categories and elite expectations in ways that both complied with and resisted the racialized nation-state.[59] This thesis draws on both perspectives, viewing *ladino* not as a fixed ethnoracial type but as a classificatory device whose meanings shifted across bureaucratic, political, and intellectual domains. As subsequent chapters show, the deployment of this category

[59] The most obvious and significant event that showcases this was the Honduran Great Banana Strike of 1954.

in census forms, legal codes, and elite essays reveals the unstable yet powerful role it played in the making of a mestizo nation.

Mahdi Amel's critique of nationalism under colonial and semi-colonial conditions offers further insight. Writing from the Arab world, Amel argued that nationalism often mystifies class domination by appealing to cultural unity. This is precisely the logic behind *ladinización*: it abstracts the reconfiguration of capitalist social relations into a narrative of civilizational progress. To be ladino, in this view, is to be defined not by what one is, but by what one is *not*: not Indigenous, not communal, not resistant. Guzmán-Böckler's analysis aligns with this critique, emphasizing how the *ladino* internalizes the values and worldview of the state, often through the rejection of indigeneity. This phenomenological transformation of seeing oneself as modern and national, parallels Amel's analysis of dependency-era ideologies, which promise progress while reproducing domination.

Feminist theorists such as Aura Cumes and Lorena Cabnal deepen the analysis by attending to the gendered operations of *ladinización*. They argue that *ladinización* entails not just the racial transformation of individuals but also the gendering of Indigenous bodies and roles. In elite and academic discourse alike, Indigenous women are often cast as passive, hyper-fertile, and in need of tutelage, so they are figures that legitimize patriarchal state interventions. The *ladino* man emerges as a symbol of modern citizenship, while the *ladina* woman embodies moralized care for the mestizo future. This gendered imaginary reinforces the racialized

hierarchy by situating Indigenous cultures as feminized, subordinate, and in need of erasure or correction.[60]

José Carlos Mariátegui's critique of liberal approaches to the "indigenous question" in Perú, as exposed above, complements these perspectives. Mariátegui rejected both biological determinism and liberal paternalism, arguing instead that the roots of Indigenous oppression lay in land tenure and class domination. His insistence that indigeneity possessed revolutionary potential through its communal structures posed a radical alternative to the ideology of *mestizaje* around the same period when it was becoming a truly strong ideology in several national states in Latin America. In this light, *ladinización* is not progress but ideological containment, an effort to dissolve collective Indigenous identities into individualized, racialized citizens stripped of communal agency.

Taken together, these theoretical interventions, from functionalist and Marxist models to critiques thought through Guzmán-Böckler, Cumes, Cabnal, or Mariátegui, allow us to understand *ladinización* not as a uniform or inevitable process, but as a contested field of classification, struggle, and state formation. The category of *ladino* emerges as a shifting signifier, embedded in elite discourse and statistical practices, among other devices, through which the state articulates and enforces racial, gendered, and class hierarchies.

In the Honduran context, these dynamics are most clearly visible in the production of official statistics, particularly in the national censuses. There, *ladino* does not merely describe a

[60] Yolanda Aguilar, "No Más Distancia En El Historiar, Etnografiar e Identificar Lo Ladino. Asumir y Resignificar Los Cuerpos Que Habitamos," in *Ladinos de Guatemala, Aportes a La Docencia 2022*, by Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas and Antropológicas y Arqueológicas (IIHAA) Escuela de Historia Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 2022, 272–92.

demographic fact but performs ideological work: it marks the disappearance of the Indigenous, the rise of the mestizo, and the imagined unity of the liberal nation-state.

The next chapter turns to these census materials to examine precisely how racial categories and that of the *ladino* or *mestizo* most specifically functioned within the statistical and ideological machinery of the Honduran state.

3 National Censuses and the Ladino/Mestizo Puzzle in Honduras

This chapter examines the role of population censuses and the racial classifications therein in shaping and reproducing specific notions of race and national identity in Honduras between 1887 and 1950. I argue that national censuses in this period did not simply record objective demographic data but performed heavy ideological work. Racial categories like "ladino," "indio," and "mestizo" did not document stable biological identities, but functioned as proxies for social class, land access, and labor regimes. This reading repositions censuses as instruments of governance and accumulation, central to the production of the Honduran nation-state's racial imagination. Drawing not on all but on multiple censuses with heftier documentation related to racial categories, I trace how these labels were deployed, contested, and transformed over time, revealing the shifting racial imaginaries that underpinned liberal reform, developmentalist rhetoric, and exclusionary nation-building. From the first national censuses under an institutionalized statistical office in the 1880s to the mid-20th century enumerations, this chapter foregrounds the social, spatial, and institutional struggles involved in defining who counted as "civilized," who was to be assimilated, and who remained outside the imagined national community, in "shameful savagery." In doing so, it provides an empirical backbone to the theoretical claims outlined in Chapter 2 and sets the stage for a broader reflection on race, state formation, and historical memory in the Honduran republic. The analysis begins with the

1801 colonial census and moves through the liberal reforms of the late 19th century, with particular focus on the 1887 census and the 1904 *Guía de Honduras*. It continues into the 20th century, highlighting racial birth statistics in 1904 and 1916, the censuses of 1927 to 1950, and the gradual shift from explicit racial typologies to more "neutral" indicators such as language and consumption. Across this trajectory, the census emerges as a key site for understanding how the Honduran state racialized its population in the service of national development, international capital, and social control.

Seventeen national censuses are generally understood to have taken place in Honduras to date. Most scholars, such as Loveman in her broad analysis of Latin American censuses, begin the count in the 1880s, following the establishment of a national statistics department as part of the liberal reforms initiated after 1876.[61] In order to apply my analysis of the censuses, I integrated observations mainly from four authors: political and historical sociologist Mara Loveman, historian Darío Euraque, historical and cultural geographer William V. Davidson, and teacher and local demographer Carmen Fiallos. In *National Colors:Racial Classification and the State in Latin America* (2014), Loveman compares national censuses at the Latin American level. Her work was instrumental thanks to her tabulation regarding the “visibility” of indigenous and afro-descendant populations in national censuses, and perhaps most importantly, thanks to her tabulation of both the criteria and method(s) used in order to ascertain indigenous presence (for example, self-identification).[62] In the state-sponsored publication *Estado y Etnicidad en la*

[61] A national statistics department was established by executive decree on June 28, 1880, with Francisco Cruz as its director. The “General Census of 1887” was published under the helm of Antonio R. Vallejo, today remembered by many as “the father of national history, and also of statistics and territorial studies of Honduras.”

[62] See the following tables “Table 6.1 Race or Color Questions in Latin American Censuses, 1810s-1980s,” “Table 6.2A Visibility of Indigenous Peoples in Latin American Censuses, 1810s-1980s,” “Table 6.2B Approaches to Enumerating ‘Indians’ in Latin American Censuses, 1810s-1980s,” and “Table 6.3 Visibility of Afrodescendants in

Historiografía, Historia y Futuro de Honduras (2021), Euraque presents a very useful periodization of Honduran censuses. He characterizes the history of censuses in Honduras between 1880 and 1926 as dominated by the concept of the ladino. He also denotes the next 4 censuses, those between 1930 and 1945, with the official disappearance of the ladino category in favor of the mestizo one, as a period where the concept of "race" is hegemonic. On the other hand, William V. Davidson's publications (2012, 2022) helped me locate a few sources that are very hard to find, especially what he calls the 1895 "ethnolinguistic census" and the 1916 national census.[63] As a geographer, Davidson has done an enormous amount of work to document and map ethnoracial categories, with the caveat that his work is not concerned with ulterior explanations or justifications for the use of certain categories, as well as his comfortability utilizing the "minority" moniker to name indigenous populations. Finally, Fiallos' *Censos de Población y Vivienda Levantados en Honduras 1791-1974* (1981), published jointly by the Ministry of Economy and the General Directorate of Statistics, offers the most outstanding data contained in the population and housing censuses that had been carried out in Honduras thus far.[64] The appendix features a guiding chart that I produced from my synthesis of these sources.

To develop a grounded and comparative understanding of the republican censuses between 1881 and 1950, it is essential to begin with one of the most detailed demographic exercises from the colonial period: the 1801 census. While limited in scope and shaped by

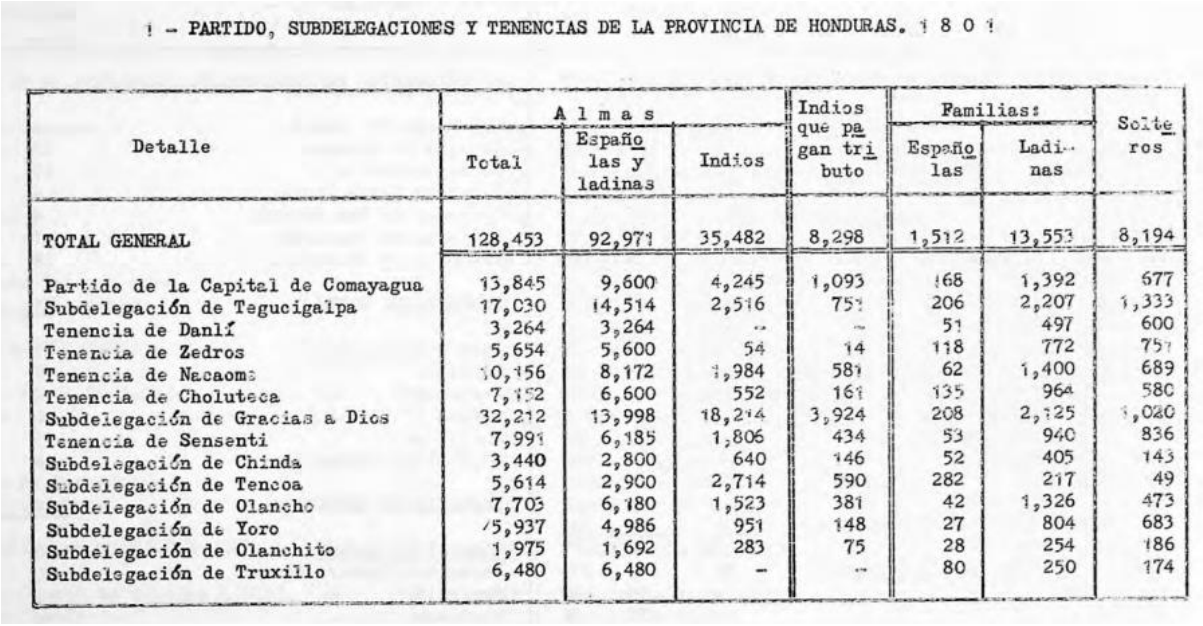
Latin American Censuses , 1810s-1980s" in Loveman, *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America*, 208; 233-234.

[63] William V. Davidson, "The National Census of Honduras, 1916: Reorganized by Departamentos, Municipios, and Settlements," (Tegucigalpa: Academia Hondureña de Geografía e Historia, 2012); William V. Davidson: "The first ethno-linguistic census of Honduras, 1895: from original manuscripts in the Archivo Nacional de Honduras, with brief comparative notes from the 1887 census," (Memphis, 2022).

[64] Carmen Fiallos, *Censo de Población y Vivienda Levantados en Honduras de 1791 a 1974 Reedición* (Tegucigalpa: Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, 1981).

colonial priorities, this early census is a crucial baseline for identifying the shifts in racial classification over time. By tracking the continuities and ruptures in how categories such as “indio,” “ladino,” and later “mestizo” were deployed, this chapter will expose two layered ideological operations underpinning racial discourse in Honduras. First, *biological obfuscation*: census categories often claimed to reflect phenotypic difference but in practice mapped economic status and political subordination. Second, the *nationalist lie*: the liberal era ideal of “mestizo unity” served to obscure the violent proletarianization of rural populations (Shift from "ladino" (1887) to "mestizo" (1935) mirrors transition from land-based to wage-labor economy). As Prof. Kontler’s question during one of our meetings helped clarify—whether race in Honduras was ever truly understood in biological terms—the answer, at least from the documentary record, appears to be no. Racial identity in the censuses functioned not as a reflection of phenotype but as a proxy for social location, land access, and labor regimes. This reading shifts the methodological function of the census: not as a neutral demographic instrument, but as a cartography of accumulation. Where “ladino” appears, land privatization is often underway; where “mestizo” dominates, export-oriented labor has likely been consolidated. By reinterpreting racial categories through this lens, the thesis offers a corrective to culturalist interpretations of mestizaje, showing how Honduras reveals the economic engine driving racial categorization across Central America.

3.1 Early Iterations: Race in Anguiano's Report of 1801



1 - PARTIDO, SUBDELEGACIONES Y TENENCIAS DE LA PROVINCIA DE HONDURAS. 1 8 0 1

Detalle	Almas			Indios que pagan tributo	Familias:		Solteros
	Total	Españolas y ladinas	Indios		Españolas	Ladinas	
TOTAL GENERAL	128,453	92,971	35,482	8,298	1,512	13,553	8,194
Partido de la Capital de Comayagua	13,845	9,600	4,245	1,093	168	1,392	677
Subdelegación de Tegucigalpa	17,030	14,514	2,516	751	206	2,207	1,333
Tenencia de Danlí	3,264	3,264	--	--	51	497	600
Tenencia de Zedros	5,654	5,600	54	14	118	772	757
Tenencia de Nacaome	10,156	8,172	1,984	581	62	1,400	689
Tenencia de Choluteca	7,152	6,600	552	161	135	964	580
Subdelegación de Gracias a Dios	32,212	13,998	18,214	3,924	208	2,125	1,020
Tenencia de Sensenti	7,991	6,185	1,806	434	53	940	836
Subdelegación de Chinda	3,440	2,800	640	146	52	405	143
Subdelegación de Tencoa	5,614	2,900	2,714	590	282	217	49
Subdelegación de Olancho	7,703	6,180	1,523	381	42	1,326	473
Subdelegación de Yoro	5,937	4,986	951	148	27	804	683
Subdelegación de Olanchito	1,975	1,692	283	75	28	254	186
Subdelegación de Truxillo	6,480	6,480	-	--	80	250	174

Figure 1. From *Censos de Población y Vivienda Levantados en Honduras de 1791 a 1974*, compiled by Carmen Fiallos.

Governor-Intendant Ramón Anguiano's 1801 population count, preserved through Antonio Vallejo's *Anuario Estadístico* (1889) and later cited by Carmen Fiallos in the 1977 *Censos de Población y Vivienda Levantados en Honduras 1791-1974*, reveals a deeply racialized and ideologically driven cartography of governance and resistance.[65] Organized through the administrative lens of *subdelegaciones* and *tenencias,* encompassing cities, towns, and *pueblos de indios*, the census deployed a familiar colonial taxonomy: "Spanish families," "Ladino families," "Indian villages," "tributary Indians," and "single men." Yet, Anguiano's own commentary pierces the illusion of biological or genealogical precision. His admission that most enumerated "Spanish" families were merely *criollos,* families that "would not deserve such a distinction" (of *Spanish*) if their origins were truly scrutinized, exposes the fundamentally social

[65] The versión I consulted is found in Roberto Sosa, ed., "Informe de 1801 - Ramón de Anguiano," in *Documentos Para La Historia de Honduras, Tomo I*, 2da edición, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Tegucigalpa: Litografía López, 2002), 558–601.

and symbolic nature of these racial categories.[66] In this schema, race is not a descriptor of lineage, but a moral-political status, assigned to mark proximity to colonial authority, participation in Christian norms, and usefulness within the imperial economy.

This fluidity coexisted with deliberate exclusion. Anguiano explicitly noted the existence of groups outside the sphere of colonial legibility: the "Xicaques" (estimated 16,000 in Yoro), the Payas (10–12,000 in Olancho), and the "large group [*gran indiada*] of Zambos, who are irreconcilable enemies" (a probably paranoid estimation of over 60,000 in Olancho). Labeled "hostile," "uncivilized," and "impossible to reduce," these populations were relegated to the margins of the report, not as people to be counted, but as threats to be subdued. The reported figures themselves tell a curated story:

- **Ladinos**: 83,674 (65.1%) – framed as the assimilated backbone of society.
- **"Spanish"**: 9,297 (7.2%) – a small elite, inflated by the inclusion of Creoles, according to Anguiano himself.
- **Indians**: 35,482 (27.6%) – recorded as "souls," with 8,298 specifically identified as "tributary Indians," reinforcing fiscal function.
- **Families**: 13,553 Ladino families and 1,512 "Spanish" families, averaging six persons per household.

However, Anguiano's own narrative disrupts this apparent order. He acknowledges the existence of at least 88,000 uncounted Indigenous people—Sambos, Payas, and Xicaques—bringing the actual population of the province to approximately 216,453. This revision renders Indigenous people the true demographic majority, composing roughly 57.1% of the population. The official asserted the dominance of Ladino and Spanish elements while obscuring the vast

[66] "Informe de 1801 - Ramón de Anguiano," 594.

Indigenous presence that challenged the territorial and racial order the colonial state sought to impose.

Their presence through enumerated omission in the report is not the whole story either, Anguiano does dedicate much of his report to discuss the state of these "Indians" and the different attempts of the Spanish to subdue or at least "civilize" them through religious doctrine. This interplay between inclusion and exclusion reflects a colonial logic that racializes territory itself: the census becomes less an exercise in enumeration than in geopolitical sorting. The so-called "civilized" are those counted, settled, and at least nominally incorporated into the colonial project. Meanwhile, entire peoples (the Zambos most specifically) are rendered statistical phantoms, occupying mountains, rivers, and coastal zones, yet omitted from the arithmetic of governance. In Anguiano's own words, these groups "no admiten conquista ni reducción"—they are simultaneously undesirable and uncontrollable, and thus uncountable.[67]

At the fringes of this colonial taxonomy and almost describing a nightmare, Anguiano recalls a 1759 reflection by a past colonial governor in which he talks about the potential alliance between Black and Indigenous populations on the northern coast of Honduras. The governor warned that due to the growing Black population, there was a danger they would unite with the so-called Sambo Indians, who were themselves described as being "also black." This perceived racial and political proximity was seen as a threat to the Spanish crown's control over strategic coastal territories, from the Gulf of Honduras to Cape Gracias a Dios and further along the Caribbean coast. The governor further accused the English of actively supporting these populations by arming, clothing, and encouraging them to undermine Spanish rule and economic

[67] "Informe de 1801 - Ramón de Anguiano," 573.

interests. This passage reveals the racialized logic of colonial security, in which Blackness and Indianness were not only racial categories but geopolitical threats, especially when imagined in alliance. This was a racial anxiety encoded into governance, a spectral vision of a future where empire loses its grip on geography and race alike.[68]

In sum, the 1801 report and its attached commentary provide an extraordinary prelude to the ideological work of later censuses. They show us the impossibility of separating enumeration from domination, and how racial categories like *ladino*, *indio*, and *español* functioned less as descriptors of any biological identity and more as instruments of political legibility and illegibility, mechanisms for deciding who counted, and who would remain invisible in the official story of the nation. While the 1801 report captured a colonial world structured around tribute obligations and missionary governance, the liberal state of the 1880s reimagined census-making as a modern instrument of national definition. The 1887 census sought to simplify identity within a binary racial framework—ladino and indígena—while embedding this logic within an emerging national archive oriented toward progress, statistical order, and historical self-consciousness.

3.2 Census of 1887: A People without Archives

> *The archive is the memory of nations, and forms, so to speak, the fabric of their history. Suppress the archives, and peoples [los pueblos] will lack the consciousness of the past. [...] A people without archives, without history, without traditions, cannot have a character that distinguishes it, that makes it play an honorable role in the magnificent evolutions of progress. This is a self-evident truth.*

[68] Ibid. In fact, the British Empire would only "cede" the Bay Islands and the northern part of the Mosquito Coast (the geographies referenced above) to Honduras in 1859, with the signing of the Wyke-Cruz Treaty. Francisco Cruz, future first Director of the newly created Statistics Department in 1880, was the Honduran representative that signed the treaty.

Ramón Rosa, "Consciousness of the Past," 1880.[69]

Such were part of the words that liberal intellectual and government official Ramón Rosa shared at the opening of the National Archives (ANH) alongside the National Library of Honduras on August 27, 1880. This grand inauguration did not only establish two of the most idiosyncratic institutions of any national state; it was part of a liberal movement that attempted to innovate what they understood to be an administrative order mired in the problems of a long colonial hangover. This was not simply a gaudy metaphor, literally thousands of documents were transported on horseback from the original capital of the republic and political as well as religious center during the colonial period, Comayagua, to the newly designated capital in Tegucigalpa.[70] The constitution of a new archive was among the most visible efforts to forge a truly "national" consciousness, part perhaps of a grander "self-consciousness" embodied by many complex late 19th century elite creatures across "Latin America," all influenced by the weight of Spanish American history and the relentless movement of ideas and material forces throughout their century. In Honduras, the creation of a national archive and a national library, among other efforts mainly in the realms of education, industry and immigration, were the most explicit expression of a positivist and liberal consciousness which begged to articulate the past historically and differently. Rosa's declarations reflect not only a positivist faith in record-keeping but also a political project: to render governable a fragmented population through documentation and classification. To talk about "national identity" is to talk about "history" says historian Jean Meyer, and it was clear that at this point in

[69] Ramón Rosa, "Conciencia del Pasado (en la inauguración del Archivo Nacional, 27 de agosto de 1880)," in *Ramón Rosa: Escritos Selectos. Selección y Reseña de la Historia Cultural de Honduras por Rafael Heliodoro Valle*, 2 ed., Colección Panamericana 19 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jackson, 1946), 280.

[70] Tegucigalpa became the Honduran capital on October 30, 1880, during the presidency (1876-1883) of Marco Aurelio Soto, cousin of "General Minister" Ramón Rosa.

time, liberal elites wanted "to endow Central American nations with an important attribute of civilization and national identity: a historicized past."[71]

Rosa, conduit and personification of this liberal and national consciousness, is popularly remembered as the most important reformer and modernizer. [72] Evident in the quoted speech, and not less in his many other actions as government official and public intellectual, Rosa ascribed immense weight to the role of state-protected archives in fomenting, and to an extent even forming, a sense of a common "national" history. What is perhaps not directly evident, is *who* exactly made up the nation that Rosa addressed: who was the *Honduran*?

This question has the disturbing dual capacity to be extremely simple as well as to remain a perennial inquiry, as questions of national identity around the world tend to be. These questions abound with a complexity of implications for, among only a few important aspects, ethno-racial identities, citizenship, political rights and representation. Was the addressed *Honduran* part of a homogenous people or nation, was she a member of a yet-to-be defined "Honduran race", or was she perhaps simply a citizen, encompassing many identities all subsumed into the practical matters of a purportedly democratic national state, such as tax collection or voting capacity? Anybody can get easily lost in the labyrinthine endeavor of approximating a well-defined meaning for nationality. It is certain that to even only summarize the history of the distinctions between nations,

[71] Rebecca Earle, *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810-1930* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 105.

[72] It is a public testament to his central role in "modernizing" the long-forgotten and "anarchic" republic of the 19th century that his effigy appears in the most coveted "Lempira" bill. This is the Honduran currency, named as such in order to "encapsulate our autonomy and past" after a native leader who commanded a great part of the Lenca resistance against the Spanish invaders in the early 16th century. See Arturo Castillo Flores, "El Lempira, Moneda Oficial de Honduras," in *Documentos Para La Historia de Honduras*, ed. Roberto Sosa, 2da edición, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Tegucigalpa: Litografía López, 2002), 254.

ethnicity and race, and ethnic groups, is overly complicated.[73] It is in our interest nonetheless to approximate a reply to these questions by focusing on the contemporaneous, official understanding of "national" demographics, this is, to situate the meaning of "Honduran" that we want to deconstruct, historically. In order to do this, it is fruitful to look at official documentation of the time, such as national censuses, as well as the arguably most representative public discourse that surrounded them.[74]

Of course, as I have pointed above and reiterate here: it is crucial to understand that it is impossible to separate the central importance of a coherent archive and national identity for Rosa and his most notable contemporaries such as Antonio Ramón Vallejo, from the broader context of liberal reforms in Central America. Also as a direct result of these reforms, the Department of National Statistics was established in 1880. Its first census was produced in 1881, and a few years later, the official organ published the "General Census of 1887." This document, through the censor authorities that produced it, contains the most official image of the country's population at the end of the 19th century. In ways that stand out when looking closely through the documents' figures and textual descriptions, the making and publication of this census was as much an attempt to reflect the reality observed by the censors, as an exercise in national identity construction. This becomes evident in the census' typology, and most specifically its racial categorization.

Pooled into only two options, the census population of Honduras in 1887 was racially classified as either "ladino" or "indigenous." Roughly two generations and ten official censuses

[73] Han F. Vermeulen, *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 29.

[74] Doreen S. Goyer and Eliane Domschke, *The Handbook of National Population Censuses: Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and Oceania* (Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1983); Mara Loveman, *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

later, in 1945, racial categories had shifted and expanded into five categories: "*indio*," "mestizo," "white", "yellow," and "black."[75] The 1950 census, on the other hand, contained no racial categorizations, which coincides with continental and international ideological trends.[76] In terms of numbers, the 1887 census presents the following picture: 262,045 "ladinos" account for 79% of the census population, while 68,872 "indígenas" make up the resting 21%, for a total population figure of 330,917. This information leaves us with more questions than clarity, especially if we focus on the use—and apparent disappearance—of the term "ladino" in this lapse of time.

[75] The disappearance of an official "ladino" category in Honduras is more or less congruent with the appearance of an official "mestizo" one by the census of 1930. For Darío Euraque the 1930 census marks the first of a set of censuses in which the "hegemony of the concept of race" plays a determinant role. It would be until 1950 where he notes a transition from the "racial to the ethnic," in which anthropological discourses slowly begin to register in official documentation. See Euraque*, Estado y Etnicidad En La Historiografía, Historia y Futuro de Honduras*, 14-16.

[76] UNESCO 1950 Statement on Race; Central Bank of Honduras, report of 1952, says that "la información disponible sobre los grupos raciales del país es demasiada enérgica y está basada en criterios de 'color' de dudosa aplicación objetiva y por lo tanto no tiene clara significación genética y biológica." See: Euraque, *Estado y Etnicidad En La Historiografía, Historia y Futuro de Honduras*, 17.

3.2.1 Of liberal ideals and forced pasts: "Ladinos" vs. "Indigenous"

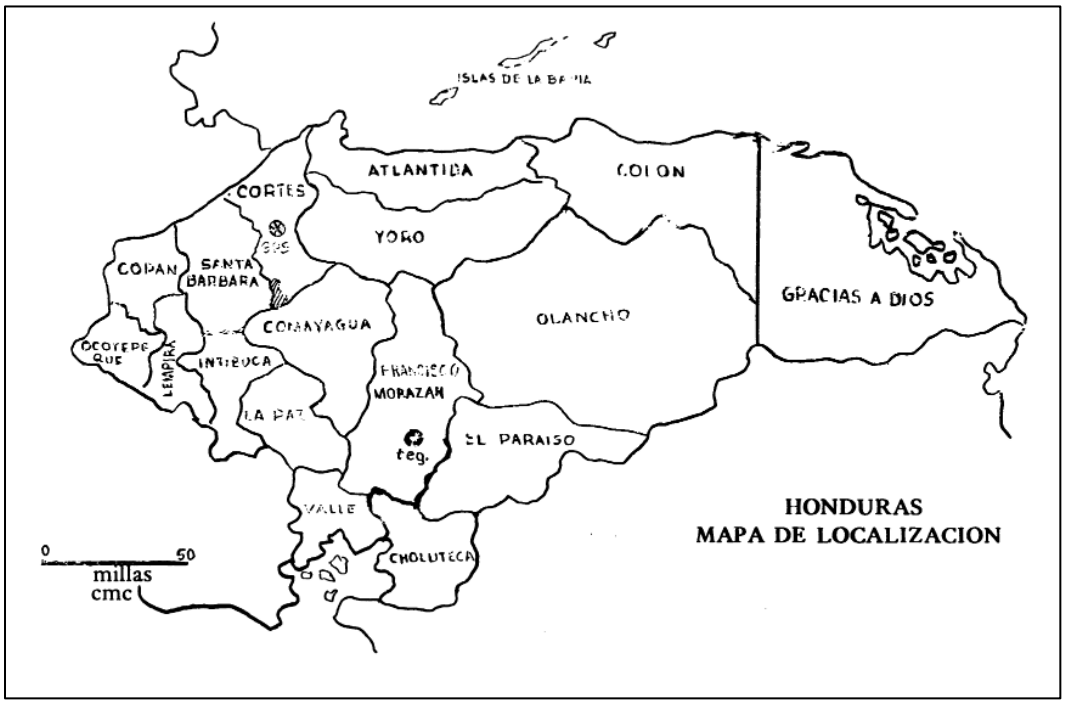


Figure 2. Map of Honduras, current territorial divisions. Source: Guillermo Molina Chocano (1977)

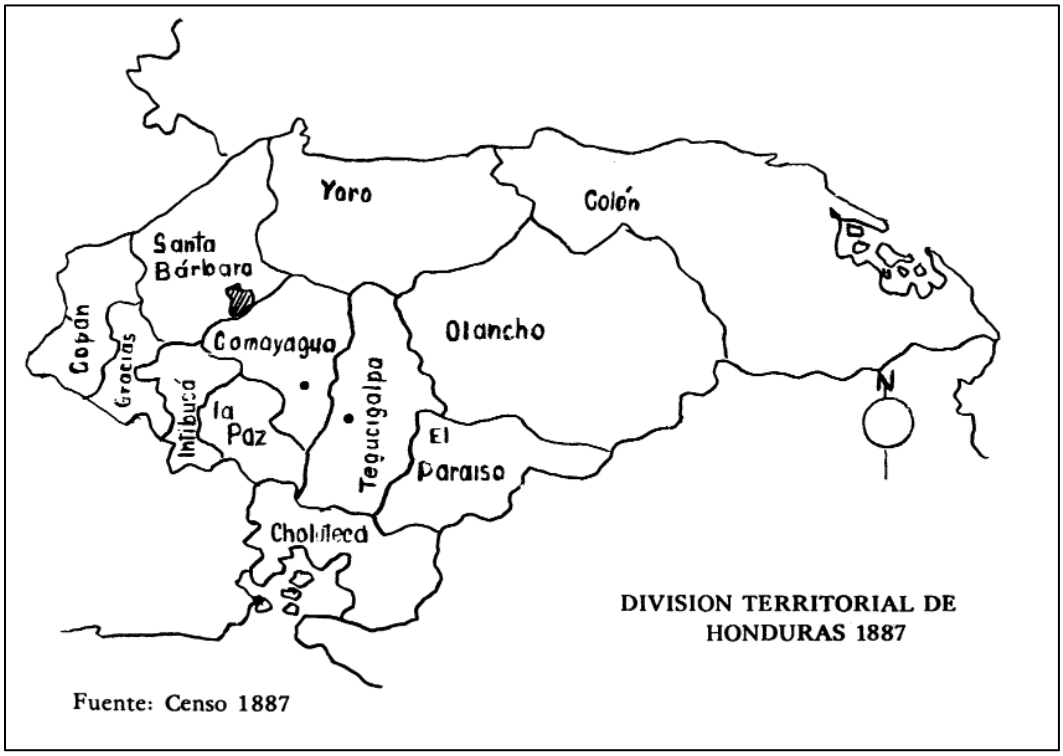


Figure 3. Territorial division of Honduras in 1887. Source: Molina Chocano (1977)

It is not only a curious coincidence that the liberal project commanded by Soto and Rosa in the last quarter of the 19th century accrued staunch opposition, perhaps most visibly with the case of the "indigenous uprising" led by Calixto Vásquez, known in the contemporary press as "The Head-Cutter Indio" [*indio cortacabezas*]. Stemming from the locality of Similatón in the department of La Paz, Vásquez' uprising was finally crushed in September 1879. Around five months before, nonetheless, said town council had already been suppressed through an executive decree. On the other hand, towns such as Opatoro were rewarded with land for their loyalty to the government. Other communities such as Santa María and Marcala were rewarded with "profits" to be used in their schools, coming from the public auction of the *ejido* lands of Similatón.[77] Evident in the 1887 census, Similatón was by then demoted into a village of the municipality of Santa Ana de Cacauterique within the La Paz department.[78] Revisiting the census' introduction for La Paz' departmental data, one finds an explicit description of the demarcations between the "ladino" and "indigenous" categories. We will take the liberty to quote this passage at length, for the implications are severe:

> "To the south of the city of La Paz and in the heights of the sierra, are the indian villages [*pueblos de indios*] of Guajiquiro, Opatoro, Santa Ana de Cacauterique, the extinct Similatón, later called Cabañas, from whence are obtained the most beautiful views of the Republic of El Salvador. Also found in the same sierra are the towns of San Juan, Yarula and Marcala. These towns, with the exception of Marcala, where there are many ladinos, are descendants of the Lenca aborigines [*aborígenes lencas*], and they preserve their customs and habits, above all, the dialect [*el dialecto*], but so degenerate that the young indians [*indios jóvenes*] do not understand at all the one that the elders speak.
>
> These towns, due to the criminal indolence of the priests and the departmental authorities, remained in the most shameful savagery. Their customs were completely primitive. The women went without shirts and wrapped in a cloth that also

[77] Ejido is a type of land tenure demarcation that denotes common use (non-private).

[78] Antonio Vallejo, *Censo General de la República de Honduras Levantado el 15 de Junio de 1887*, (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía del Gobierno, 1888), 67.

> served to cover themselves at night. They professed the Christian religion, but lacked the most indispensable rudiments, and even the idea of God. When they celebrated their religious functions, they washed the chalice and the monstrance the night before, and when they played bulls in the plaza, they took out San Juan, the town's patron saint, and placed him on the barrier so that he could have fun, offering him the lots drawn by the bullfighter [*toriador*]. This act was accompanied by rockets [*cohetes*] and joyful ringing; and they used to bring the saint from afar in procession the night before the function, and in the vicinity of the town they held what they called the reception. At this point, offerings of corn, wheat, etc. were given to the saint by the attendants, men and women, who, for the most part, drunk with liquor [*aguardiente*], came galloping on horseback; but fortunately, since 1870, when schools for both sexes began to be founded and a priest of *conscience* who came to serve the parish of Lamaní temporarily prohibited the use of the dialect, convinced and penetrated that it hindered all improvement and all progress, and kept the towns in the greatest stupidity, such customs have been gradually moderated [*morigerándose paulatinamente*] as the dialect has disappeared. Today these towns are very awake. [...]"[79]

To start unpacking this, let us have a look at the data first. The municipality of Marcala might hold the most intriguing yet representative information. Out of 1791 inhabitants, the census registers 941 as "indigenous" and 850 as "ladinos," resulting in the percentage numbers of 52.5% and 47.5% respectively. The department of La Paz, collectively, runs the percentages of 50.3% "indigenous" and 49.7% "ladinos". What is particularly intriguing here is Vallejo's affirmation in the census that excluding Marcala, most towns in southern La Paz are "descendants of the Lenca aborigines." If we take a quick glance at the census data on these towns, we will see that the observations generally hold,[80] although it remains slightly confusing to comprehend why the population of Marcala was singled out by Vallejo as having "many ladinos" and effectively denying that the municipality had the almost exact, and in fact slightly higher, number of indigenous people. A quick exploration of the dataset, when followed alongside the internal logic

[79] Vallejo, *Censo General 1887*, 65.

[80] With the exception of the municipality of San Juan, which reported 100% ladinos, closely similar (above 90% ladino) to 5 other municipalities. On the other hand, there were 8 municipalities which reported above 90% indigenous, and 4 among which the rates are shared between 40-60%. The census contains data for 18 municipalities of La Paz in total.

of the textual component of the document quoted above, makes at least two things clear: 1. religion was by 1887 not the definitive marker of the "ladino" category; 2. the "indigenous" category carries extremely negative connotations in the eyes of the census' author, to the point where a subtle yet visible attempt to deny indigenous presence and affirm the prospect of "de-indianization" as much as possible is in order.

CODE	Department	ladino_hombre	ladino_mujer	ladino_TOTAL	indigena_hombre	indigena_mujer	indigena_TOTAL	razas_TOTAL	%_ladino	%_indigena	%_total
HN02	Colon	4382	4233	8615	1309	1550	2859	11474	75.1	24.9	100
HN03	Comayagua	7475	8364	15839	481	419	900	16739	94.6	5.4	100
HN04	Copan	16352	16594	32946	1881	1917	3798	36744	89.7	10.3	100
HN06	Choluteca	18444	19579	38023	2344	2221	4565	42588	89.3	10.7	100
HN07	El Paraiso	8760	9103	17863	109	85	194	18057	98.9	1.1	100
HN08	Tegucigalpa	22291	24279	46570	6571	7029	13600	60170	77.4	22.6	100
HN10	Intibuca	5324	5230	10554	3683	3705	7388	17942	58.8	41.2	100
HN11	Islas de la Bahia	1215	1046	2261	398	166	564	2825	80.0	20.0	100
HN12	La Paz	4571	4782	9353	4752	4695	9447	18800	49.8	50.3	100
HN13	Gracias	8164	7742	15906	5961	5949	11910	27816	57.2	42.8	100
HN15	Olancho	11583	13090	24673	3056	3403	6459	31132	79.3	20.7	100
HN16	Santa Barbara	14069	13982	28051	2231	2352	4583	32634	86.0	14.0	100
HN18	Yoro	5308	6083	11391	1361	1244	2605	13996	81.4	18.6	100
	SUMA TOTAL	127938	134107	262045	34137	34735	68872	330917	79.2	20.8	100

Table 1. Data from the census of 1887, according to sex and race by department.

If we go back to Rosa's speech at the opening of the National Archive (ANH), we figure then that the deep interest in fomenting a unified sense of identity through the maintenance of historical archives, is simply a feature that is never in the interest of rebelling or primitive "indigenous" formations. While Rosa shows himself intimately worried about a Honduran nation entering the "magnificent evolutions of progress," in practice this notion will explicitly deny the history and culture found within and among the inhabitants of the territorial space known as Honduras. More poignantly, in the likes of Vallejo and many of his most notable contemporaries as well as future counterparts, there will run an actual *need* to deny this existence. It cannot be clearer than the closing sentence of the passage above, made in reference to the "primitive customs" of the "indigenous": "such customs have been gradually moderated as the dialect has disappeared. Today these towns are very awake." In truth then, it appears that the inhabitants pooled under the "ladino" category were not as problematic as their indigenous counterparts. What

appears most salient as well is that as "dialects," which were in reality languages, were suppressed and lost and other customs were controlled, towns became more "awake," and ostensibly, "ladino," better. This brings home our previous point that by the 1880s the "ladino" was effectively measured against the "indigenous" and not necessarily the "spanish" anymore, evidenced in the 1887 census itself.

3.3 "Guide to Honduras" of 1904

While Euraque notes that the 1901 national census omitted racial categories in its official publication, the 1904 *Guía de Honduras* provides one of the most explicit articulations of racial ideology within early 20th century state statistical practices. Its ambition, prose, and clarity in racial logic often surpass even the 1887 census in revealing how those at the helm of the Honduran state imagined and sought to shape its national community.

At its core, the *Guía* was a document for "foreign eyes" as much as a pedagogical tool for Honduran schools. In his introduction, Director of Statistics Somoza Vivas explains that the Guide seeks "to inform foreigners of our state of progress, the immense wealth we have at our disposal, and the opportunities that immigrants can find on our soil to build their fortune."[81] This was not idle boosterism. By declaring that "the progress of Nations cannot take a powerful impulse without the immigration current that brings with it intelligence, industries, capital and blood," Vivas ties race, capital, and national development into a single programmatic vision.[82] Within the lines of "blood" and "intelligence" we see the liberal logic of *mestizaje* and *ladinización* taking shape: the ideal Honduran subject was not even the ladino, racially malleable through education and productivity, yet always oriented toward whitened modernity through

[81] Fernando Somoza Vivas, *Guia de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1905), 3.
[82] Ibid.

foreign investment. The ideal subject *for* Honduras is that amazing immigrant, who will know how to take advantage of the natural resources at their disposal. A hundred years before, Anguiano expressed the exact same logic, yearning of having the land "scrupulously examined, well recognized by intelligent Botanists and Naturalists" in order to remove the natives [*estos Naturales*] from the misery in which they lived.[83]All what the "Natural Indians" needed was "European directors who taught them how to work the land and increase its fruit."[84] This could be read as only paternalistic remarks, if it not were for the fact that both ladinos and indios are described throughout several censuses as

In Section VI, "Social Situation," the Guide claims that "social classes in Honduras are not based on the origin of blood or capital," noting that "people of Indigenous and even Black origin are frequently seen rising to the first class, with no regard for anything other than correctness of manners or intellectual superiority."[85] On its face, this reads as egalitarian. In practice, however, it operates as a rhetorical sleight-of-hand. By disavowing race as a fixed barrier, the text can still demarcate the "civilized" by their European dress, habits, and customs—thereby reinscribing a hierarchy rooted in civilizational taxonomy. In other words, biology is denied while cultural markers (dress, comportment, education) serve as proxies for racial difference.

Patricia Castillo Canelas has shown how liberal regimes from 1876 to 1891 actively promoted foreign settlement and industrial extraction.[86] By foregrounding the promise of mining,

[83] "Informe de 1801 - Ramón de Anguiano," 570.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Somoza Vivas, *Guia de Honduras*, 31.
[86] Patricia Elizabeth Castillo Canelas, "Inmigración y colonización en Honduras durante la Reforma Liberal, 1876-1891," *Población y Desarrollo - Argonautas y Caminantes* 15 (July 26, 2019): 26–33.

coffee, and timber—often in cooperation with North American and European capital—the Guide situates itself at the intersection of economic ambition and racial epistemology. Three analytical axes help unpack its layered ideology: (1) the language of blood and race, (2) the relation between archives and indigenous people, and (3) the use of race as a social data matrix.

In relation to the language of blood, Somoza Vivas invokes racial categories in explicitly biological terms, linking Honduras's very "raza actual" to the lure of gold and silver mines:

> "Honduras undoubtedly owes its present-day population [*raza actual*] and culture to the gold and silver mines, for without the lure of their veins, the conquistadors would never have dared to enter its uneven territory."[87]

Here, race is cast as a product of conquest and resource extraction. Yet in the very next section, by insisting that class mobility transcends "blood," Vivas reintroduces racial hierarchy through coded references to manners, education, and dress. Lofty rhetoric about "correctness of manners" serves as a stand-in for whitened civility, effectively naturalizing exclusion by labeling it "meritocratic failure," not structural inequality.

The Guide's recurring lament throughout the 400-page document: "no se sabe la fecha de fundación" (the date of founding is unknown) is not accidental. From Curarén (1871) to Morocelí (1893), archives burned alongside villages during indigenous revolts and state reprisals. The census ledger and the torch were twin instruments of control, one constructing legibility, the other enforcing oblivion.[88] The Guide's extensive departmental chapters are peppered with ethnographic observations about Indigenous communities: who lives where, which archives survived—and which were lost to

[87] Somoza Vivas, *Guia de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1905), 20.

[88] There lies a subtle tensioned reality here between state and people though, which would have to be explored further: by destroying the records that made them legible to church and state, they might have also contributed to the rise of *mestizaje* as national ideology in the future.

fire, rebellion, or cholera. Somoza Vivas speaks of municipal records and the histories of Xicaque, Payas, and other Indigenous groups, but his tone shifts between clinical bureaucracy and paternalistic moralism. This is a state apparatus eager to catalog and control Indigenous life. And yet archival absences (destroyed by revolution in 1893 or neglected over decades) become part of the racial-national mythos. When archives burn or wither, the state narrative simply moves forward, erasing inconvenient pasts under the banner of progress.

Finally, though not a census in the strict sense, the *Guía* nevertheless divides social statistics—births, marriages, crime—along racial lines, especially in departments such as Tegucigalpa (later Francisco Morazán), Choluteca, El Paraíso, Olancho, Colón, and the Bay Islands. Figures categorize "indio" versus "ladino" births or crimes, embedding racial difference within the everyday technologies of governance. By doing so, the Guide turns race into a statistical norm, less a lived identity than a category to be tallied, compared, and mobilized for nation-building. Taken together, these axes reveal that the *Guía* is far more than a neutral compendium of facts. By proclaiming that Indigenous and Black individuals can "rise to the first class," the Guide naturalizes exclusion as an individual failing rather than structural bias. Then, by cataloging departments with granular precision the text stitches together a racialized cartography in which local memory, land tenure, and racial classification collide.

3.4 Census-Making and the Shifting Landscape of Racial Governance in Honduras (1927–1950)

Between 1927 and 1950, Honduras conducted five national censuses that reveal not only evolving administrative capacities but also the shifting ideological, political, and international conditions that shaped how the population was classified. Although these censuses are frequently described as administratively flawed—suffering from incomplete data collection, institutional confusion, and public mistrust—they nonetheless offer valuable insight into how the Honduran

state imagined its populace. In particular, they show how racial classification was not a consistent or neutral category but one that was variously emphasized, downplayed, or reconfigured in response to changing political pressures and global currents.

Due to the lack of access to key archival materials such as census directives or internal bureaucratic communications for this period, the following analysis draws on the most accessible and evident features of the census data as published. A full statistical treatment was not feasible, not only due to time and labor constraints (particularly the challenge of tabulating data from scanned or archival documents to a digital interface) but also because the inconsistencies and fragmentary nature of the data would render such analysis methodologically tenuous. Instead, what follows is a critical narrative reading of these five censuses, organized chronologically to trace the evolving relationship between racial classification, state formation, and international context. The sources used are Fiallos' compendium of censuses and the scanned censuses themselves as published in the website of the National Statistics Institute (ine.gob.hn).

The 1927 census, conducted under Héctor Pineda U., reflected a fragmented administrative apparatus and a profound public distrust.[89] Reports indicate widespread evasion, confusion over official duties, and suspicion that the census was a tool for conscription or taxation. While the census omitted explicit racial categories, it did include classifications by nationality and residency status—distinguishing between "domiciliados" and "transeúntes"—as well as literacy rates. This absence of racial data was not neutral: it aligned with a broader legal shift, as immigration and residency laws passed in 1929 targeted West Indian, Black, Chinese, and Arab populations. This was directly connected to the banana conglomerates in the north

[89] *Censo General de Población, 1927* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1927).

coast of Honduras and the racial anxieties exhibited among their labor policies and the workers.[90] Racial governance in this period did not disappear; it was refracted through the language of nationality and legal status. In this way, racial exclusion was maintained through ostensibly neutral administrative categories.

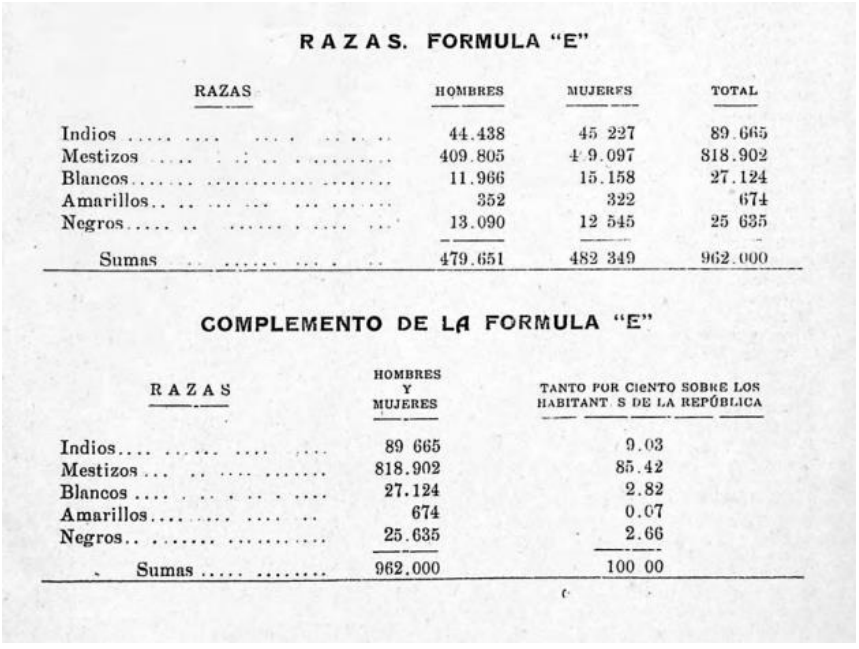
By 1930, under José Pineda, race re-entered the census as a named and counted category. The 1930 census collected information on race, sex, age, education, religion, and disabilities—presented as part of a broader effort to quantify the "social and material elements" of the population.[91] This marked a return to more explicit racial enumeration, although the criteria for classification remained vague. The rationale behind the census echoed broader elite aspirations to model Honduras after "civilized" nations, deploying statistics as instruments of moral and developmental governance. This logic persisted in the 1935 census, directed by Enrique B. Uclés. Here again, racial classification appeared—now with five categories: *mestizo*, *indio*, *blanco*, *negro*, and *amarillo*. [92] While the inclusion of multiple categories suggests a continued preoccupation with racial differentiation, the disappearance of the *ladino* category and the central positioning of *mestizo* signaled a deeper ideological shift. The census preface framed enumeration in aspirational and moralizing terms, declaring that "the population is the soul of the country, its strength, its power, its wealth, its glory," and urging Hondurans to embrace peace and national unity to fulfill the country's demographic potential.

[90] The most recent work in English language that deals with the history of labor, race, and gender in the banana plantations and the 1954 Banana Strike is found in Suyapa Portillo Villeda, *Roots of Resistance: A Story of Gender, Race, and Labor on the North Coast of Honduras* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021).

[91] Fiallos, *Censo de Población y Vivienda Levantados en Honduras de 1791 a 1974 Reedición* (Tegucigalpa: Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, 1981), 91.

[92] Dirección General de Estadística, *Resumen del Censo General de Población Levantado el 30 de Junio de 1935*, (Tegucigalpa: Talleres Tipográficos Nacionales, 1936).

This vision marked a culmination of transformations that had begun decades earlier. While the 1801 colonial census operated through a framework of tribute obligations and missionary administration, the liberal reforms of the 1880s reimagined census-making as a modern national instrument. The 1887 census had reduced colonial plurality to a binary distinction between *ladino* and *indígena*, constructing identity as both measurable and governable. By the 1930s, however, the ideological stakes of classification had changed. The replacement of *ladino* with *mestizo* reflected the growing dominance of *mestizaje* as a national project. Far from a neutral descriptor, *mestizo* now functioned as a normative ideal: an aspirational identity tied to discourses of modernization, national unity, and racial fusion. At the same time, intellectual and state projects of Mayanization and indigenismo sought to revalorize select Indigenous cultures in sanitized, folkloric terms—integrating them into a mestizo-centric national imaginary while obscuring ongoing dispossession and inequality.



RAZAS. FORMULA "E"

RAZAS	HOMBRES	MUJERES	TOTAL
Indios	44.438	45 227	89.665
Mestizos	409.805	409.097	818.902
Blancos	11.966	15.158	27.124
Amarillos	352	322	674
Negros	13.090	12 545	25 635
Sumas	479.651	482 349	962.000

COMPLEMENTO DE LA FORMULA "E"

RAZAS	HOMBRES Y MUJERES	TANTO POR CIENTO SOBRE LOS HABITANTES DE LA REPÚBLICA
Indios	89 665	9.03
Mestizos	818.902	85.42
Blancos	27.124	2.82
Amarillos	674	0.07
Negros	25.635	2.66
Sumas	962.000	100 00

Figure 4. 1935 Censo General de Población. Razas. Formula "E"

The 1945 census, overseen by Vicente Palma, took place in a moment of political tension. Although Tiburcio Carías Andino remained in power, signs of institutional fatigue and impending transition were evident. The census once again included racial categories, along with data on religion, legal status, and property.[93] Yet the official evaluation of the census emphasized widespread failures: local authorities misunderstood their roles, and popular non-participation persisted. These administrative breakdowns raise important questions about how effectively the state could impose classificatory regimes such as race. Despite this, the insistence on conducting a "serious" census speaks to the ongoing desire to render the population legible—to transform it into a knowable object of policy and governance. Racial classification, despite the dysfunction of implementation, remained embedded within this ideological project.

The 1950 census represents a transitional moment. Carías had relinquished power in 1948, and the global political climate was shifting rapidly. The Cold War was intensifying, and international bodies such as UNESCO and CELADE (founded in 1950) were beginning to promote new demographic standards. Directed by Carlos Zúniga Figueroa, the 1950 census did not prominently feature racial classification in its published summaries. However, race arguabñy did not disappear; it was submerged into new categories such as economic activity, household infrastructure, and consumption patterns—data on shoe and bread usage, as well as type of sleeping device (mattress, cot, etc.) for example, began to signal developmental status.[94] While Honduras did not formally participate in the 1950 Census Committee of the Americas, the influence of its emerging demographic paradigms would become more evident in subsequent

[93] Dirección General de Estadística, *Resumen del Censo General de 1945*, (Honduras, 1945).
[94] Dirección General de Censos y Estadística, *Resultados Generales del Censo General de la República Levantado el 18 de Junio de 1950,* (Tegucigalpa: Talleres Tipográficos Nacionales, 1952).

decades. Even in the apparent absence of race, its logic remained present and transformed into the language of productivity, domesticity, and modern consumption. Such argument could be tested by performing a comparative statistical map with previous censuses, a capacity not at immediate hand for me.

3.4.1 Census Making Beyond 1950: Race Between Omission and Codification

This period marked the beginning of a deeper shift. The binary of ladino and indigenous, which had long structured Honduran social classification was integral to the liberal project of national integration and capitalist expansion. As racial terms were gradually replaced with linguistic and cultural indicators, the state's approach to indigeneity changed in form but not necessarily in function. By 1988, the national census no longer recorded race, focusing instead on whether residents spoke a language other than Spanish. However, this shift did not erase the legacies of racial categorization. Rather, it reflected a retroactive process where earlier racial constructs shaped later ethnic and linguistic understandings.

For instance, the Tolupán people's experience illustrates the interplay between language loss and racial identity.[95] Atanasio Herranz, a leading scholar on Central American languages and history, notes that although it might be assumed the Tolupán of Cortés and Atlántida lost their language by the late nineteenth century and thus ceased to be recognized as indigenous in a 1893 law directed to recognized *tribus selváticas* or "wild tribes", this assumption is incorrect by many decades.[96] Questioning if this was simple misidentification or part of a strategy is well

[95] Previously, for centuries and even in the discussed Herranz book, the Tolupán people have been documented as Jicaques, Hicaques, or Xicaques. These are as loaded and confusing terms as *ladino*, perhaps more.

[96] Atanasio Herranz Herranz, *Política del lenguaje en Honduras, 1502-1991* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2002), 342. The cited text goes: "Honduran law, in the 1893 decree, only recognized the Jicaques, the Payas, the Tawahcas (called Toacas), the Zambos, and the Moscos

worth our attention. Herranz attributes language loss to socio-economic changes driven by the confiscation of Tolupán lands in the departments of Cortés and Atlántida, the arrival of banana companies, the Tolupán transformation into wage-laborers for said companies and coffee plantations owned by *mestizos*, as well as the influx of Spanish-speaking *ladino* workers.[97] Between approximately 1910 and 1940, this process of *ladinization* resulted in the near-complete loss of the Tolupán language, though some elderly individuals retained passive knowledge.[98] I wish to emphasize that this example underscores the entanglement of racial and linguistic categories with broader economic and political forces, highlighting the limitations of using language alone as a marker of indigeneity. Additionally, the fact that the Tolupán *not* considered even as "wild tribes" in 1893 were those living close to León and Mulia—as opposed to other Tolupán at the time—reveals a centuries-long pretension for the Tolupán lands and their labor. In 1801, Ramón de Anguiano reported that there was a 1794 prospective report "on the *extraction* of the Xicakes Indians from the mountains that they occupy called Lean, and Mulia, belonging to the Subdelegación de Yoro."[99]

In this light, the evolution of racial categories in Honduran censuses cannot be understood as a simple shift from race to culture or language. Instead, it reveals a longer arc in which racialization is continually rearticulated to serve state and capital interests. The disappearance of race from official statistics did not signal its end but its transformation. For

(Misquitos) as wild tribes. Of the Jicaques, it only recognized those living in the department of Yoro, ignoring the large number who lived in the department of Cortés and in the mountains of León and Mulia, in the department of Atlántida." In 1801, Ramón de Anguiano reported that there was a 1794 prospective report "on the *extraction* of the Xicakes Indians from the mountains that they occupy called Lean, and Mulia, belonging to the Subdelegación de Yoro."

[97] Herranz, 344.

[98] Ibid., 347.

[99] Roberto Sosa, ed., "Informe de 1801 - Ramón de Anguiano," in *Documentos Para La Historia de Honduras, Tomo I*, 2da edición, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Tegucigalpa: Litografía López, 2002), 579.

scholars working in transnational or comparative frameworks, this case underscores the need for historical specificity: the census is not just a technical instrument but a political one, shaped by—and shaping—the racialized landscapes of national development and global accumulation.

From 1927 to 1950, Honduran censuses oscillated between the erasure and reassertion of race. Where race was omitted (1927), it reappeared soon after (1930, 1935, 1945), often accompanied by paternalistic or developmental rhetoric. The censuses do not reflect a coherent racial ideology, but rather a fluctuating and fragmented one—partly shaped by internal politics, partly by international currents. By 1950, the emerging framework of global demographic science had not yet erased race, but had begun to reconfigure its place in population management.

For scholars of racial governance, this period reveals how the Honduran state negotiated its relationship to race not only through categories, but also through administrative practices, legal exclusions, and discursive formations. The census, far from being a neutral instrument, was a site where racial knowledge, national desire, and international models intersected—often imperfectly, but with lasting consequences.

3.5 Conclusion – Multicultural Futures Past: what race was the ladino?

This thesis has traced the ideological production of racial categories in Honduras through the lens of census-making, from the colonial 1801 enumeration to the mid-20th century's modernizing censuses. Across this long arc, racial categories such as *ladino* and *mestizo* emerged not as neutral descriptors of identity, but as flexible instruments of governance. Rather than documenting fixed demographic facts, censuses in Honduras functioned as tools for sorting

populations in accordance with shifting political economies—first tribute and missionization, then land privatization, wage labor, and foreign capital investment.

The core finding across this study is that racial categories such as "ladino" and "mestizo" were not rooted in phenotype but in projects of governance. Their changing meanings mirror broader shifts in political economy. "Ladino" emerges not simply as an ethnic label but as a functional designation for those positioned within the aspirational model of modernity, even if its substance was always defined in the negative sense (*not* Indigenous, *not* Spanish, etc.). "Indio," in contrast, became a residual category, evoking backwardness, disorder, and the limits of governability. These meanings were not static but were produced and reproduced through the census as an administrative act.

The transformation from *ladino* (1887) to *mestizo* (by 1945) does not reflect racial mixture in any biological sense, but rather an ideological reclassification aligned with the consolidation of capitalist modernization. This shift was part of a deeper process of *ladinización*—not just cultural assimilation, but juridical and economic transformation. It involved the erasure of languages, the restructuring of land tenure, and the symbolic remaking of whole communities into into national citizens stripped of Indigenous status. This was not a spontaneous cultural evolution, but instrumentalized through institutions like the national archive, statistical offices, and public schooling system to align racial classification with productivity and national coherence.

Seen in this light, the liberal reforms of the late 19th century must be re-evaluated. While portrayed as a break with colonial backwardness, they reproduced deeply racialized logics under the banner of republican progress. A later most respected Central American intellectual would

describe Honduras as the clearest example of how Spanish colonial legal structures persisted long after independence, until the liberal intervention of late 19th century.[100] Indeed, the "transformation" carried out between 1871 and 1883 under Marco Aurelio Soto and Ramón Rosa modified Honduran social reality profoundly. What perhaps was not immediately transparent was that this transformation had as its material basis the concomitant dispossession of "indigenous" lands and the rise and hold of foreign capital as new overlord of the republican nation.

In this ideological landscape, fear and fantasy often went hand in hand. As Rafael Heliodoro Valle remembered in 1948, liberal reformer Ramón Rosa spent his adolescence haunted by the cry of terror: *"The Indians!"* They were, in his memory, the bogeyman of children and adults alike, bursting into villages speaking the Spanish of Curarén or Texiguat—*"the bloodthirsty hordes."* How Valle imagined Rosa's reaction was not merely personal. It reflected a broader racial anxiety among the liberal elite: the Indigenous presence was not just a political nuisance or a cultural relic but a threat to the vision of a unified, governable, modern republic. To make the *indio* vanish statistically and linguistically was to secure the national project.

And yet, this disappearance was never complete. The story of the Tolupán people illustrates how racial and linguistic identities continued to be reconfigured under economic pressure. Though many Tolupán retained their language and communal practices well into the 20th century, the state reclassified them as *ladino* in 1893 to facilitate land dispossession and

[100] Rafael Heliodoro Valle, *Historia de las Ideas Contemporáneas en Centro-América*, Colección Tierra Firme (México D. F. y Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960), 16.

wage labor extraction. Later, when the census adopted linguistic indicators instead of racial ones, this shift did not signal rupture but continuity. As Atanasio Herranz observed, even when racial terms faded from official use, the racialized structures remained, now dressed in the language of modern development and multicultural inclusion.

This might be one of the lessons of the Honduran case. The census is not just a mirror of society but a mold that shapes how populations are seen, governed, and remembered. The disappearance of the *indio,* and the numerical rise of the *mestizo,* tell the story of a racial future that was not born from demographic destiny, but crafted through the ideological infrastructure of the state. Furthermore, the Honduran case illustrates how international models of race and development shaped local practices. From Anguiano's colonial fear of Black-Indigenous alliances to UNESCO's postwar push for pluri-ethnic recognition, Honduras navigated shifting global racial regimes while maintaining internal hierarchies. The transition from racial typologies to linguistic indicators in later censuses reflects this global reorientation.

To ask *"what race was the ladino?"* is ultimately to ask how state power, international capital, and liberal ideology conspired to produce racialized subjects for a national project that promised unity while delivering exclusion. It is to recognize that *mestizaje* and *ladinización,* far from benign cultural processes, are embedded in the architecture of state formation in Central America. Understanding this architecture demands a rigorous methodological commitment to tracing how race, class, and governance intersected and continue to do so in the construction of the nation. This task remains urgent today, as new forms of racial categorization, both local and global, continue to emerge.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Integrated table tracking the appearance of racial categories in Honduran censuses.

	CENSUS	Record of RACE	Indigenous Visbility	Method of Recording Indigenous Visibility	Afro Visbility	Special Observations
"Hegemony of the Concept of CASTAS"	1791		Yes	Casta		Mulatos
	1804 (1801)		Yes			The section on Trujillo is categorized by "negro caribe," "negro inglés," and "negro francés"
	1832		Yes			
	1856		Yes			
	1860		Yes			
"Persistence of the Concept of LADINO"	1881	No	NO			
	1887	Yes	Yes	Race		
	1895		Yes			"Ethnolinguistic Census" according to Davidson. Information on La Mosquitia
	1901	No	No			
	1904		Yes			Guía de Honduras, not a census in strict sense
	1910	Yes	?	?	?	Mulato, Negro
	1916	Yes	?	?	?	Birth statistics are the only section separated by RACE (ladino-indio)
	1927 (1926)	No				
"Hegemony of the Concept of RACE"	1930	Yes	Yes	Race	Yes	"Advanced Nations"
	1935	Yes	Yes	Race	Yes	
	1940	Yes	Yes	Race	Yes	
	1945	Yes	Yes	Race	Yes	
"From the RACIAL to the ETHNIC"	1950	No		Customs		
	1961	No		N/A		Recommendations COTA Censo de America 1960, Argentina 1958
	1974	No		N/A		United Nations Statistics 14th 1966
	1988	No	Yes	Language		Garífunas
"Towards an ETHNIC RIGHT OF LAW?"	1994					Executive Decree 0719-EP-94
	2001		Yes	Self-Identification; Language		
	2013		Yes	Self-Identification; Language		

Sources: Loveman (2014), Euraque (2021), Davidson (2012, 2022), Fiallos (1981).

Appendix 2. QGIS visualizations of the 1887 census, by race

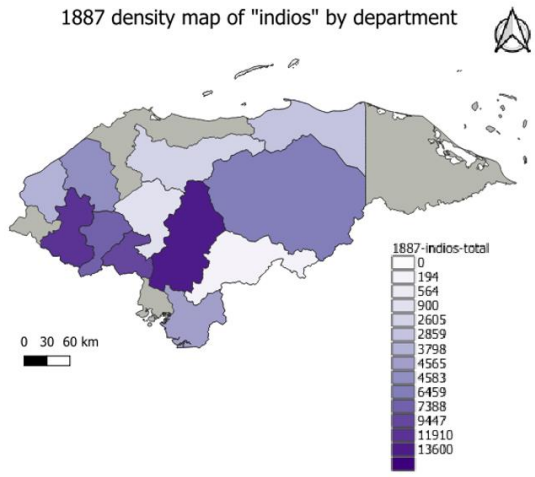


Figure 1. 1887 "indios" map.

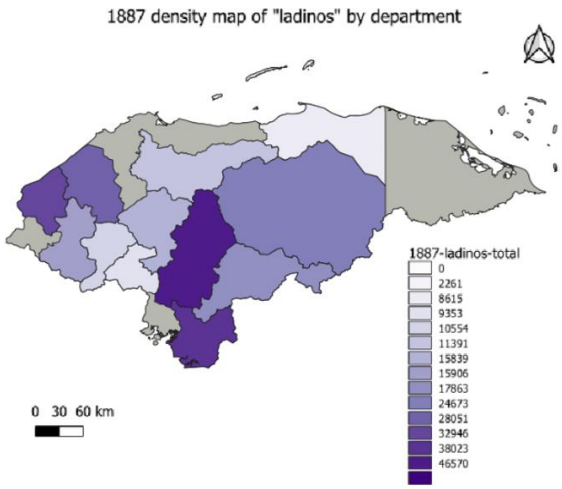


Figure 2. 1887 "ladinos" map.

Appendix 2. QGIS visualizations of the 1935 census, by race

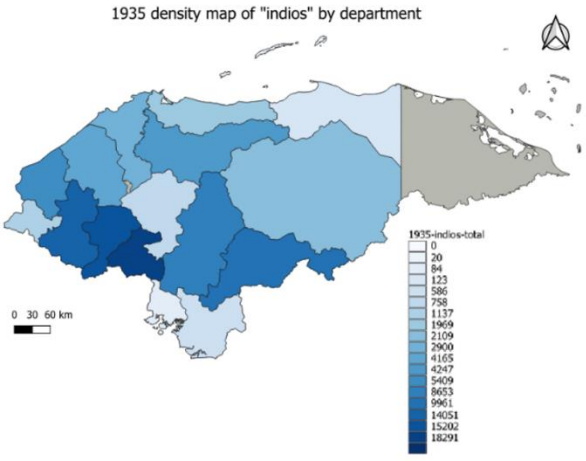


Figure 3. 1935 "indios" map.

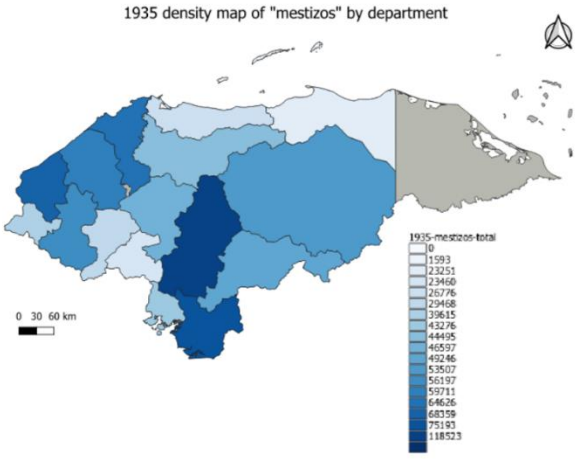


Figure 4. 1935 "mestizo" map.

Appendix 3. QGIS visualizations of the 1945 census, by race

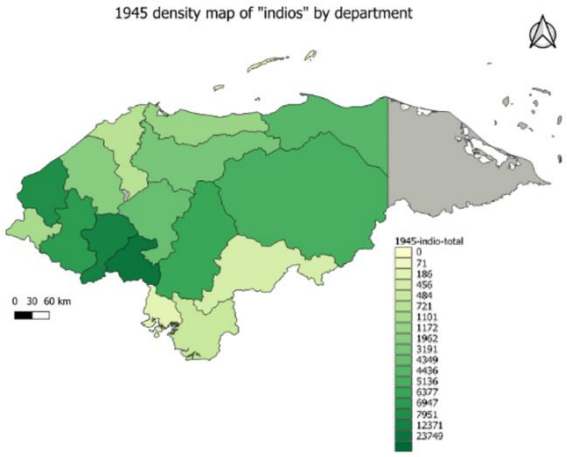


Figure 5. 1945 "indios" map.

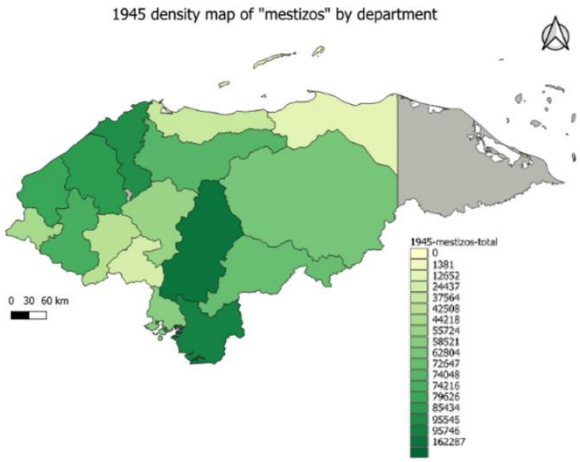


Figure 6. 1945 "mestizos" map.

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