

THE DYNAMICS OF ETHNIC STATUS

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The title of this symposium is a bit puzzling. To begin with: because cultures cannot be, in the literal sense, *mestizo*, that is to say, "half-caste" or "cross-bred", though in a less strict sense they can indeed be said to be "a mixture" of elements of various provenance. But I don't think that this is what is meant, but rather "the culture of the *mestizos*". Yet this is where our difficulties start: the word has many different applications. It is not a single generally-recognized social category, but rather a word, used today, to mean "non-Indian in identity", *i.e.* of Hispanic culture. But this requires us to decide what is an Indian, and, as Judith Friedlander (1975) put it, «one is always the Indian of somebody». The definition of the Indian changes from region to region and from class to class.

Moreover the word, *mestizo*, has itself changed its connotations over the past five centuries. Therefore to understand the concept in its entirety, what it means in Mexico today, it is necessary to review the evolution of its meanings ever since the conquest, and not merely in Mexico, but in all the countries of Latin America, because the ways in which it has evolved vary from one to the other and produce quite different meanings in different places, which are nevertheless related to one another. It is the concept as a whole that we must grasp in order to understand its dynamics. Finally it is not the term used currently by many populations. Non-Indians are more commonly called, according to the region *ladinos*, *gente decente*, *gente de razón*, *racionales*, etc., as Pedro Carrasco pointed out twenty-five years ago.

It referred, initially, to that block of the population that was neither Spanish nor Indian but between the two, literally "cross-bred" in the literal sense. And provided they were recognized by their fathers and kept in his household, they were brought up as part of the Spanish-speaking half of the population, and as in

many other empires these half-castes performed, initially, an intermediary function between the Spanish rulers and the peoples they ruled, for they were bilingual. Hence the two races that came into contact at the Conquest became three within a generation. Then, with the arrival of Negro slaves, four and with the production of *mulattos*, five, and six with the cross between Negro and Indian: *lobos* or *pardos*. It is to be noted that the Negroes largely lost their indigenous culture in the slave-markets of the Caribbean where they were sold as individuals not groups, so that they retained very little of their African heritage, either cultural or social, nor did they have any incentive, nor even the possibility, to integrate into Indian society, so they were absorbed, if they ceased to be slaves on plantations, into the urban, Hispanic lower class. On the other hand, a further distinction, virtually a racial one, was introduced in time between the Spaniards born in Spain, *gachupines*, and those born in the New World, *criollos* (1), and feeling ran very high between them.

Further miscegenation produced a multiplication of ethnic crosses which were finally displayed, if not caricatured, in the famous *cuadros de mestizaje* that were painted for the vice-roys both of New Spain and Peru. I do not believe that, as ethnographical data, they are worth very much, being inspired by a concern to demonstrate the varieties of interbreeding that were possible and the richness of the slang vocabulary of the day applying to them, rather than the reality of ethnic relations, but they represent the amused view of the population as seen from the steps of the vice-regal palace. They were not used in legislation, nor could they have been, (only a few much more rudimentary distinctions were). But they are full of social information. In accordance with contemporary Spanish ideas concerning breeding, purity of blood and so forth, the notions of inherited status and descent were everything, and phenotype, their undependable manifestation, counted for little. Thus a gentleman of Merida in the Venezuelan Andes brought a case against the municipality of that town towards the end of the eighteenth century for denying him the right to take a *parasol* to church, a privilege reserved for *blancos*. He emerged five years later after his case had gone to the high court in Caracas justified as *blanco de segunda clase* with the right to *parasol*,

gloves and a footstool! But during those years nobody had thought it relevant to inquire as to the colour of his face in order to decide whether or not he was white.

With Independence things change again; but in the other direction. Legal ethnic status was abolished and the social system returned to one of three categories: whites - there are no longer any *gachupines* - *mestizos* and Indians. A century later the system is further reduced: the whites disappear under pressure from the indigenist ideology of the Mexican Revolution. In next-door Guatemala, however, they do not, since there has been no Revolution and the *blancos* continued to consider themselves ethnically different, even if others of Hispanic culture did not necessarily so consider them.

It is essential to distinguish between the social status of Indian and pretensions to Indian descent which are often, more ardently formerly than today, entertained by members of the Mexican middle class in accordance with the ideology of *indigenismo*, the fruit of the Mexican Revolution. For you do not claim Indian blood if you are socially an Indian; there would be no point. Hence the paradox that you openly claim to be Indian if you are not one. The ideological Indians are, necessarily, *mestizos*, since *indigenismo* is a product of *mestizo* culture. In this fact we can see that *mestizo* is a residual category meaning simply: socially non-Indian, and its variability is due to that. In accordance with this distinction, when statues are erected to celebrate the autochthonous ancestors - which the countries of the New World feel periodically moved to do - they never resemble the real social Indians of the area, but rather copies of illustrations from the novels of Fennimore Cooper: North American Indians with feather head-dresses (see, for example, Oaxaca, Barranquilla, etc.).

If we go to the Peruvian and Bolivian Andes we find a similar and more complex system which has not been reduced so drastically - or at least, had not yet been when I was last there twenty-five years ago - where, in places, as many as five ethnic statuses were still recognized. *Blancos* are clearly demarcated from *mestizos* (the word is used currently here) and the ladies of this class are clearly distinguished by their *polleras* and top-hats, the magnificent coloured velvet "mother-goose" top-hats of Potosí, for example, or the white starched straw ones of

Cochabamba. The *mestizas*, in turn, are distinguished from the *cholas* who wear *polleras* and bowler-hats. In places, both wear bowler-hats but the *mestizas* wear black ones and *cholas* brown; and there are many less striking different details of dress which distinguish them. The men-folk of both wear European clothes. But they are clearly separated from the Indians who in the region of Sucre wear pig-tails and *conquistadores'* helmets of felt or leather. Yet these "civilized" Indians are quite distinct from the *chunchos*, jungle Indians who come up onto the *altiplano* occasionally in order to trade. It appears that these Indians were not in fact autochthonous to the jungle but are the descendants of highland Indians who fled from the Andes to live in freedom.

The sumptuary laws of the Empire had certainly left their mark upon the Andes, but today such fine distinctions are blurred. The *mestizas* top-hats have gone out of fashion in Cochabamba; the ethnic structure is collapsing. Even before it collapsed, however, it was never a simple single system like a legal code, the same for everybody and one that all could understand as being the same, but depended upon the position of the viewer. Just as in Mexico the "Indian" is ultimately to be defined as anyone considered culturally or morally inferior by the speaker, - this gives the word its value as a fighting insult - so egocentricity produces a personal deformation in the view of each man. A lady of Lima who bore the proud name of a former viceroy once undertook to clarify my grasp of the ethnic categories of Peru: «It's very simple, really» she said «there are the Spaniards, people like us, and then there are the Indians!». «What about the *mestizos*?» I asked. «They're all really Indians. You've only got to look at them». But the same thing occurs at the other end of the social hierarchy in Peru. The term *misti* meaning 'white' is used by the Quechua-speaking Indians to include all those who speak Spanish, from the *cholos* upward. If one is always the Indian of somebody, one is also always the *mestizo* of somebody else. The view of the forty families and the view from the Puna are symmetrical inversions of each other.

Societies must always be treated as wholes, because in fact they are wholes in the sense that factors present in one part affect the other parts. This is a very old lesson in anthropology, but it has not always been taken to heart; if the Indians are as they are, it is because the *mestizos* are so also, et *vice versa*. And

this is all the more evident when the possibility exists that individuals and even communities may decide one day to change their ethnic status and become *mestizos*. This involves a certain modicum of cultural acquisition, for you cannot "pass" for a *mestizo* unless you can express yourself to some extent in Spanish. To take the example of the State of Chiapas, one of the less dynamic states of Mexico, the census of 1762 gives only 528 whites (Peña 1951), while that of 1778 (Trens 1957) gives 2500 whites out of a population of 64000. The *negros* and *mestizos* were 5000 each, which leaves 80% of the population as Indians. But today the Indians are a minority. We know the different periods at which different *pueblos* have changed, mainly late 18th and early 19th century and during the Revolution, and we have watched the process going on.

Ixtapa, the most southerly village of Zinacantan, was in the middle of it when we were there in the early sixties: all the young men (the under forties) were become *ladinos*, while the over fifties were still Indians, they spoke Tzotzil and wore Indian clothes. Other *pueblos* changed less abruptly. And there were many cases of individual "ladinization" (as we called the process of hispanization in Chiapas) and even the most famous case, recorded in the autobiography of Juan Pérez Jolote by Pozas (1952), who lived for two decades as a *ladino* during the revolutionary years before going back to Chamula, where he became a *principal* of the town. The passage of loan words from Spanish to the local Mayan dialect and in the contrary direction was therefore no surprise to us. Nor were we surprised to find, in the Spanish of the *ladinos* of Chiapas a number of survivals from the age of Quevedo: *bastimento*, *un mi caballo*, *un mi hermano*, etc., for such a time-lag is usually to be found on the outskirts of empires. Yet not only words, but ideas and usages are found in *ladino* discourse that go back to an Indian origin; the concepts in witchcraft, *naguales* and the techniques of curing, or to give another example, the ranking of children by age; in the Mayan language there are two words for brother: *bank'il* 'elder brother' and *itz'in* 'younger brother' but no generic for brother. Hence in Spanish the distinction is conserved by the use of the diminutive and if you ask a child: «¿ Cuantos hermanos tienes?», he is liable to reply proudly: «Ninguno, soy el mayor» or «¿ Cuantos hermanitos?» «Ninguno, soy el menor». Cultural

and linguistic borrowings in the other direction are of course yet more numerous.

Now it has been suggested that the Indian half of the population is simply a deprived peasantry kept in marginal status on poor land, and though this is an over-simplification (for there are *ladino* peasants even poorer than their Indian neighbours), it had at least the merit of opposing the view of those whom I christened "The Romantic Antiquarians" whose whole ambition was to discover traits of "pre-columbian culture" among the modern Indians and who took no account of their social relations at all. In fact, the Indians of New Spain went through much more cultural change than these early anthropologists were prepared to admit, and very often they identified as pre-columbian culture, features that were due to the teaching of the Spanish missionaries of the sixteenth century - simply because they were different to modern Mexican urban culture. Because they were Indian culture today, it was assumed that they had always been so. And they were not the only ones to make this mistake. The people themselves also sometimes made it. Thus, for example, the *ladinos* of Villa Las Rosas decided they would no longer participate in the *jalagallos*, the sport of riding during the *fiesta* to snatch by the head a chicken suspended from a cord across the street, because this was an Indian custom which they judged *infradig* for them. They did not know that this is an ancient Spanish game practised at *fiestas*. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1961) gives other examples in Aritama of similar misidentifications of such features which were repudiated because socially despised as uncouth Indian practises. Thus the time-lag in the transformations of cultural features tends to change their social significance and even their ethnic identity.

There is indeed, as the rather unsatisfactory theory I mentioned suggested, a class differential between Indian and *mestizo* society. The Indians, pushed into the margin of the imperial enterprise, onto the poor land, defend their culture and identity, and their social integration as a community, by an extraordinary amalgam of sixteenth century Christianity and autochthonous culture in which they receive little to reward them, but the escape into alcohol and their dreams of spiritual power. It is an adaptation to subordination, based upon the idea of community solidarity and service in the *cargo* system (2). Those

who get separated from their community peel off into the Hispanic world where they disappear, having little hope of achieving any measure of success in anything. However those few who do achieve success in the world outside their *pueblo*, as *promotores* in the Indian Organization, or by renting land and exploiting it with hired hands or by buying a truck and becoming middle-men, equally tend to end up by becoming *ladinos*. You cannot be simply an Indian, you have to be a member of a specific Indian community, for there is no culture without society, nor *vice versa*. Octavio Paz (1959), writing about the moral values of the colonial heritage, saw this very clearly. And George Foster (1960) came near to opening such a vision when he coined the expression "conquest culture"; there is indeed a heritage of conquest, just as there is an adaptation to subordination. In contrast to the Indians' retreat into the moral and social, as well as geographical, margins, *mestizo* culture is dominant, it is based upon the premiss of worldly success, of the need to impose oneself, of male superiority. Hence *mestizo* culture is the heir to conquest culture; it is Hispanic in origin as well as in form and where it has absorbed elements from the Indian past, they have come down through Indian mothers, the organization of children, food and the home, the sentiments and the transcendental.

There is no better case to illustrate the transformations of structure I have been discussing than Yucatan. Unlike Mexico north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the word *mestizo* is not used for the Hispanic sector of the population who are called *ladinos*. This is particularly the case in Chiapas and in Guatemala. In Yucatan however, only the word *mestizo* is used, but it does not here apply to the Hispanics, but to those who wear traditional dress and speak Maya. Hence the ingenuous observation that in Yucatan the Indians are called *mestizos* has a certain point to it.

Now, the words *mestizo* and *ladino* have not always been synonymous and they are still not so in the dictionaries, but only insofar as both are used as names for the Hispanic, as opposed to the Indian population. For in essence, while *mestizo* refers to mixed descent, *ladino* indicates cultural accomplishments: it was already employed in Sevilla before the Conquest to refer to Negroes or Moors who could speak Spanish. Hence membership

of Hispanic society was attributed in one case to descent and in the other case to culture. The question is, then, why did New Spain down to the Isthmus define the Hispanics by their descent, while Chiapas and Guatemala chose the criterion of culture? And why did Yucatan follow neither?

The *Audiencia* (to which Chiapas belonged before Independence) was peopled by highland Maya tribes, each speaking a different language, who had been subdued with no great difficulty. It was subsequently entrusted to the Dominicans who became extremely powerful as landowners, cattle-ranchers and bankers.

Now the monks were, as educators, producers of *ladinos*, not, theoretically at any rate, of *mestizos*. Their policy was to convert the leaders of Indian society, to produce the «cacique, indio muy ladino y buen cristiano», and if vows of chastity were sometimes infringed, this was hardly surprising in an age when the priest's *barragana*, or house-keeper, was a recognized institution in parts of Spain. But, if they may have been *genitores*, they could not be recognized as *patres*, since paternity was denied to the clerics. Hence, viewed ideally, clerically-dominated society produced *ladinos*, secular society produced *mestizos*.

There were many areas north of the Isthmus which resembled Guatemala, yet in New Spain as a whole political, industrial and commercial concerns dominated and the monks operated in the margins of Hispanic society where there were Indians. In Guatemala the Hispanic segment of society was proportionally much smaller and they dominated the whole society. New Spain therefore jettisoned the word *ladino*, Guatemala did not.

If, as we hope, we have explained satisfactorily why south of the Isthmus they choose *ladinos* rather than *mestizos*, we still have not explained why there were no *ladinos* in Yucatan. It was certainly isolated enough: a virtually portless coast, encircled by a strand to the north and west, a sea infested by pirates to the east and impenetrable jungle to the south, occupied by the warlike Lacandones. The Franciscan monks there wielded as much power as the Dominicans in Chiapas or Guatemala and they both appear to have retained it till the mid-nineteenth century, much longer than in most of Mexico. The difference between the two orders was considerable.

On account of the severity of their rule, the Franciscans never acquired the same worldly power as the Dominicans, but it was above all the difference between the Indians themselves that counted. The Lowland Maya of Yucatan were a civilized people before the Conquest. The Maya of the highlands were tribesmen. In Yucatan, they spoke a single dialect from one end of the country to the other, for they had previously been part of a single state, the highlanders spoke a dozen different Mayance languages.

In Yucatan the Indian aristocracy, which endured till the days of Stephens, continued to speak Maya even though they learned Spanish, as did the *mestizo* class who were largely the bastards of the *hacienda* owners and they formed the class of foremen on the estates, as well as small traders and artesans. Everyone spoke Maya, including the Spanish estate-owners who needed to communicate with the people on their *haciendas*. Hence *mestizo* did not imply Hispanic, but only half-caste, its original meaning.

Lacking physical communications and commercial or industrial activity, Yucatan remained a backwater of the empire, administered directly from Spain as a *Capitanía general*, and when Independence came, no shot was fired and the Spanish power simply went away when the rest of the continent was lost. So it continued as if still in colonial times, quite separate and quite different to the rest of Central America, «a country as different from Central America as if separated by the Atlantic» according to Stephens (1949).

Stephens paints the portrait of a perfectly stable, tranquil society, and yet within a few years of his departure it was the scene of the most ferocious civil war, the *guerra de castas* (a phrase which has most unfortunately been translated into English as “the caste war”) (3). It started as a war between the traditional conservative land-owners of Merida and the modernist, liberal and commercial interest which had grown rich with the development of sugar production. The latter armed their Indians to join them in the fight and the Indians turned their arms on their masters. The *mestizos* mainly sided with the whites and some of the *hacienda*-Indians did so too, particularly on the old estates to the West. After three years the rebel Indians retired to the jungles to the east and those who

remained with their white masters were given the honorary title of *mestizo* in order to differentiate them from the rebellious "Indians"; the Indians were thereafter excluded from civil society altogether. Thus a three-term system had been reduced to a two-term system by the elimination, not of the term at the top, the *blancos*, but of the bottom category, the Indians. The *mestizos*, who have no contact with them, consider them sub-human, witches and cannibals to a man.

Already in the case of modern Yucatan there have been signs of a movement in favor of independence, as there had been a movement to join the United States, not of Mexico but of North America in the nineteenth century. Perhaps Yucatan, on account of its very exceptional conditions, has been a premonition of a fundamental change that is going on elsewhere in Mexico now. As we have seen, there were urban middle-class people who were speaking *la Maya* at home - and I remember a young man twenty years ago in the Panam Office in Merida who was speaking to his girl-friend on the telephone in Maya. The dominant (Hispanic) culture did not dominate there.

It was at that time that a regionalist Indian consciousness began to appear, a quite different phenomenon to the *indigenismo* of the Mexican Republic. The premiss on which the former system depended was the dominance of Hispanic culture which meant that social ascension was inevitably accompanied by ladinization, but this started to be no longer true everywhere. Wealthy and educated Indians, especially in Guatemala (Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, etc.) refused to renounce their Indian identity and one found young men learning Quiché from their grandparents because their parents knew so little. And in Mexico, the Zapotecs of the Isthmus are the most outstanding example; they already had their Zapotec-speaking radio twenty years ago. The regional revival is breaking the old mould of the colonial heritage which so successfully survived Independence and the Mexican Revolution.

Regionalism is a world-wide phenomenon, due to a change in the nature of the modern state which has produced a rebirth of ethnic consciousness, in Europe as in Mexico, and not only regionalism like the Basques' or the Bretons', but Black Power, Red Power, Fairy Power, Women's Lib. It is a rebellion against the centre, a centrifugal effect which calls into question the

fundamental consciousness of identity, produced, I think, by modern communications which eliminate the necessity for those "cultural brokers" who served to interpret the state to the local community and *vice versa* and who thereby gave a personal identity to the group of face-to-face relations and a face to the state. A community cannot exist without frontiers, physical and/or moral, where the inversions and trasformations defining its limits are placed, and if these limits are abolished then the notion of community itself is destroyed. Then perhaps our studies of those Indian *caciques* in Mexico, who were above all cultural brokers, will turn out to have a far wider significance than we imagined, for they provided a blue-print of the problem, which extends far beyond the frontiers of Mexico.

Notes

1. This distinction was especially critical in the Spanish empire on account of the importance of the principle of the *jus soli* which accorded identity to a person by his place of birth.

2. This is a gross overgeneralization, of course. For, quite apart from the Indians of the *regiones de refugio*, there were others who collaborated more less with the Spaniards and found a niche among the *mestizos*, just as there was the Indian nobility that became part of the Hispanic world and that which remained entirely Indian.

3. The word *casta* in Latin America means a lineage or breed, hence it referred to the Indians or to the variants of *mestizos*. The *guerra de castas* would be better translated as "the Indian rebellion". See Pitt-Rivers (1971, 1976).

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Summary

The A. once wrote a paper under the title "Who are the Indians?" (1965). Now he asks: who are the *mestizos*? The word means literally "half-castes"; but it is not commonly used in popular conversation, being rather too literary and precise to define a social category which is no longer genetic. The terms used to denote those who are not Indian are, depending on the

region, *gente decente*, *gente de razón*, *racionales* (common in the Andes) etc. and, south of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, *ladinos*.

In Yucatan *mestizo* is used, but not to refer to those who are recognized as *mestizos* elsewhere, but rather the contrary: those who speak *la Maya* as their first language and who would elsewhere be identified as Indians. The A. has explained how this came about historically in an article "Mestizo or Ladino?" (1968-1969).

The terms have changed enormously through time and their denotation also. And the situation as we find it today in Mexico is the end-product of a process which started with two races only, then, through cross-breeding and the introduction of the African population, ethnic statuses multiplied for two centuries and subsequently diminished in number till, finally, with the disappearance of the *blancos* as a category in the Mexican Revolution, we are left with the only two we know today in Mexico: Indian and *mestizo*, that is to say, Hispanic.

But not only does the definition of ethnic status change in time, it changes in space also, and even according to the point of view of the speaker. Everyone is the "Indian" of somebody in Mexico, it has been said. And by the same reasoning everybody is the *mestizo* of somebody also. The system of ethnic differentiation can be seen more clearly by looking back into the past, even if the *cuadros de mestizaje* give no more than a caricatural picture of it. Or by looking at modern Peru where the process of reduction has gone less far and we can find in some parts as many as five ethnic statuses: *chunchos*, that is to say jungle Indians who come up into the Andes, *indios* whose culture contains many features of Hispanic origin, especially their dress, *cholos*, ex-Indians who speak at least some Spanish, *mestizos* (this time the word is used) and finally the *blancos* or whites, who are not necessarily as white as all that in physical colouring, since ethnic status pays much more attention to social than to physical features.

This evolution depends upon demographic, economic, cultural and ideological factors which determine which sector of the population is to be ranked as *mestizo*. The only generalization that holds, except in Yucatan, is that *mestizo* culture is based upon the Spanish language, since this is the *sine qua non* of becoming a *mestizo*, i.e. abandoning Indian identity.

This, however, does not exclude certain Indian ideas from passing into *mestizo* culture and *vice versa*. Moreover the ethnic composition of any Mexican *pueblo* is very much more the result of the decision of the young men to change their ethnic status and become *ladinos*, than to any change in its genetic components.

Quite a different phenomenon is the revival of autochthonous identity (Zapotec, Tlaxcalan, Quiché, etc.) which corresponds to the revival of regional culture such as we find in Europe today, and, as in Europe, they are far from being simply a renaissance of the past, as they pretend, but rather, new constructions, born of new social situations, and favoured by those who have become largely *ladinized*.

Sommario

Esiste un saggio dell'A. dal titolo "Who are the Indians?" (1965). La domanda che egli ora si pone è: chi sono i *mestizos*? La parola significa letteralmente "mezzi-casta", ma non è comunemente utilizzata nella conversazione corrente, essendo un po' troppo letteraria e precisa per definire una categoria sociale che ha perso ormai il suo carattere genetico. I termini usati per chiamare coloro che non sono indiani sono, a seconda delle regioni, *gente decente*, *gente de razón*, *racionales* (comune nelle Ande) e, a sud dell'Istmo di Tehuantepec, *ladinos*.

In Yucatan si riscontra l'uso di *mestizo* ma non in riferimento a coloro che sono riconosciuti come *mestizos* altrove, quanto piuttosto l'inverso: si riferisce a coloro che parlano *la Maya* come loro prima lingua e che in altre zone sarebbero identificati come "indiani". Come ciò si sia verificato è stato spiegato dall'A. in un precedente articolo, "Mestizo or Ladino?" (1968-1969).

I termini variano enormemente nel tempo e così anche il loro significato. La situazione che si constata in Messico oggi è il prodotto finale di un processo che prese il via con due sole razze. Attraverso gli incroci e l'introduzione di gente africana le categorie etniche si moltiplicarono nei primi due secoli per poi diminuire di numero fino alla scomparsa dei *blancos* come

categoria durante la rivoluzione messicana, arrivando infine alle uniche due conosciute nel Messico contemporaneo: indiana e *mestiza*.

Ma la definizione di status etnico varia non solo nel tempo, ma anche nello spazio e perfino rispetto al punto di vista dell'informatore: ognuno è "l'indiano" di qualcun altro in Messico. Si può comprendere più chiaramente il sistema della differenziazione etnica se si rivolge lo sguardo al passato, sebbene i *cuadros de mestizaje* ne siano solo la rappresentazione caricaturale. O esaminando il Perù attuale, dove il processo di riduzione è stato più lento ed in alcune zone si possono rilevare almeno cinque categorie etniche: i *chunchos*, sarebbe a dire gli indiani della giungla che salirono all'altopiano; gli *indios*, la cui cultura include molti tratti di origine ispanica, in special modo l'abbigliamento; i *cholos*, ex indiani che conoscono un po' di spagnolo; i *mestizos* (in questa occasione si utilizza tale termine) e, per finire, i *blancos*, che non sono poi necessariamente così bianchi, dal momento che lo status etnico è molto più attento alle peculiarità sociali che a quelle fisiche.

Questa evoluzione è soggetta a fattori economici, culturali ed ideologici che determinano quale settore della popolazione debba essere classificato come *mestizo*. L'unica generalizzazione che rimane valida, con eccezione dello Yucatan, è che la cultura *mestiza* è basata sulla lingua spagnola, la cui conoscenza è *condicio sine qua non* per diventare un *mestizo*, vale a dire per abbandonare l'identità indiana. Ciò non esclude, comunque, che elementi indiani passino nella cultura *mestiza* e viceversa. D'altra parte la composizione etnica deriva in Messico più dalla decisione degli uomini di cambiare il loro status etnico e diventare *ladinos* che da possibili mutamenti nella composizione genetica.

Di altra natura è il fenomeno del revival delle identità autoctone (Zapotechi, Tlaxcaltechi, Quiché, ecc.) che corrisponde alla rinascita delle culture regionali in atto nell'Europa attuale: lontane dall'essere una mera fioritura del passato, alla stregua di quelle europee sono nuove costruzioni, sorte da nuove situazioni sociali e sostenute da coloro che sono già ampiamente "ladinizzati".