Symbols of Identity and Nationalism in Mexican and Central-American Currency

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Introduction

Modern nation-states have often used conceptions of "the past" for building or reinforcing national identities (see, for example, Blakey 1990; Fowler 1987; Olsen 1986). Unfortunately, the manipulation of material culture in constructing national identities has generally been ignored in most analyses. Material culture, being at least partly symbolic in nature, has the potential to transform societies through concepts and ideologies (Hodder 1982: 212). This is because material objects which serve utilitarian purposes may also function to communicate information. According to Barthes, such objects "have a substance of expression whose essence is not to signify; often, they are objects of everyday use, used by society in a derivative way, to signify something" (Barthes 1967: 41).

One kind of material culture that can be particularly effective in shaping ideas about the past, and therefore identity, is state produced currency. The commonly- held view in economics that money "merely serves to transfer economic energy between independent agents" ignores the fact that money also has "value function" (Dyer 1989: 504-5). However, it is argued here that the physical aspects of money also have sign value, and as objects that frequently pass from person to person, coins and bank notes can be potent vehicles for verbal and non-verbal communication. Commenting on the functions of money, Hart also noticed this communicative potential: "Look at a coin from your pocket. On one side is 'heads' — the symbol of the political authority which minted the coin . . . [This] reminds us that states un-

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derwrite currencies and that money is originally a relation between persons in society" (1986: 638). This paper explores the communicative aspects of money through a comparative analysis of state-produced currency from modern Mesoamerica and lower Central America, in which particular attention is given to the representation of the indigenous past and to the construction of national identities.

Methods

The principal physical attribute of currency analyzed here is design. Variation in design, such as the size and color of visual elements and the depiction of nature, personages, events, and artifacts, is taken to suggest variation in meaning. The physical space upon which design is laid also has the potential to transmit messages. For example, both paper money and coins have obverse and reverse sides, allowing for contrasts or comparisons to be made between the messages communicated by primary, or obverse, and secondary, or reverse designs. Surface area and material are also potentially significant; coins have smaller, more restricted surfaces (in both shape and size) than do bank notes, meaning that designs must be smaller, and there is often poorly defined detail on Central American specimens (Krause and Mishler 1981: 18). Conversely, for paper money "it is of benefit that due to its relatively large surface . . . it offers space for many motifs and frequently impresses by means of its accurate printing on high-grade paper" (Pick 1977: 19). It therefore follows that the designs on coins should differ from those on bank notes, and that the messages represented by those designs will depend upon which form the currency takes.

Finally, as durable objects, coins and bank notes have the capacity to communicate information over long periods of time and over great distances. While this may at first appear advantageous when compared with more ephemeral or "rapid-fading" signs conveyed by speech, sounds or gestures, the long communicative lives of durable objects means that the messages which they convey cannot be easily changed when desired (Harrison 1974: 147). Given the permanence of coins relative to that of paper money, it could be expected that the issuing authority would wish to ensure that the messages delivered by coins would be perdurable, appropriate for the foreseeable future and beyond. Conversely, it follows that the impermanence of paper allows for the communication of somewhat more timely yet perhaps socially or politically volatile information.

This study utilizes catalogs designed for paper money and coin collectors, namely the Standard Catalog of World Paper Money by Albert Pick (1990) and the Standard Catalog of 20th Century World Coins by Krause and Mishler (1992). These volumes catalog virtually all bank notes and coins issued by national governments. While photographs of the obverse sides of bank notes are always provided in these catalogs, the reverse sides are usually only described. The opposite is generally true for coins. As a consequence, direct visual access to some of the design motifs was not always available.

In this analysis, catalog numbers are provided in square brackets, with the prefix "P" designating bank notes catalogued in Pick (1990). The other prefix, "KM," refers to the numbering system for coins in Krause and Mishler (1992). In this study, the "present" is considered to be the respective dates of publication for each of these volumes.

Analysis

Mexico

Following the Mexican Revolution (ca. 1910-20), the increasingly centralized Mexican state sought to end long-standing and divisive ethnic conflicts by stepping in as a powerful adjudicator (Adams 1991: 182). More importantly, Mexico instituted an aggressive indigenismo policy with the goal of erasing cultural differences among its various Indian, mestizo, and white groups (Adams 1991; Urban and Sherzer 1991).

Accompanying Mexico's *indigenismo* policy has been the state-supported concept of la raza, or mestizaje. This concept maintains that Mexicans are a unique, "cosmic" race derived from the fusion of Indians and Spaniards into the mestizo. This ideology is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in Mexico City's Plaza of the Three Cultures at Tlatelolco, the site of the Aztec last stand. In this square, which is dominated by an Aztec pyramid, a colonial church, and a modern government building (Friedlander 1975: xiii), a plaque dedicated by the Mexican president in 1964 reads: "On 13 August, 1521, Tlatelolco, heroically defended by Cuahtémoc, fell into the power of Hernan Cortés. It was neither a triumph nor a defeat, but the painful birth of the mestizo people that is Mexico today" (Fowler 1987: 234).

The ideology of a synthetic, mestizo identity is today expressed in a variety of ways: through song, dance, literature, plastic arts, murals on public

buildings, the excavation and restoration of pre-contact archaeological sites, and the display of pre-contact artifacts and sculptures in museums (Bonfil Batalla 1990: 89-91). It is also represented on Mexican paper money and coins.

The representation of Indians on Mexican currency began near the end of the Revolution. In 1920, a 2 peso note [P 698] was printed, but never issued, that depicts a native woman, wearing traditional costume, standing before the Aztec calendar stone. Other notes from this issue depict personified attributes of the nation, such as "The Law" and "Maritime Commerce." The succeeding issue (1936-42) replaced these personified national attributes with portraits of actual people, such as Zaragoza and Madero.

The third issue (1935-78) continued the depiction of important historical figures, including de Allende, Hidalgo, and Morelos y Pavon. Appearing during a time of greater post-revolutionary social stability (Knight 1992), this issue incorporated two bills with indigenous themes. The first to appear was a 1 peso note [P 709-12] that displays the Aztec calendar stone at the center of the obverse side; this note remained in print from 1935 until 1970. A 1000 peso note [P 721], in print from 1936-77, depicts both Aztec and Maya pasts: the obverse portrays Cuauhtémoc, the conquered Aztec emperor, and the reverse illustrates the stepped pyramid known as El Castillo from the Post-classic period Maya site of Chichén Itzá.

The fourth general issue of notes, printed from 1969 until 1980, ranges in value from 5 to 5000 pesos [P 725-30]. Design changed significantly with this issue: the moderate value notes, from 20 to 500 pesos, have predominantly Aztec or Maya pre-contact artifacts and monuments depicted on their reverse sides, with Hispanic themes and individuals, such as Hidalgo and Madero, on the obverse sides. The fifth issue (1981-present) follows a similar pattern, with the 10,000 peso note [P 736] exhibiting the newly discovered Coyolxauhqui stone (an Aztec sculpture) on the back. The obverse of this note portrays Lázaro Cárdenas, president of Mexico (1934-40), who instituted mestizaje as an official policy (Mallon 1992). A 20,000 peso note [P 740] depicts an ancient Maya sculpture and a painting on the reverse, and Quintana Roo on the obverse. In 1986, a 50,000 peso note [P 743], the highest denomination of its time, commemorated Cuauhtémoc on the obverse, and an Aztec warrior and Spanish conquistador locked in battle on the reverse. This note evokes the image of a unitary Mexico formed by past struggles between Spanish conqueror and Indian conquered.

Mexican coins have also been used to represent the indigenous past. Both before and since the Revolution, the national seal usually has been the only design on the obverse side of Mexican coins. The national seal, an eagle with a snake in its beak perched atop a cactus, is derived from an Aztec symbol for the city of Tenochtitlán, which the Spanish destroyed when they built Mexico City. The reverse sides portray many of the same people that were used on bank notes, such as Ortiz de Dominguez, Hildalgo, and Morelos y Pavon.

The first depiction of the Indian past on coins was on a 20 peso gold piece [KM 478] minted during the late 1910s and early 1920s. This coin illustrates the Aztec calendar stone on the reverse side. Analogous to the hiatus in indigenous motifs that occurred after the printing of the never-circulated 2 peso note, indigenous themes did not reappear until 1943, with a 20 centavo coin [KM 439-41] which portrays the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán. In 1947, Cuauhtémoc first appeared on the reverse of a silver 5 peso coin [KM 465], and shortly thereafter on 50 centavo pieces [KM 449-52]. More recent coins have depicted an ancient Maya ruler of Palenque [KM 492], who replaced Cuauhtémoc on the 50 centavo piece, a Maya and an Aztec ballplayer on 20 and 25 peso coins, respectively [KM 486, 479], a feathered serpent head from Teotihuacán on a 5 peso coin [KM 485], and an Olmec colossal stone head on a 20 centavo coin [KM 491].

In summary, Mexican currency witnessed a short-lived period (ca. 1917-21) when past native cultures were first represented. On both bank notes and coins, this took the form of the Aztec calendar stone. Significantly, the bank note never circulated, and the coins were of extremely high intrinsic value. It was not until the late 1930s and early 1940s that the Indian past reappeared on currency intended for general circulation. However, on all of the Mexican coins and bank notes since then — save for the 50,000 peso note [P 743] — the indigenous past has been secondary or subordinate to other design elements. On bank notes, Indian artifacts or personages are placed in secondary positions on the reverse side, while white Hispanic individuals are portrayed on the obverse, or primary, side. On coins, indigenous elements are also placed on the reverse side, subordinate to the national seal. Contrary to the official ideology of *mestizaje*, the Hispanic and indigenous are not conflated. Instead, they are symbolically opposed and the indigenous subordinated; in the case of bank notes this subordination is to the Hispanic past, and on coins it is to the sovereignty of the nation.

Another dimension of this subordination is that of time: Hispanic Mexico is in the present, while native Mexico lies in the past. The frequent ap-

pearance of Cuauhtémoc on coins and on a bank note which emphasizes conflict (indeed, conquest) is a reminder that the age of the Indian is gone. Another material example of this ideology can be found in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. While the museum has some of the specific characteristics of ancient Mesoamerican cites, its overall layout gives the impression of a Christian church: "The architectural conception, in all of its details, reflects the ideology of the exaltation of the pre-colonial past, and simultaneously and contradictorily, its break with the present" (Bonfil Batalla 1990: 90, translation mine). This ideology draws attention to the existence of a dead world: "a singular, extraordinary world in many of its achievements, but dead" (Bonfil Batalla 1990: 91, translation mine).

Significantly, it is only a very small proportion of this dead world — the Aztecs in particular, as well as the Teotihuacanos, Maya, and Olmec — that is used to represent all of native Mexico. The 8 to 10 million Indians of Mexico today — 10 to 12.5 percent of the population — are represented by 56 different languages (Bonfil Batalla 1990: 49), but are subsumed on currency by only a few pre-Hispanic cultures. Indeed, Del Val (1987) has observed that the Aztecs were selected to represent all Indians by Mexican nationalists not merely because they were modern Mexico's cultural predecessors, but because they were Mexico's institutional forbears: rulers of a centralized, hegemonic state. Only more recently, as reflected on paper and hard currency, has Mexico recognized that other Indian groups (such as the Maya), are part of the nation.

Guatemala

Unlike Mexico, Guatemala has never had a state ideology comparable to mestizaje. However, it has made repeated attempts to eradicate cultural differences among its population of about 6 million, which is roughly half Indian. The official policy of indigenismo is advocated in the belief that Guatemala can never truly achieve modern nationhood without dismantling the "non-Guatemalan" identity of Indians (Smith 1990). To help further this policy, the state has frequently attempted to create a "national hegemonic culture" as a means of control (Smith 1990). As in the Mexican case, a national identity that co-opts folklorized elements of Indian culture is part of this culture. The most notable example of this is the popular and official veneration of Tecún Umán, the Quiché Maya leader who brought some ninety thousand warriors against the Spanish, and who was slain in hand-to-hand combat by the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado (Moore

1967). In 1980 the Guatemalan newspaper *El Grafico* regarded Tecún Umán as the symbol "of the mixture . . . produced by the encounter and fusion of . . . the Guatemalan Indian and the Spaniard. In him we venerate our indigenous ancestor . . . who yielded before . . . a more technically and scientifically developed continent but not without presenting heroic resistance" (Hendrickson 1991: 291). As Hendrickson (1991: 291) observes, this ironic passage alludes to conquest and the subsequent subordination of Indian culture by the more "advanced" Spanish. By this rhetoric, the modern Maya are defeated and subordinated, and their power and right to self-determination are placed firmly in the past.

These themes of ethnic and temporal hierarchy run throughout Guatemala's currency. Before the Guatemalan Revolution (1944-54), designs on bank notes were dominated by two motifs: a portrait of General José Maria Orellana, president of Guatemala (1921-8), and a quetzal bird perched atop a column. The quetzal, or resplendent trogon, is the national bird of Guatemala, and its feathers were highly valued by pre-contact Mesoamerican peoples. The quetzal has also been the name of Guatemala's currency since the mid-1920s, when a sudden increase in coffee prices allowed Guatemala to set up its own national bank (LaFeber 1984).

The first time the pre-contact past was explicitly portrayed on Guatemalan currency was in the late 1940s through the mid-1950s, a brief period of revolution and liberal reform in Guatemalan history. A series of notes printed during and after the Revolution depicted a variety of indigenous motifs: Maya Indians in traje, or indigenous dress, on the back of the half quetzal note [P 91], a pre-contact, Classic period Maya vase on the obverse of a 5 quetzal note [93, 99], with a Maya-Spanish conflict depicted on the reverse, a 10 quetzal note [P 94, 100] picturing a Classic period carved stone slab from the site of Tikal, and a portrait of a male Indian in indigenous dress on the obverse of a 100 quetzal note [P 96, 102]. These notes remained in print into the early 1970s.

The Banco de Guatemala's second issue of the 1970s can be characterized by a blending of historical and indigenous design elements on bills of all values. The obverses portray Maria Orellana and other white men, while the reverses picture schools, crop workers, and the National Assembly. Indigenous motifs are incorporated into the designs of these bank notes in two manners: 1) they function as margins for other designs, and 2) they are relatively unobtrusive elements that are smaller in scale and/or impressed or shaded more lightly than non-indigenous designs. The note [P 110] with the

least value, one-half of a quetzal, is an interesting exception. The back shows a temple from Tikal, while the front portrays a stylized bust of Tecún Umán.

The bank's third issue (1983-9) is essentially the same as the second, but exhibits a more thorough integration of indigenous and historical elements. The "Maya" designs are more complex and darker in color, yet remain small or in the borders. The head portraits of white men are now backgrounded by a stylized pyramid reminiscent of those at ancient Tikal, while the backs continue to display historical scenes. The fourth issue (1989-present) shows the same trend of integration, with lightly impressed Maya glyphs forming much of the background for the obverse sides of several notes.

The first coins to depict Guatemala's Maya heritage were minted during the middle years of the Revolution, when all coins underwent a change in design. Interestingly, just before the Revolution (in 1943) coins were struck that exhibited a more stylized, "Maya-like" quetzal [KM 251-2]. In 1949, a 10 centavo piece [KM 256] depicted an ancient Maya stela from Quirigua on the reverse side. In 1950, the bust of an Indian woman in traje appears on the reverse of a 25 centavo coin [KM 258]. Both designs are still minted and remain basically the same. The Indian woman's features have changed subtly: the nose is now smaller, and she looks less "Indian." On all Guatemalan coins minted since 1925, when the quetzal became the monetary unit, the obverse sides depict the national seal.

Compared to Mexican money, Guatemalan currency over the years has shown a greater degree of integration of indigenous and Hispanic elements. The mid- century bank notes were the first to include the indigenous past and present, and unlike Mexico, some of the them actually exhibited this on their obverse sides along with other motifs. Guatemalan coins also introduced indigenous subject matters during the Revolution, and these designs have essentially remained the same. As with Mexico, both the Indian past (the monolith from Quirigua) and the Indian present (the Maya woman in traje) are subaltern to the modern nation-state of Guatemala, which is represented by the national seal.

The timing of the first appearance of Indian motifs on Guatemalan currency is significant. In 1945, the newly formed Instituto Indigenista was charged with assimilating Indians into the "national culture" during a time when an Indian revolt was greatly feared. One expression of Guatemala's indigenismo policy were the misiones ambulantes de cultura, or roving bands of cultural emissaries who sought to bring Guatemalan nationalism to rural areas (Handy 1988: 701-2). The symbolic incorporation of Indians and

past Indian culture on state-produced currency may have been another strategy, possibly an unconscious one, for transmitting Guatemalan nationalism to hard to reach Indian communities that at least partially relied on wage-labor for subsistence.

The culmination of this strategy can be seen on the Banco de Guatemala's third and subsequent issues of bank notes, which showed a further consolidation of Indian and Hispanic motifs. However, the Indian is symbolically subordinated by the smaller size of "indigenous" design elements, the use of Indian art as border motifs, and the use of Maya glyphs and artwork as backgrounds for the portraits of white Hispanic men. The bank note of lowest value, one-half quetzal, bears the likeness of Tecún Umán, who like Mexico's Cuauhtémoc, was a rebellious native who fought and was defeated by the Spanish. The representation of Tecún Umán on a low value bill not only expresses the official national identity - Hispanic culture with appropriated, folklorized elements of Indian culture - but it also serves as a reminder of defeat and subjugation for Guatemala's large, poor Indian population, who would likely handle the bill more often than those of higher denominations.

Like Mexico, with its symbolic subordination of Indian culture and history to that of the Spanish, Guatemalan currency emphasizes the presumed link between "Indian-ness" and the past. Similarly, Hendrickson (1991: 295) notes that Guatemalan tourist literature emphasizes the supposed bonds between modern Mayas and the past, thereby highlighting the gap between Indians and ladinos. While in one sense, the Guatemalan state desires that all of its population be "Guatemalan" (i.e., ladino), it is willing to exploit the image of the Indian for nationalistic purposes (Hendrickson 1991). The Guatemalan Indian, as depicted on currency, is a symbol of national identity, that gives a distinctive cultural flavor to the country and thus differentiates it from Mexico, other Central American countries, and the rest of the world.

Honduras

Honduras' population of 3,319,200 (as of 1974) is about 5 percent Indian – Lenca, Chortí, Jicaque, Garífuna, Miskito, Paya and Sumu - and roughly 90 percent mestizo (Cruz Sandoval 1988). Like Guatemala, Honduras instituted monetary reform in the mid-1920s, when the Honduran peso was renamed the "lempira" in honor of the Lenca leader who mustered a force of some thirty thousand warriors from over two hundred villages to oppose the Spanish (Newson 1986). In 1932, bank notes [P 34-41] of 1 to

100 lempiras were issued. These notes portrayed Lempira at the left of the obverse side in a pose reminiscent of "cigar store Indian" statues, with feathers in his hair and a partially drawn bow and arrow in his hands. The national emblem is to the right, and a bank is on the back. The representation of Lempira on bills of 5, 10, and 20 lempiras was supplanted in 1941 by those portraying Hispanic men, such as Morazan, Santos Soto, and Agurcia. In 1951, the 1 lempira note [P 44] portrayed Lempira's profile with a feather in his headband on the obverse, and an ancient Maya stela from Copán on the reverse. The reverse side design has changed three times since then, first in 1961 to a representation of Classic Maya artifacts and a maize deity [P 45], and then in 1968 to a view of the ball court at Copán [P 46]. In 1974 the feather was removed from the headband and Lempira's face was rendered to appear more "Indian," but in a less stereotypical fashion than was previously the case [P 46A]. The reverse side of this note portrayed the ancient Maya ruins of Copán. In 1980, the design of the 1 lempira bill changed slightly, with Lempira's head becoming somewhat larger [P 47A].

Interestingly, none of the bank notes greater than 1 lempira depict the indigenous past at all. In 1976, a 2 lempira note [P 47B] was printed that depicted Aurelio Soto on the obverse side with an unobtrusive "Mayan" squiggle at the center of the bill; a mountain appears on the back. Similar squiggle motifs can be found at the center of higher denomination bills as well. These folklorized indigenous elements are the only ones on these bills. These higher denominations all have portraits of Hispanic men on the obverse. Designs on the obverse sides include the battle of Trinidad, a city university, the Port of Cortés, the National Development Bank, and a forestry school, in ascending order of value.

Since the early 1930s, Honduran coins have displayed the national seal on the obverse side. At this time, coins of 20 [KM 73] and 50 [KM 74] centavos and 1 lempira [KM 75] depict Lempira with feathers in his hair. The 1 lempira coin was not minted after 1937. The bust of Lempira on 20 and 50 centavo coins underwent a metamorphosis similar to that on the bills in 1978 [KM 83-4], and remains the same today.

The depiction of the indigenous past on Honduran money is less pervasive than in the Mexican or Guatemalan cases, in spite of the currency being named after an Indian. Significantly, the 1 lempira note is the only one which depicts the Indian past, and it is very similar to Guatemala's one-half quetzal note. On their obverse sides, both depict Indian leaders who brought tens of thousands of warriors against the Spanish, and both show an ancient Maya ruin on the reverse. Like Tecún Umán, Lempira was de-

feated; his face and the name of the currency itself serve as reminders of the Hispanic power structure, as do the depictions of white men on higher denomination notes that the poor of the country rarely ever touch. The dominant message on coins is the sovereignty of the Honduran nation; the representation of Lempira on the reverse sides of two coins subtly asserts the messages of conquest, subjugation, and subordination.

Because most of the nation is poor, and non-mestizo ethnic groups constitute a very small minority, Honduran money primarily appears to be an instrument of class oppression rather than ethnic oppression. The poor of this country are excluded from the power structure that is represented by the higher denominations, and are left with a conquered Indian and fallen ruins as their models.

Belize

The small country of Belize (formerly British Honduras), has an ethnically diverse population of about 160,000. English-speaking creoles make up roughly 40 percent of the population (Davidson 1987), which is comprised of people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including East Indians, Germans, and French (Robinson 1988). About 33 percent of the population is ladino, and there is a small (17 percent) yet highly visible Indian population, including Kekchi, Mopán and Yucatec Maya, and Arawak-speaking Garífuna (Black Caribs), all of whom are relatively recent immigrants to Belize (Davidson 1987). Indian participation in national political life lags behind that of other ethnic groups (Adams 1991: 202; Davidson 1987).

The currency of Belize stands in complete contrast to that of the nations previously discussed. As a colony, the paper money of British Honduras (1884-1981) depicted the ruling monarch or the national seal on the obverse sides of all denominations beginning with the government's third issue in 1939. The authority of the British empire was also represented on coins from the mid-1880s until the early 1970s, with the depiction of busts of British monarchs on the obverse side. After the country's name changed to Belize in 1973, and especially after its independence and entrance into the Commonwealth of Nations in 1981, the national seal replaced the queen's portrait on the obverse sides of most coins. The queen's portrait remained prominent on paper money, however.

Since Belize's name change in 1973, nature (especially birds) has been the dominant commemorative theme on both bank notes and coins. There are, however, three high intrinsic value commemorative coins from the mid-

dle to late 1970s that depict elements of Belize's pre-contact past: Maya gods [KM 53, 55] and glyphs [KM 52]. In addition, an unusual collection of paper-bonded gold foil bank notes were issued in 1984 that range from $1 to $100. All of these depict the queen and a Maya ruin on the obverse side [P CS1]. Although these notes were redeemable for a short time, redemption may not now be possible (Pick 1990).

In summary, although Belize has a substantial number of Indians, the indigenous past has been only recently represented on commemorative issues aimed at investors and collectors, and these have little or no potential for general circulation. This situation is very much unlike Mexico, Guatemala, or even Honduras. The Belizean government chose a different set of symbols for their currency, perhaps because most Indians are recent immigrants from other areas, or perhaps because the rich ethnic diversity and the relative economic integration of ethnic groups which Belize enjoys did not necessitate assimilationist messages. However, symbolism of the authority of the British monarchy still pervades Belizean currency. The Indian past is only found where it does not question the message of sovereignty - on non-circulating collector's issues.

El Salvador

El Salvador is a nation of roughly 5.3 million people, most of whom are poor ladinos, although there are a small number of affluent, usually white, landed families. According to official estimates, Indians comprise roughly 9-12 percent of the population, although the actual proportion may be higher (Farje 1987). The greatest difficulty facing Salvadoran Indians - Maya, Nahua and Lenca - is land, which has been expropriated from them over the years by both legal and illegal means (Farje 1987; Montes 1988). El Salvador's recent civil war, during which a great number of Indians and ladino peasants were killed, was largely an issue of land reform and redistribution.

As an agrarian nation built on peasant labor, it is perhaps not surprising that Salvadoran money has depicted peasants engaged in agricultural activities. The obverse side of a 1 colon bank note [P 70] issued in 1938 depicted a ladino woman carrying a basket of fruit on her head. This was replaced in 1944 by a 1 colon note [P 72] portraying a boy plowing with oxen. These and other agricultural themes reappear at various times until the present. Other common themes include infrastructure development, as represented by an hydroelectric dam [P 87B, 106-7], and a view of Acajutla port [P 108], among others. The colonial past is represented by the frequent portrayal of

Columbus – after whom the currency was named – on the reverse, and a colonial church at Panchimalco [P 91]. In 1974, the indigenous past is represented for the first time on a 100 colon note [P 112] that pictures an ancient Maya pyramid at Tazumal, Chalchuapa on the obverse side. This note was reprinted in 1980, and remains the highest denomination bank note.

Like many of the other coinages discussed in this paper, that of El Salvador is relatively unchanging over time with respect to design. The obverse sides of 1, 2, 3, 5, and 10 centavo coins depicted General Francisco Morazan since the early 1920s. The Pope is shown on 25 and 50 centavo coins. Columbus is shown on the obverse of 1 colon coins, while the national seal predominates on 1 to 250 colon coins of high intrinsic value. This pattern suggests that the national seal is used only to differentiate El Salvador from other countries rather than to send messages regarding state sovereignty to its own citizens, as was the case for Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize. Also in contrast to these countries, the coins of El Salvador emphasize the nation's colonial, revolutionary and Catholic roots. The colonial social order persists in El Salvador today; its currency reinforces this order by orienting national identity towards the past, denying social justice for its poor ladino and Indian population.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua is home to about 100-150,000 Indians, most of whom are Miskito, but there are significant numbers of Sumu, Rama and Garífuna, as well. Of the remaining 3.3 million people, 70 percent are mestizo, 15-20 percent are white, and roughly 9 percent are black.

Nicaraguan currency has never represented the indigenous past, although an Indian girl, with wholly Spanish features, was portrayed on the obverse side of a 1 cordoba note [P 76] that was printed from 1941 to 1960. This note was subsequently replaced by one depicting a bank building. The notes from 1979 to 1990 depict figures involved in the Nicaraguan Revolution, as well as the purported social benefits of the Revolution's aftermath.

Nicaraguan coins display no indigenous elements. Like El Salvador, Nicaraguan coins before the Revolution emphasized the nation's link to its colonial past, as represented by the frequent portrayal of Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba, the founder of one of Nicaragua's first settlements, on the obverse side. The reverse sides of these coins displayed a version of the national seal. During the 1980s, Sandino replaced Cordoba on the obverse sides of coins, and the reverse sides were dominated by numerals represent-

ing the denomination. Virtually all the recent precious metal commemoratives display the national seal on the obverse, and two of these [KM 64, 77] observe the "encounter of two worlds," Spanish and Indian.

What is most interesting about the Nicaraguan case is how the messages conveyed by currency changed over time. During the middle of the century, Indian identity was perhaps used on money to create a sense of Nicaraguan distinctiveness, or perhaps to serve as a reminder of Spanish (i.e., ladino) power and the conquest of the Indians. These alternatives are difficult to assess because this representation of an Indian on Nicaraguan currency is a unique occurrence.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a unique Central American country in that 80% of its 2.8 million people are white. The rest of the population is generally mestizo, and there is a small number of blacks. There are only about 15,000 Indians in Costa Rica, which the state treats with a typically contradictory policy of indigenismo: the goals are to elevate the economic, social and cultural status of Indians through their integration into national life, while simultaneously recognizing the value of their "autochthonous" culture (Dobles-Ulloa and Guevara 1988).

Costa Rica has produced a small number of bank notes that represent the indigenous past. Bank notes issued under the authority of the Banco Internacional, from 1918 until the inception of the Banco Nacional in the early 1940s, portrayed modern Costa Rican peasants, such as horsemen, coffee pickers, sugar cane cutters, and women carrying fruit. Notes issued by the Banco Nacional during the 1940s include a 2 colon note [P 201] which depicts natives and de Coronado on the obverse, a 10 colon note [P 205] with a personage labeled cacique ("Indian chief") on the obverse, and a 100 colon note [P 208] that depicts a pre-Columbian polychrome vessel at the center of the obverse side and a ceremonial altar on the reverse. The obverse sides of many of the other notes depict historical personages such as Columbus and de Coronado. Since the 1940s, Costa Rican notes issued by the Banco Central are conservative in comparison, depicting both historical and contemporary white men. The importance of development is implied by the portrayal of modern buildings, although an emphasis on traditional agricultural themes continues.

Unlike paper money, coins exhibit continuity in design from the early 1900s up to the present. Coins of all denominations depict the national seal

of Costa Rica on the obverse side, a design which highlights discovery and colonization through its depiction of a tall ship sailing along a rugged coast. The reverse sides of 2 colon coins and below simply denote value, the only exceptions being a few of turn of the century gold coins that portray Columbus. Nevertheless, Costa Rican coins draw attention to the nation's colonial roots. Higher denomination coins from the 1970s, some of which have high intrinsic value, commemorate development, human rights, animals, and conservation. One 100 colon commemorative gold coin minted in 1970 [KM 196] portrays pre-Columbian gold art, as does one coin issued in 1983 [KM 218].

Costa Rican currency is similar to that of El Salvador, in that its earlier notes emphasize the nation's agrarian foundation. This theme is supplanted by images of the past, including the Indian past, around the mid-century. This was in turn replaced by very conservative, authority-evoking images of white men. The reverse sides of these bank notes simultaneously secure images of development and peasant-labor based agriculture. As already mentioned, coins are very stable in design over time, with the exception of precious metal commemoratives, which are highly variable on their reverse sides. All coins emphasize the sovereignty of the nation by bearing the national seal on the obverse side. The indigenous past has only been portrayed recently on a few commemorative coins of high intrinsic value. The theme of development is much less obvious here than on the currencies of other nations, although it is an important issue in Costa Rica today, especially with regard to oil (Dobles-Ulloa and Guevara 1988).

In general, the symbolism of Costa Rican currency has less to do with ethnic oppression, by ignoring the native past, than it has to do with reinforcing notions concerning exploitive class relations. This makes the currency of Costa Rica similar to that of Honduras, Nicaragua before the Sandinistas, and particularly El Salvador.

Panamá

A small number of relatively isolated Indian groups inhabit Panamá, numbering about 94,000 people, or 4.8 percent of the population. The most numerous of these are the Guaymí and San Blas Kuna. There is no representation of the Indian past on paper money in Panamá; although Panamá issued bank notes in 1941 [P 22-5], these circulated only very briefly. The American dollar now circulates freely in Panamá (Pick 1990: 855).

However, Panamá has issued coins in its national currency, the balboa, since the mid-1900s. Balboa is a predominant theme on the obverse sides of most of the earlier coins, with the national seal and/or value amount on the obverse, although Balboa and the national seal are sometimes reversed. The 1 centesimo coin has always depicted Urraca on the reverse side. Nearly all recent coins display the national seal on the obverse. Indigenous themes appear on a few recent commemorative precious metal coins, including one depicting a Guaymí ball player [KM 64], one showing Balboa and an Indian guide [KM 98], and a series [KM 60, 66, 74, 83, 95, 100] that illustrates indigenous art objects and designs on the reverse sides.

A unique aspect of Panamanian currency is that one coin actually depicts a modern Indian belonging to a specific named group, the Guaymí. However, this and the other indigenous themes only appear on high intrinsic value commemorative coins. Unlike many of the other nations discussed, one motif dominates the commemoratives: Balboa and his discovery of the Pacific. The continuing importance of the colonial past, as represented by Balboa, and the sovereignty of the modern nation of Panamá are virtually the only messages on coins intended for general circulation.

Conclusions

The differences in the symbolic expression of nationalism and identity on currency can be partly accounted for by demography. Mexico and Guatemala have large, potentially threatening indigenous populations and accordingly strong *indigenismo* policies. These nations go to great lengths to represent the indigenous past on currency, which both reflects and transmits assimilationist ideology and official national identity. El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panamá have much smaller Indian populations. Exploitive class relations overshadow ethnic problems in these countries, and this relationship is represented on currency. Honduran currency exhibits attributes of both of these situations: problems of class are more important than those of ethnicity, but Indians are incorporated in a subordinate position into the national identity. These observations correspond well with those of Adams (1991) regarding the different strategies employed by the states of Mesoamerica and lower Central America to deal with their native populations. The former "ladinocratic" countries have generally exercised force to control Indians, while the latter countries have smaller, more isolated indigenous populations which are less subject to direct repression (Adams 1991: 201).

Not all of the nationalist symbolism on these currencies is related to assimilation or the maintenance of social hierarchy. Urban and Sherzer (1991: 7-11) note that Latin American states involve indigenous peoples in two processes: assimilation, or the elimination of contrasts, and differentiation, or the highlighting of contrasts. The former process is an internal one of pulling together, or nation-building, and the latter is an external one which creates unique identities or characters for whole nations (Urban and Sherzer 1991: 7-11).

National sovereignty is represented by the national seals on the obverse sides of coins, and is involved in both processes of assimilation and differentiation. With respect to the former, sovereignty denies claims of autonomy for groups within the confines of the state. For nations with large indigenous groups, such as Mexico and Guatemala, the national seal, as depicted on the obverse side of coins, is superordinate to Indians or the Indian past. All the other nations regularly depict the national seal on the obverse sides of coins, except for El Salvador and Nicaragua, which only do so for high denomination coins. This demonstrates that even though other symbols, such as the "colonial order" (El Salvador, early Nicaragua) or the Nicaraguan Revolution, may be chosen in place of national sovereignty for "domestic" coins, the national seal is still important to differentiate these nations from others on precious metal commemorative coins.

Another facet of external differentiation is related to tourism. Nations such as Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras possess spectacular, accessible pre-Columbian sites and artifacts. In addition, Mexico and Guatemala are also home to millions of Indians who attract tourists. The portrayal of Indians – and by extension the nations in which they reside – as "exotic" is one strategy of external differentiation that promotes tourism (Hendrickson 1991; Urban and Sherzer 1991). It therefore makes sense that Indians and the Indian past are appropriated as national symbols, and are represented on currency which tourists would also handle.

One final question with regard to the depiction of the native past on these currencies is, What is the significance of the timing of its appearance? The answer appears to be linked in part to the development of large-scale cash economies, particularly those based on coffee, in many of these countries around the turn of the century. This development led to an increasingly greater need for economic and political integration within these societies. In nations like Guatemala, Indians were integrated through policies that diminished their capabilities for self-sufficiency, forcing them to participate in a national cash economy (Warren 1989: 6-13). For such a system to work, it

was important to make sure that Indians were incorporated into society in a low position, as has been the case in both Guatemala and Mexico. This low position was made official using currency in Mexico in the mid-1930s, when land reform was less of a burning issue, and in the mid- 1940s during the Revolution in Guatemala. Indians were also first represented around this time in Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The appearance of indigenous motifs and design elements at around the time of the second world war may also reflect an increased need for ideology to assist the process of nation-building, when, as Anderson observes, "the nation-state tide reached full flood" (Anderson 1983: 104). At this time, the need for internal cohesion was a leading priority for states during a climate of international turmoil (Berlin 1980).

In conclusion, this study has shown that currency often has been used as a vehicle for the transmission of nationalist symbolism and the construction of national identities. Often, these messages are subtle and are not immediately apprehended. Therein lies their power. As Barthes stated, "What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality" (Barthes 1972: 142). Therefore, the symbolism found on the currencies of Mexico and Central America explains to its audiences, in apparently factual terms, the relationship between their past and present situations.

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