Chapter 7

The Changing Meanings of Indigenous Tacana

Manipulating identity.

Indigenous peoples in the Amazon Basin of Bolivia, like those in many parts of the world, have been the targets of oppressive politics and practices, including overtly genocidal attempts to wipe them off the face of the earth. Some historical accounts of the Beni and Pando region of Bolivia are gruesome. While many groups of indígenas have shown what could be considered heroic cultural tenacity and pride in their group, the situation of northern Bolivia indicates that not only can maintenance of indigenous identity occur in spite of external pressures, but can also be assisted by them. Indeed, it is the paradoxes which result as this occurs in northern Bolivia, among the Tacana, to which I now turn.

In Chapter 6, I examined how indigenous organizing in the 1980s and the resulting legal rights gained in the 1990s affected Tacana identity. In this chapter, I move from the two decades of indigenous mobilization and look at its effects in the 2000s, focusing on how the boundaries between Tacana and its ethnic other are drawn and redrawn, sometimes by the same people in different contexts. I show how Tacana-ness is contested, strategically manipulated, and responsive to global flows of capital, people, and ideas. To demonstrate this, I set forth the variety of definitions of Tacana I found and the legitimizing claims upon which these definitions rest. Framing these definitions theoretically to provide one explanation for why these boundaries are drawn in the ways they are, I argue that a shift is
occurring between hegemonic definitions of Tacana-ness. A new, more inclusive definition of Tacana is becoming hegemonic in the region in response to the legitimacy accorded to claims (to land, to local governance, and others) of those designated as indigenous peoples, a transnationally constructed, indigenous other.

As stated in Chapter 6, like other indigenous Bolivians, the Tacana are currently experiencing a redefinition of their place in the Bolivian state. The political and legal reforms of the 1990s resulted in the recognition of indigenous citizens as possessing unique rights and needs (Postero 2001), including collective ownership of indigenous territories (similar to US reservations) as well as the maintenance of indigenous languages and traditional customs. The creation of indigenous reserves is a major force in the codification of Tacana identity for outsiders. When I arrived to Riberalta in 2001, it was just in time to witness the titling ceremony of Multiethnic 2, the indigenous reserve of which Santa Rosa, the Tacana community in which I lived, is a part. The granting of this title was the result of the decades of struggle by the regions indígenas. At last, the Tacana and the other inhabitants of Multiethnic 2 now collectively own their land. In addition, other legal reforms provide for increased local governance and recognize a certain degree of internal, indigenous sovereignty. The stage has been set for reshuffling and firming the border of identity as the Tacana claim their place in the reformed Bolivian state.

**Potential identities.**

During my field research, I documented self-designations of Tacana identity based upon different types of legitimizing claims. That is, people had different requirements which allowed one the label of Tacana, which varied not only across population, but also across
context. For my purposes, it is useful to understand ethnic identity as a potential that may or may not be actualized, in people who fulfill one or more socially defined requisites in terms of cultural practices or heritage. Tacana identity can be seen as active or latent. One can see oneself as Tacana, based on whichever underlying characteristics are considered salient (active identity), or one can not see oneself as Tacana, while possessing some subset of these potentially legitimizing attributes (latent identity).

My aim is not to judge the legitimacy of the varied claims to Tacana identity, but rather to understand the claims to legitimacy of the varied Tacana identities. This approach allows me to examine the power-filled processes that privilege the activation of particular identities in particular circumstances, along with the agency of actors who exercise choice in which of their potential identities are activated in what circumstances. It goes without saying that which others are considered Tacana, and which “others” are not, depends upon the types of identity claims that are considered legitimate (and sometimes expedient) by the one doing the considering. Next, I provide a brief sketch of the range of definitions of Tacana. Then I turn to the structural changes which privilege particular transformations of alterity on the part of those possessing the most exclusive definition of Tacana, that of Tacana-speaking.

**Tacana by language.**

In the field, I documented two ends of the spectrum in terms of inclusiveness for definitions of Tacana identity held by self-designated Tacana. The most inclusive definition referenced a shared history of exploitation and the possession of Tacana sangre (blood). The least inclusive, the most exclusive, was a definition of Tacana identity based upon language use. In this case, *Tacamistas* (Tacana-language speakers) were Tacana.
As noted earlier, in the region where I worked, the number of Tacana speakers is extremely small. In the former mission settlements north of La Paz, the Tacana language is not so close to extinction. In Santa Rosa, however, only the elderly and the middle-aged spoke Tacana (about 1/5). One little girl was learning it, but her Tacanista grandmother assured me that this would end as soon as she entered school. It was, in fact, the introduction of schooling that killed the Tacana language, this woman explained. Even fluent Tacana speakers were limited to Spanish if they wanted to communicate with the younger generation, and Spanish was by far the dominant language in Santa Rosa and in other Tacana communities. Day to day, Tacana nouns, particularly animal names, were used often by most Santa Rosans, but only as loan words into Spanish. And even Tacanistas did not tend to use much Tacana.

Native speakers would often convey a language-based definition of Tacana-ness in one context, and then change to a more inclusive definition in more formal contexts involving institutional others like governmental representatives or those of NGOs. You could perhaps say that for those Tacana who held exclusive, language-based definitions of Tacana, the other is us when there is another, more powerful, other we’re against. Urban Tacana descendents also primarily possessed language-based definitions, as did a number of non-Tacana, usually those critical of instrumental use of ethnicity within indigenous mobilizations. These non-Tacana could be of a number of types: 1) forest-dwellers identifying exclusively as “peasant” who did not appear to differ much culturally from many identifying as Tacana, 2) native-speakers of other indigenous languages who feared their political gains as indigenous peoples were being aprovechado (taken advantage of) by non-natives, and 3) elites whose ideas of indigenousness continue the conflation of language,
race, and culture that the “father” of American Anthropology, Franz Boas, was writing against in the early 20th century (Boas 1911).

It is not surprising that language is often seized upon as a defining ethnic attribute. Language use is such an obvious external marker of difference that when a group speaks a different language, it usually regarded as a different group. Further, use of an indigenous tongue is normally regarded as evidence of a group’s persistence. Language loss is often seen as evidence of a group’s disappearance. Links between common definitions of ethnic identity and the use of a distinct language abound in the case of the Tacana. On the ground, of all definitions, one of the most common was the idea that the Tacana are Tacanistas—those who speak Tacana.

This self-definition appears to be the norm historically. Indeed, the name “Tacana” to designate the descendents of these missionarized Tacana-speaking natives appears to have been employed only by outsiders such as missionaries and ethnographers until the 1980s (Wenzel 1989). Prior to the 1930s, self designations referring to indigenous status included “Tacanista” (Tacana-speaking) and “civilizados” (civilized). The latter was used as an opposite of “salvajes” (savages). In any case, it is likely that Tacanista was an adequate indicator of group membership, and while Tacanista refers to language, the conflation of language and culture is a widespread phenomenon, as noted in the text. Self-identification among the Tacana communities of Iturralde, La Paz, and in particular, the community of Tumupasa, according to Wentzel (1989) was based upon religion, village, and (cultural) evolutionary state. She writes,
Due to the profound mission influence, “Cristianucuana” (the Christians) was the only term that could be elicited for self-identification beyond the village level Tumupaseño. Locally, the term Tacana was usually restricted to the language and not applied to the ethnic group. The Tacana had long distinguished themselves as civilizados (civilized) from their ‘wild’ old-time enemies, the so-called Chamas (Ese Ejja), whom they ridiculed in one of their dances. (Wentzel 1989: 97)

Elsewhere, Wentzel writes about the Tacana as including themselves in the general category of “cambas” (lowlanders) as opposed to “kollas” (highlanders) as evidenced in her free translation of a song by a San Buenaventura band, popular in 1978.

I was drinking a gourd full of corn beer
and had coca and chamairo in my pouch.
We were all having fun dancing
to the rhythms of native music.
Kollita (highland girl), that’s how you dance in Tumupasa,
Cambita (lowland girl), that’s how you dance in Tumupasa. (Wentzel 1989:91)

She continues:
From the perspectives of people in Tumupasa and Santa Ana, [highland] colonists were different from intra-regional migrants who had a cultural tradition and land use system similar to that of the Tacana. These intra-regional migrants will therefore in a more general sense also be considered indigenous or native peasants. (Wentzel 1989: 93).

Thus, the Tacana of Tumupasa could be said to have the following cognitive map, as documented by Wentzel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>Tumpaseño</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Cristianucuana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Camba (lowlander)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>Civilizados</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extrapolating from my contact with elderly Tacana-speakers in the Beni and Pando who expressed a schema consistent with Wentzel’s, the list should be revised by adding family-name identifiers and the word “salvaje” (savage) in opposition to those who had not been “civilized” and Christianized. “Salvaje” included pre-missionized Tacana. A revised self/other chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Surname (e.g. Marupa )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>Tumpaseño</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Cristianucuana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>Civilizados</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wenzel adds an additional, language-based identifier: Tacanista. This self-identifier was laden with more complex attitudes and values. She writes, “Several parents would not speak Tacana to their children because they did not want them to be Tacanistas (a pejorative term used much in the sense of “hillbillies”) and have a lengua pesada (‘heavy tongue,’ i.e. accent) for speaking Spanish” (Wentzel 1989:100). A revised chart incorporates this data a notes associated positive values (+) and negative values (−) associated with terms.
Tacana by practice.

A less exclusive definition of Tacana-ness was one based on cultural practices other than the use of the Tacana language. This definition was harder to pin down, because the cultural practices that were considered indexes of Tacana-ness varied. Chewing coca, drinking *chicha fuerte* (fermented corn or manioc), and shamanistic practices were among those listed, all of which were widespread practices among other indigenous groups as well as peasants in the region. Indeed, Henkemans (2001) documents some of these traits in “camba” communities who do not claim to be Tacana, or at least who did not claim so at the time of her research. I could document not one quintessentially Tacana practice, aside from language. It is interesting to note that non-Tacana commonly referenced these sorts of definitions, while those identifying as Tacana either used language-based or solidarity and descent-based

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>( + ) Surname (e.g. Marupa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>( + ) Tumpaseño</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>( + ) Cristianucuana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>( + ) Civilizados</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>( - ) Tacanista</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of note in Wentzel’s quote above is that “Tacana” was “usually” applied to language, versus ethnic group (1989:97). During my research of 2001-2002, I was witnessing a change, a “retribalization” (Cohen 1969) in which “Tacana” was becoming a commonly used ethnic designation. The use of the word “usually” in Wentzel’s account suggests that this change had begun by 1989. Given the history of indigenous organizing in Bolivia, discussed in detail in Chapter 6, this is not surprising. The politicization and revalorization of indigenous identity was already in progress, if not so widespread, at this time.

A contemporary schema of self-identifiers for adult Tacana of the Beni and Pando region follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>( + ) Surname (e.g. Marupa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>( + ) Tumpaseño</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>( + ) Cristianucuana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>( + ) Civilizados</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>( + ) Tacana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Tacanista (mixed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>( + ) Tacanista or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( - ) non-Tacanista</td>
<td>( + ) Tacanista</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( - ) non-Tacana</td>
<td>( + ) Non-Tacana, unmarked Spanish speaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The point, here, is that to be Tacana was, at one time, to speak a language known as Tacana. Ethnicity and language were conflated. This has changed, however, and while Tacana language use wanes, Tacana ethnicity does not.
definitions as part of their explicit discourse.

There was one exception, in a case of what one could call adoptive Tacana identity. Don Victor, a 70 year-old man who lived with his three sons, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren on the edge of Santa Rosa, claimed no Tacana descent. However, he told me that since he lived in a Tacana community, he was Tacana. Sometimes, he would qualify this assertion. Once Don Victor told me, “Mas que voy a ser. (Better said, I’m going to be.)” He explained to me what it meant for him to be Tacana.

Let’s say there’s a problem here among the Tacana people. We don’t deal with the police. We go directly to CIRABO [the regional indigenous confederacy]. Then they call the person [who caused the problem] and CIRABO resolves it. Only in the case of a death do the police get involved. In that case, the suspect is handed over to the police. With whatever affair of ours, however, we go to CIRABO.

To Don Victor, being Tacana meant living in a Tacana community and participating as Tacana anytime this ethnic identity would differently structure actions in the world. One can see resonances between his explanation of what it means to be Tacana and Louis Althusser’s notion of interpellation whereby one becomes a particular kind of subject by being hailed as such, recognizing oneself as the target of the call, and then internalizing the category and identifier by which one was hailed (1971). By living in a Tacana community, Don Victor is therefore a particular kind of citizen and subject of the Bolivian state, and a particular kind of subject within regional indigenous governing mechanisms. He is hailed as Tacana and he becomes so.
Don Victor asserted no *preexisting* cultural or biological claim to a Tacana identity, but he considered himself Tacana and was considered to be Tacana in many circumstances. When I gave him, at his request, a copy of a Spanish-Tacana dictionary, Don Victor expressed his pleasure at being able to study the Tacana language, and would often tell visitors about my gift to him. He was not able to be *Capitán Grande* of the Tacana without also being a *Tacanista*, he told me.

**Tacana by blood.**

The most inclusive definition of Tacana-ness involved being a descendent of someone who was Tacana, usually expressed as being the descendent of someone who was Tacana-speaking. Hand in hand with this blood-based (or biologically-based) definition of contemporary Tacana-ness went the assertion of a history of exploitation. Even this biologically-based definition of Tacana was not just biological.

This descent-focused definition was widespread, and was hegemonic within the discourse of those acting as designated indigenous people in contexts framed by regional indigenous mobilizing. No contention from within favoring exclusive, language-based definitions of indigenousness was evident. What is especially interesting about this definition is the potential designation of the majority of the region’s population as Tacana, something which is not occurring at present.

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2 The *Capitán* was the head of OITA (Organización Indígena Tacana de la Amazonía). OITA was one of two organizations of Tacana, and was affiliated with CIRABO (Central Indígena de la Región Amazónica), which was affiliated with CIDOB (Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia). The other was CIPTA (Centro Indígena del Pueblo Tacana), which was affiliated with CEPILAP (Central de Pueblos Indígenas de La Paz), which was affiliated with CIDOB.
Expanding the boundaries of us.

In his report to the 4th regional indigenous congress, held in Riberalta in June 2002 and attended by representatives of each of the indigenous groups represented by CIRABO, exiting CIRABO president Mario Moreno had some comments which speak to reasons why local actors would want to claim or deny indigenousness. According to Don Mario (my translation):

Hundreds of indigenous people are surprised to have been identified as indigenous people and hundreds of us are also proud to be genuine indigenous people with our capabilities achieved. Why wouldn’t one want to be indigenous? During the rubber era, many indigenous people were sold, others were exterminated, others brought from far away. The consequences of all this is that now we are changed, up to last name and first, by shame and fear of nativeness.

In the indigenous census, many communities told us that they didn’t want anything to do with indigenousness. Indigenous peoples are capricious, lazy, thieves, etc., but in spite of this these friends that were like that were the first to affiliate and benefit from the territorial demand and the titling of indigenous communal land.

In other cases, communities have thrown us [representatives of CIRABO] out. These are also the first to affiliate. And CIRABO has never rejected a community that wanted to affiliate because of this. In this way CIRABO has gone gaining strength….

Don Mario’s comments are a reminder that negative stereotypes of native peoples continue in the region, encouraging the denial of indigenous identities. Changing circumstances, however, mean that the benefits of claiming to be indigenous may have reversed this trend,
at least for those living in rural areas. I'll return to the reason it is different for urban dwellers in a moment.

While increased numbers are important to the regional indigenous federation in terms of increasing its perceived legitimacy and power, the existence of Tacana with recently activated or affirmed identity is not considered positive by everyone. When I asked a native Tacana speaker what he thought about Tacana communities that claim to be Tacana but don’t speak Tacana, he responded that they say their grandparents spoke Tacana. After lamenting the loss of the Tacana language that is so rapidly occurring, he told me that he thinks people sometimes lie about being Tacana. Further, he said, two people in a community will be Tacana and they will say the whole community is. I asked what there was to gain for saying you’re Tacana, and he said that land was the only thing.

In spite of his dislike of those he perceived as benefiting through deceit, even he tended towards an inclusive definition of Tacana-ness as descent-based. Reasons why he and others like him might choose inclusive definitions of Tacana-ness include the dwindling number of Tacana-speakers and the increased political power coming from membership in a larger group. To include his own children as Tacana, he must, in fact, enlarge his definition. Proving Tacana blood is both impractical and problematic, due to unreliable birth documentation, and border patrol is hard to do without the existence of some key symbol of Tacana-ness. Many “others,” including those thought to be lying, are becoming part of the “us” of Tacana.
Latent urban Tacana identity.

There is one group, however, which is notably absent from this recent activation of Tacana-ness. Preliminary research suggests that there is a widespread base of latent Tacana identity in urban Riberalta which has not been activated and which warrants further research. Currently, living in the city without active social ties to rural communities equals assimilation to most residents. However, awareness of Tacana descent creates the potential for activation of urban latent Tacana identity if the symbolic value of being indigenous were to increase and space for urban Indians were to be made within the regional indigenous movement and in national and international discourses and practices. The following two anecdotes from my research are suggestive.

Case #1. When I first arrived to Riberalta on a summer grant to explore dissertation research possibilities, I secured a room in the home of a local family. Doña Maria\(^3\) was an excellent cook, and she and Don Julio delighted in showing me local customs, native herbal remedies, and feeding me *comida típica* (typical food). When I chose to focus my research on the Tacana, Doña Maria told me that her grandmother had spoken Tacana. In a conversation with Doña Maria towards the end of my fieldwork, I tried to understand why she did not consider herself Tacana while she claimed to be a direct Tacana descendent, why Tacana identity remained latent with her while it was active in others with no more (or less) claim to it than she had. I asked her if she was Tacana, and she answered that she was probably “un poquito” (a little) Tacana.

\(^3\) Names have been changed.
Case #2. At another point during my research, I was staying in the home of another foreign doctoral student where I could have internet access and better conditions to process my field materials when I was back from the forest. While my research schedule did not permit systematic research on the ethnic make-up of Riberalta, I decided to see if the idea that most (non-elite) Riberalta residents were of Tacana descent would hold up to random testing. In the city, my contacts were primarily elites or non-elites already associated with the rural indigenous rights movement. In addition, a certain level of confianza (trust) was necessary before non-elite Riberalteños would answer questions from a random researcher. So I turned to one of the few easy candidates to whom I had access: our empleada (employee), the woman who cleaned our house. I asked if she would take me to visit her grandparents. I wanted to hear how things used to be, I told her.

After spending an enjoyable Sunday afternoon recording stories about the past from her grandparents and one of their neighbors, I emerged from the encounter having found out that while her grandparents did not speak Tacana, which was their definition of being Tacana, they did claim Tacana descent. The neighbor they fetched spoke a little Tacana. I did some more of this sort of spot checking and found that almost all of my rather limited sample of non-elite Riberalteños claimed Tacana descent as well.

For the purposes of this chapter, the most interesting piece of this story came as I was leaving. I had mentioned the regional indigenous federation, CIRABO, in connection to my work with the forest community of Santa Rosa. My empleada asked me what CIRABO did. I told her a little about its various activities. “And what could they do for me?” she asked. I paused to think, and was forced to return an answer of “Nothing, I suppose.”
no benefits to be gained from being indigenous if one was exclusively a city-dweller. While there are benefits to being indigenous in the city, specifically in terms of access to institutional resources, these benefits are only for those who identify as part of rural communities. In addition, negative stereotypes of primitive, backward natives continue to exist, working against self-identifying as indígena. And so contemporary urban definitions of Tacana-ness remain framed in terms of language use, or of the past.

The second instance suggests that urban Tacana identities remain latent precisely because the benefits (economic, social, and psychological) of being indigenous are almost exclusively for rural populations. The main benefit, at present, is collective title to rural forest land, and now that the land is owned, one must have ties to current forest dwellers to gain access to it.

**Indigenous identity as symbolic capital.**

Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, introduced the idea that capital, stored wealth available for use in the production of more wealth, can come in symbolic or cultural forms as well as in material or economic forms. According to Bourdieu, symbolic capital and economic capital exist within a larger market and each can be exchanged for the other. To Bourdieu, symbolic capital is not just available for use in the production of more capital (economic or symbolic), but its existence is dependent upon existing, but hidden, links to economic capital. He writes,

Symbolic capital, a transformed and thereby *disguised* form of physical ‘economic’ capital, produces it’s proper effect in as much, and only in as much, as it conceals the fact that it originates in ‘material’ forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects. (1994:178)
Bourdieu’s conceptualization of symbolic capital is a useful frame for understanding the multiple forms and expressions of Tacana identity. These multiple definitions exist in a moment of transition – of shifting valuation of specific forms of symbolic capital. The Tacana are acting within a national and international scene where “indigenous” has experienced a relatively sudden increase in symbolic value. For rural forest dwellers, Tacana identity is now cultural capital that translates to wealth in the form of land (indigenous reserves) and forest products (especially Brazil nuts and timber). Without the designation of Tacana or another indigenous group, the poor of the region have a harder time accessing these resources. It remains to be seen what other forms of wealth can be produced from this stored wealth of ethnic Tacana identity.

**Changing markets.**

An extremely important moment in the restructuring of the market for identities in Bolivia, was the Bolivian land reform of 1994. This legislation, which provided for the creation of indigenous territories, was considered such a political hot potato by funding agencies that several officials in such organizations claimed that it never would have been implemented without the backing of the World Bank. Like the land reform of 1952, this land reform provided the means by which a set of impoverished Bolivians could collectively own and control land. This time, however, ownership was specifically for those designated indígenas. Some forest dwellers have aggressively maintained their (nonindigenous) rights to private ownership.

As I mentioned, land reforms implemented in the last decade provide for collective ownership of forest land by indigenous populations. A long process of title clearing,
dependent upon World Bank funding, is resulting in the creation of specially-titled inalienable indigenous lands. For the World Bank, this process is arguably worthwhile due to its contribution to title clearing on a global scale as well as to serve to pacify a potentially restive population. The result of this title clearing is a “queso con huecos” (cheese with holes, or Swiss cheese). Sprinkled throughout these territories are privately held lands and lands held by peasant communities, also provided for in the land reforms. Whereas indigenous communal land is collectively owned by all of the indigenous inhabitants living in indigenous communities in the demarcated territory, each peasant community holds title to its land as a single community. This is a problem for the long term in a region where slash-and-burn agriculture is the norm. Forest plots become exhausted and are abandoned after a number of years to be reclaimed by the forest and regenerate. The land allotted to a single community is too limited to allow sufficient rotation in land use for subsistence on a sustainable basis.

While indigenous territories might not be large enough to accommodate the current or future population indefinitely, at least they offer more flexibility for the highly mobile forest-dwellers than land titled in the names of peasant communities. Among a regional population where a great deal of intermixing and intermarriage has occurred, especially in recent decades, differences between peasant and indigenous Tacana communities can be minimal. Strategically, activating and/or affirming indigenous Tacana identity can be seen as preferable to identifying as peasant for the purposes of this titling process. For many, a focus on the continuing presence of indigenous peoples can be seen as preferable to subscribing to a “myth of mestizaje” (Bonfil Batalla 1996; Hale 1996; Gould 1998; Nelson 1999) in which intermixture is believed to have homogenized the nation. Not everyone
chooses this course, and deep splits within and between communities have been one result of varied reactions.

**Why not indigenous?**

Given this analysis of the benefits of (and trend towards) identifying with indigenous Tacana identity in the region, a natural question is why do some forest-dwellers adamantly refuse to self-designate as indigenous Tacana and/or affiliate with a Tacana community. Since my research was primarily among those who had chosen to identify as Tacana, I can only speak in a limited fashion to this question.

First, one must remember that there are three other indigenous groups in the region, the Ese Ejja and Cavineña, with whom they share a collectively held territory, and the Chacobo, who are fellow members of CIRABO. It appears that the boundaries of group identity are more tightly policed in these cases then among the Tacana. Members of these groups are unlikely to claim to be primarily Tacana even in cases of mixed parentage. Social action would take place almost exclusively under the rubric of their other regional indigenous identity with a metaphorical nod to their Tacana identity.

For those with reasonable grounds for claiming Tacana identity, but who chose not to do so, I can only speculate, based on preliminary observation, that pride, social networks, and private land ownership are three possible reasons for their choice. In other words, they might be acting to avoid the stigma attached to indigenous identity; they might be involved in peasant politics; they might be responding to the choices made by friends and family.
They might also be lacking a perception that they would gain from indigenous identification.

These questions remain important ones for future research.