"The Only True People"

Bethany J. bin Beyyette

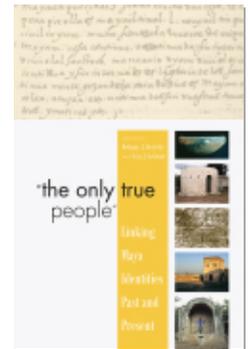Published by University Press of Colorado

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Considering the Edge Effect

Ethnogenesis and Classic Period Society in the Southeastern Maya Area

Marcello A. Canuto and Ellen E. Bell

THE EDGE EFFECT: DEFINING POPULATIONS PAST AND PRESENT

From the outset of archaeological investigations in western Honduras, researchers have grappled with questions about the relationship between the "ancient Maya" and the modern nation-state of Honduras. As early as 1834, explorer, political operative, and archaeologist Juan Galindo (1945:219) asserted that Copán represented an incursion by foreigners into Honduran territory: "Copán fué originario de una colonia tulteca; su rei dominó el país que se estiende al Oriente del de los mayas o Yucatán, alcanzando desde el golfo de Honduras hasta cerca del Oceano Pacífico."[1] The untrained but enthusiastic Apostolic Nuncio to Honduras, Federico Lunardi, devoted years of research to counteract these dominant views, claiming in his peculiar tome *Honduras Maya* that "hacía ocho años que sabía que Honduras era toda Maya y maestra del Mayab; pero, no solamente los extranjeros, que de ordinario ven las cosas superficialmente, sino los propios hijos de honduras, le negaban a su madre lo que hay más precioso, la maternidad, y una tan noble como la de los Mayas"[2] (Lunardi 1948:ii).

Despite Lunardi's protestations, the area that became known prosaically as "the southeast Maya periphery" came to be broadly understood as a borderland region where Maya groups based in the large centers of Copán and Quiriguá interacted with non-Maya populations to the east (Hay et al. 1940; Kirchoff 1943; Longyear 1947; Lothrop 1939). These non-Maya populations were assumed to have spoken different languages, produced and used stylistically different material culture, and

engaged in traditions and practices distinct from those of their Maya neighbors. The boundaries between them were conceptualized (actively or passively) as impermeable, monolithic, and unchanging. Interactions were modeled as unidirectional and hierarchically defined, with the Maya "high culture" acting as a donor culture to the "low culture" non-Maya recipients of Maya-style pottery and other material goods as well as intangible concepts of political, economic, and social organization. In this approach, identity was viewed as *primordial*—a response to an innate human need for connection and belonging that was shaped by cultural norms.

Needless to say, subsequent research efforts have argued that this characterization is too simplistic and that it relied on the heavy-handed use of material culture trait lists typical of early culture history approaches to describe the interactions among the inhabitants of this area (Boone and Willey 1988; Robinson 1987; Schortman and Urban 1986:2). In time, processualist approaches reshaped these conceptualizations so the image of a monolithic border erratically shuffling back and forth was replaced by models that recognized interaction spheres. These spheres were defined by the common presence of certain pottery types throughout a delineable region (Andrews 1976:181; Demarest 1986:163; Demarest and Sharer 1986). Based on archaeologically recovered ceramic data, these interaction spheres were found to have extended back to the Preclassic period, where, for example, the Providencia/ Miraflores and the Uapala ceramic spheres suggested the existence of separate but contemporaneous interaction zones in central highland Guatemala–western El Salvador and in central Honduras. It became clear that as early as the Late Preclassic, southeastern Maya elites were engaged in the construction of elaborate architecture, the erection of public sculptural monuments, and the exchange of prestige goods through long-distance trade routes (Dixon 1992; Sheets 1984:90–91; 2000:420). It was also clear that those interactions were more frequent within each sphere than between spheres, thus impacting group identities. While these ceramic spheres were vaguely associated with ethnic groups, they were conceived as the result of processes of socioeconomic interaction, elite prestation, and social competition or emulation, which helped explain the rise of sociopolitical complexity throughout the southeastern Maya area in the Late Preclassic period.

Beyond the Late Preclassic, research showed that interactions within and between ceramic spheres became even more complex, revealing a complicated network of interactions between different non-kin social groups. These interactions included cohabitation of ethnic groups in the same areas (Gerstle 1988), the local use and manipulation of interregional foreign objects and styles (Reents-Budet et al. 2004), the regional adoption of highly visible symbols of identity (Schortman 1989; Viel 1999), and, a tight cohesion, organization, and interaction among area elites (Ashmore 1984; Sharer 1978).

Although these processualist and transactionalist approaches, which modeled identity as *instrumental*—one of many tools deployed to achieve goals—opened many new avenues of investigation, several applications continued to emphasize elements (including, for example, monumental architecture, fine-ware pottery, sculpted monuments, inscribed texts) whose production is thought to have been under elite control. Characteristics like monumental art and ceramic style principally represent the activities, declared affinities, kinship, and public tastes of the powerful class. Furthermore, the active identities reflected in these attributes do not necessarily fully represent the complexity of this manipulation of styles, nor do they include all members of the group. Undoubtedly, commoners displayed their own identities and affiliations, and while these often intersected with those of the elites, they diverged in important ways. It is also likely that commoner identities were expressed in less ostentatious ways or by using perishable items such as clothing, which are less recognizable archaeologically. Nevertheless, these identities are part of the daily negotiations and interactions that occurred at all levels of the hierarchy in ancient centers. In other words, the new paradigms failed to assess the extent and diversity of salient social identities in the southeastern Maya area. They also failed to systematically explore the salience of different identities or changes in that salience through time (see Canuto 2002; Schortman 1989; Willey 1986).

ARCHAEOLOGY AND SOCIAL GROUPS

The archaeology of complex societies has had great success in recognizing and studying multiple forms of past societal organization, especially as it relates to class or status. These particular societal distinctions are often fixed within the material world to facilitate acceptance of a historical contingency as a natural fact. As a consequence, archaeology can recognize societal distinctions commonly expressed (and reinforced) by conscious manipulation of the material world. For instance, differences of *economic* class or *political* status were encoded in the built environment in an attempt to naturalize differences between groups—that is, to help "make inequality enchant" (Geertz 1980:123). In this way, the elements of material culture grouped within the old culture history "trait lists" can provide meaningful information about past identities. They serve as visible markers of choices made and actions undertaken in the past. For this reason, the study of a building's iconographic program can inform us about political changes within a polity, and an energetics analysis of a building's construction can help determine the extent of the residents' resource wealth.

Normative Identity

Complex societies, however, consist of more than just status groups, economic classes, communities, and families. These societies are rife with large non-kin groups—such as *factions* or *ethnicities*—constituted of people who "think themselves into difference" (Cohen 1985:117). Such distinctions, also known as *salient social identities* (Schortman 1989; Schortman and Nakamura 1991), are collectives whose members often deploy a mutually recognized, exchanged, and manipulated subset of symbols to mark themselves.

While these symbols, also known as *diacritics* (Cohen 1978), might appear arbitrary from an etic perspective, the emic perception of them as representative of an imminent (almost normative) culture transforms them into effective and readily recognizable icons of identity. In fact, their normative quality often involves some form of materialization—such as architectural style, decoration, emblems, insignia, or even written language—that leaves an archaeological signature (in residential structures, building facades, prestation goods, or texts) of the group's self-proclamation.

Transactionalism

It is also true that such social groups do not develop in a vacuum; they are situational, often defined in relation to others: *we are X because we are not Y* (Barth 1966; Bourdieu 1977; Shennan 1994). In fact, Dell Upton (1996:5, original emphasis) urges that archaeologists must not treat such diacritics "as something that can be held and nurtured, then photographed or excavated and identified, [but rather as processes] by which . . . groups form themselves by *choosing* to commodify their identities and to attach them to equally conscious chosen material signs."

Fredrik Barth (1969), in fact, noted that the specific "content" of any particular group is only a means to maintain boundaries of distinction. Interactions among individuals who share an affiliation erase subtle differences and reinforce similar dispositions based on a perception of shared material conditions of existence. Conversely, interactions between individuals who do not share such an affiliation reinforce their distinction, especially if those interactions are strictly limited and designed to highlight differences between them. In other words, Barth suggests that social groups are simply the consequence of interactions that form social groups, as in the case of *factionalization* or *ethnogenesis*.

This process is highlighted and even accelerated in situations of culture contact. Boundaries are formed through the negotiation of points of difference, and while ethnogenesis is often conceptualized as a slow, steady process, it can, in the proper circumstances, occur extremely quickly. Barbara Voss (2008), for example, traces

the emergence within a single generation of a new "Californio" identity among the Mexican soldiers and their families sent by the Spanish Crown to fortify and guard the Presidio of San Francisco, California, in 1776. Full members of neither the Spanish political system they represented nor the indigenous Native North American populations they were charged with overseeing, the Mexican soldiers forged an independent identity that occupied the conceptual interstices of the multiethnic landscape in which they lived. The frontier zone along the southeast edge of the Maya area may have presented similarly intense and intrusive interrelations and likely resulted in swiftly forming, fluid social affiliations as individuals and groups sought to position themselves within the new sociopolitical milieu created by the expansion of Mayan-speaking groups into non-Maya territory in the Early Classic period.

SALIENCE AND AGENCY

In terms of archaeology, therefore, the dual strategy of identifying diacritics and evaluating the formation of boundaries provides some of the most useful and effective ways to consider the importance and impact of non-kin social groups in the past. It is not enough to identify which diacritics—such as architecture, decoration, emblems, or insignia—were used in a particular context. It is also important to assess how and for what reason these arbitrary symbols were deployed.

Nevertheless, the combination of normative and transactional approaches does not consider the fact that identity manipulation can often be the result of *individual* rather than *collective* strategies. It is important to acknowledge, therefore, the role of individuals in manipulating archaeologically visible diacritics rather than assuming that such assertions of normative identity characterize an entire population. The static, normative, monolithic identity asserted through the use of diacritics could be the result of a particular *negotiation of identity* despite a daily reality that reflects a more complicated and dynamic system of intercalated identities. To link normative and transactionalist definitions of identity with a practice-oriented approach, the manipulation of diacritics should be seen as a negotiation or declaration of a social identity rather than a result of the identity itself.

LATE CLASSIC IDENTITY: THE SOUTHEASTERN MAYA AREA

In Classic Maya society (AD 250–900), for example, groups such as lineages, political factions, or ethnicities reflect some of the potential salient identities used to integrate people into large, non-local, extra-kin groups. To investigate how identities were formed, tolerated, and maintained within the southeastern Maya area's
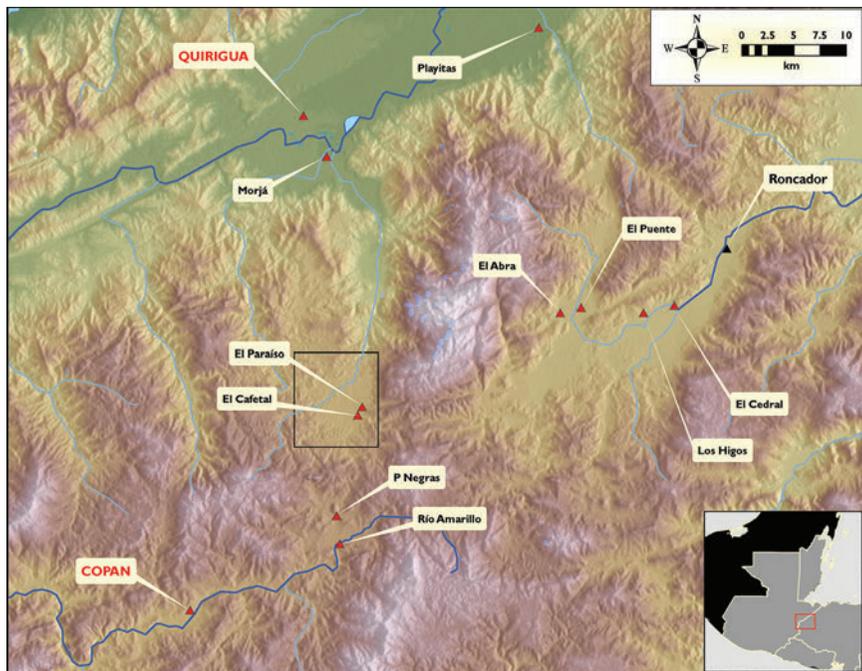
MAP 9.1. Southeast Maya area

multiethnic landscape, the Proyecto Arqueólogico Regional El Paraíso (PAREP; Bell, Canuto, and Ramos 2001; Canuto and Bell 2008, 2013; Canuto, Charton, and Bell 2010; von Schwerin 2010) conducted nine years of archaeological investigations at two Classic period sites in the El Paraíso Valley, western Honduras (map 9.1). This valley is located between Copán and Quiriguá along a trade route that also provided access to central Honduras. The well-watered, fertile, alluvial bottomlands are more extensive than those in the Copán Valley (Fash 1983), suggesting that the present high agricultural productivity likely extended into the past.

When archaeological research first began at Copán, only the site of El Paraíso was known in the valley (Lothrop 1926; Morley 1917, 1920; Sapper 1898; Yde 1936, 1938). Early reports noted that this site was an important regional center located between Copán and Quiriguá and that this importance was underscored by the presence of standing architecture and plentiful evidence of architectural sculpture. Given the rarity of both attributes throughout the Copán hinterlands, it became apparent that the El Paraíso elites were important members of regional Classic Maya society. These early reports supported the impression that Copán influence (and the Maya ethnicity associated with it) extended homogeneously throughout the region.

In the 1980s, however, a far more complex picture of regional identity began to emerge when David Vlcek and William Fash (1986) reported a second large site in the valley that differed in significant ways from El Paraíso. The second site, known as El Cafetal, is located a scant 1.5 km southwest of El Paraíso; while the two sites are largely coeval, they differ from one another in significant and pervasive ways. As both sites appear to have been the settings for the same range of residential and administrative activities, their dissimilarity cannot be ascribed to differences in function or status alone. Instead, we suggest that these centers reflect the presence of two distinct social groups living side by side in the valley during the Late Classic period. To explore this possibility, we discuss several of the more archaeologically visible ways affiliation and identity can be expressed, including site plan, construction techniques, architectural embellishment, the use of open space, and portable material culture. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of this pattern for our understanding of ethnogenesis and interaction in the region and beyond.

EL PARAÍSO AND EL CAFETAL: A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

The El Paraíso Valley contains two linked but culturally distinct contemporaneous Late Classic centers, El Cafetal and El Paraíso (map 9.2). Differences in settlement patterns, site plans, architectural design, construction techniques, sculpture, and portable material culture indicate that El Cafetal was a long-lived, autochthonous center, while El Paraíso was established by Copán elites (or at least under their auspices) in the mid-seventh century AD and likely served as an administrative outpost. Available data suggest that this administrative strategy, which highlighted cultural distinctions, is unique among Maya polities and appears to have been limited to southeast Mesoamerica, where it may have been replicated by the centers of El Puente and El Abra in the La Venta Valley, 29 km southeast of the El Paraíso Valley (Nakamura, Aoyama, and Uratsuji 1991), and possibly by the centers of Morja and Quiriguá in the Motagua Valley, 30 km to the north (Ashmore 2007). These patterns suggest that PAREP has documented an administrative strategy particular to Copán rulers. Such findings support, complement, and expand research in other Maya kingdoms, including Yaxchilan and Piedras Negras (Golden et al. 2008, 2012), in which distinct local administrative strategies have been documented. We suggest that this strategy was tailored to and necessitated by the presence of multiple salient social identities in the region and that, in essence, it was specifically designed to meet the unique challenges present in a multiethnic frontier zone.

Extensive excavations in the valley have shown the sites to be markedly different in nearly every respect investigated. By the mid-seventh century AD, stark
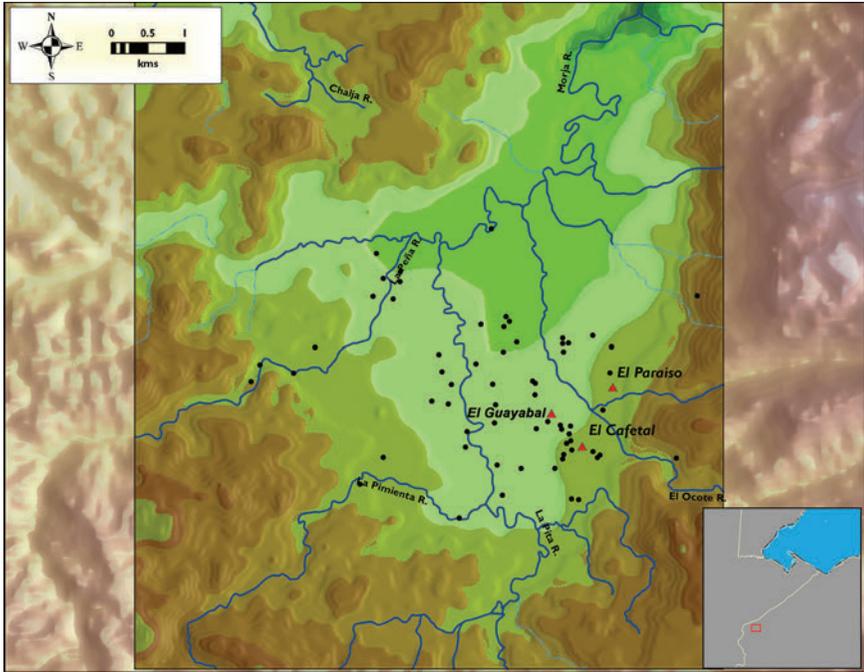
MAP 9.2. Settlement in the El Paraíso Valley, western Honduras

differences between the two major Late Classic settlements were very apparent and would have shaped the lives of residents at each center.

El Paraíso: A Copán Enclave in the El Paraíso Valley

The site of El Paraíso (map 9.3), which we believe was established as an enclave by or in association with the Copán elite, is a quadrangular center situated in the foothills along the southeastern edge of the valley. Its site plan is characterized by enclosed, sunken patios surrounded by monumental architecture and elite residences. The buildings are composed of stone-faced substructure platforms topped by stone structures, many of which include dressed volcanic tuff (*toba*) masonry and Copán-style mosaic sculpture. Elite residences contain built-in architectural features commonly found in elite Maya residences, including benches, "curtain holders," and niches. Many of the buildings retain traces of the stucco (in at least one instance red-painted) that covered superstructure walls, floors, and benches. Water flow out of (and possibly into) the stucco-surfaced main plaza was facilitated
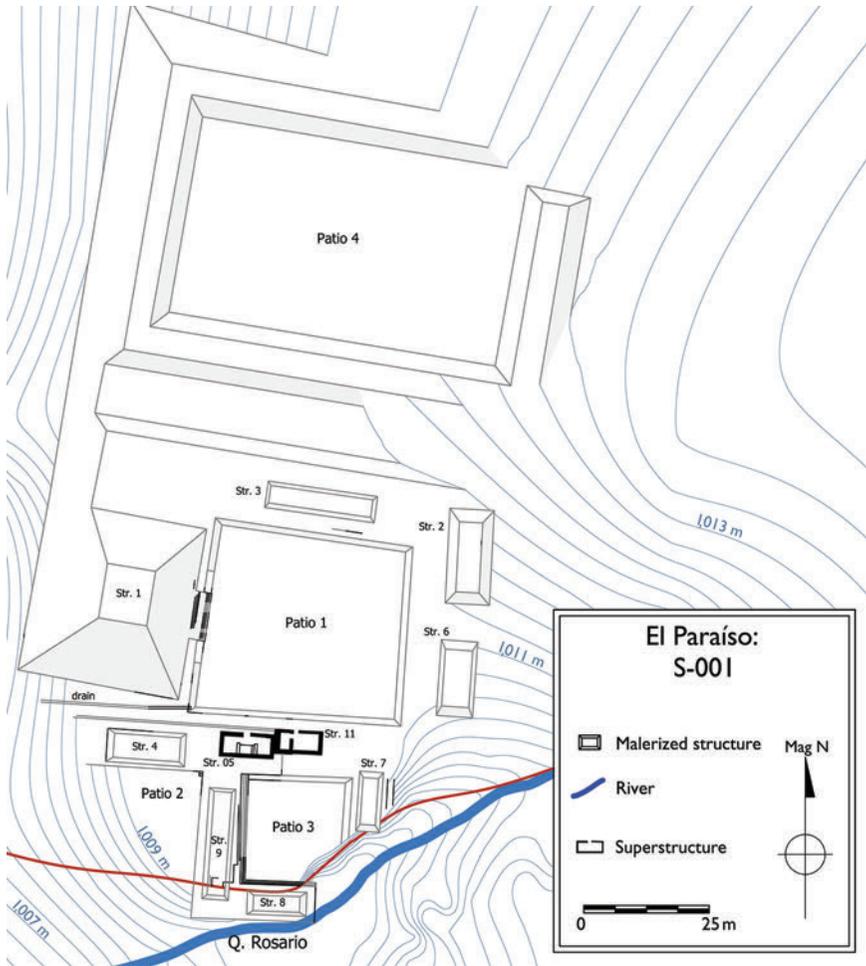
MAP 9.3. El Paraíso site map

by an elaborate drainage system integrally constructed with the southwest corner of the sunken court.

At El Paraíso, open spaces appear to have been swept clean, and phosphate analysis within the sunken courts suggests that they may not have been used for phosphate-rich activities such as food preparation, consumption, or disposal (Canuto, Charton, and Bell 2010). El Paraíso residents did, however, cache objects, including large ceramic jars, beneath the surface of these open spaces. Like the architecture, portable material culture at El Paraíso suggests that the residents were

closely tied to the Copán ceramic economy, with Copán pottery types comprising as much as 95 percent of the fine wares, 80 percent of the censers, and even a striking 70 percent of the utilitarian wares found at the site analyzed to date. These types include Copador polychromes, black-brown Surlo carved wares, and Copán jars (Bill et al. 2006; Bill, Levan, and McFarlane 2007). Settlement at El Paraíso also appears to have been limited to the Classic period, with no evidence of occupation before that time and very ephemeral traces of any activity in the Postclassic period. In sum, El Paraíso exhibits all the hallmarks of a Copán-style center that may have served as an outpost for further Copán administrative strategies in the region.

El Cafetal: A Long-Lived Local Center

The nearby center of El Cafetal (map 9.4), located a mere 1.5 km to the south and west of El Paraíso, provides stark contrasts with its neighbor. At El Cafetal, the site plan may best be characterized as an open plaza plan: no known corners are closed, there are ample points of access into and out of the site core, and the northern portion of the site appears to have included a formalized entrance that opens to the northwest, onto the bottomlands that comprise the vast majority of the valley. This entrance is defined by a cobble-paved plaza bordered by two low structures (Structures 12 and 13) and bounded to the south by a low platform (Structure 9) and steps that lead into the Main Plaza. Phosphate analysis combines with spatial patterning to suggest that space within the site was organized in loosely defined areas that served as the settings for a variety of open-air activities (Canuto, Charton, and Bell 2010). At El Cafetal, buildings are composed of cobble-faced substructure platforms with earth and cobble fill. Low cobble-faced steps or terraces provide access to the summits, while side and rear walls are steep and narrow. These substructures are topped by perishable buildings seated on cobble foundations, and most include large, open interior rooms.

In contrast to the portable material culture at El Paraíso, pottery at El Cafetal boasts a large percentage of locally made ceramic vessels, including both fine and utilitarian wares. There is also, however, a significant amount of pottery, especially fine wares, imported from Copán. Local wares include jars, modeled and scored censers, and small orange-slipped bowls. When seen side by side, the ceramic frequencies at El Paraíso and El Cafetal present a stark contrast, highlighting the strong connections with the Copán ceramic economy enjoyed by El Paraíso residents and the vibrant local ceramic economy in which those who lived at El Cafetal participated (Bill et al. 2006; Bill, Levan, and McFarlane 2007). El Cafetal also appears to have had a much longer occupation history than El Paraíso, with extensive deposits of Preclassic pottery found below the Late Classic plaza floors. In sum, El Cafetal
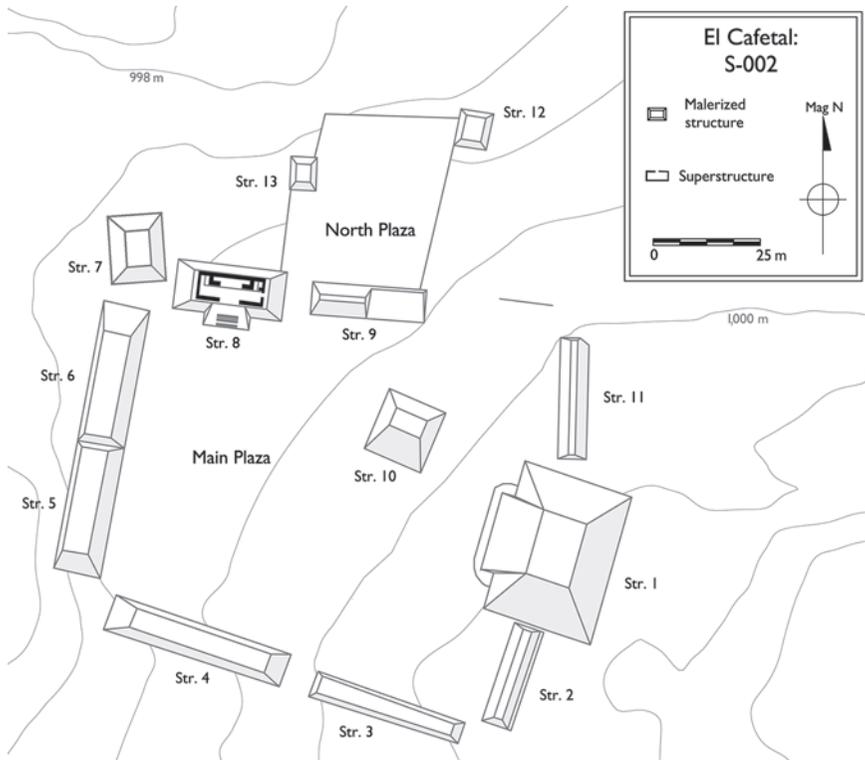
MAP 9.4. El Cafetal site map

appears to have been a long-lived local center whose residents marshaled their own strategies vis-à-vis Copán elites—both in the valley and beyond.

ETHNOGENESIS ON THE EDGE OF THE COPÁN KINGDOM

Much of the PAREP research in the El Paraíso Valley has developed from a transactionalist paradigm. When we started in 2001, we focused on the strategic location of the El Paraíso Valley along routes connecting Copán, Quiriguá, and settlements in central Honduras and the dynamic frontier zone interactions this location likely fostered. By intensively investigating the region, we recovered not only evidence for the deployment of salient social identities in interactionalist strategies to secure privileges and resources but also evidence of the salience of social identity altogether. In other words, although we have attempted to identify the processes that led to the use and deployment of critical group-marking diacritics, we also noted a

pervasiveness of difference that extended beyond the predicted scope of a "strategic" (or transactionalist) deployment of such diacritics. How, then, might this unexpected emphasis on difference be explained? Rather than attribute it to an irreducible primordial normative distinction between two groups that could not help but be encoded in the archaeological record, we turned to broader and more complex models of the role of ethnicity and ethnogenesis in the negotiation of difference.

The forging of ethnicity and the shared identities it can create is a complex, dynamic, and multidirectional process and must be understood as such. As Wolfgang Gabbert (2004:xii) notes, ethnic identity does not automatically result in group integration, solidarity, or shared awareness of a unifying identity; and Barbara Voss (2008) has demonstrated that ethnogenesis can be employed both as a means of resistance and in the assertion of dominance. As a supra-ordinate identity, Lisa LeCount (this volume) suggests that ethnicity subsumes many facets of selfhood whose members are unevenly connected through nested and overlapping affiliation; that is, "given that members of any ethnic group share some identities with oppositional groups, nested and overlapping affiliations contribute to the often amorphous and unbounded character of ethnicity." As such, ethnic groups are better understood as "imagined communities" that provide few opportunities for group-wide face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, in complex societies, where people of different ethnic backgrounds come into daily contact, individuals are prompted to develop and express multiple affiliations—such as social status, craft specializations, or gender—that cross-cut or even undermine ethnic boundaries. As a consequence, ethnic affiliation is not necessarily encouraged; in some cases, it might not be salient at all.

What might therefore impel the construction or discovery of similarities among people who otherwise perform conflicting identities and whose differences are not necessarily resolved by ethnic affiliation? In essence, what are the conditions for *ethnogenesis*? Fredrik Barth (1969:18) has suggested that ethnic distinction becomes relevant in conditions where a large number of social roles and values are canalized and standardized. These conditions simultaneously foment *communitas* among those who would otherwise express obvious differences and impel the exclusion of those who do not share the most salient social values.

We contend that in the Classic period, the El Paraíso Valley—and much of the Copán region more broadly—demonstrates many of the conditions under which ethnic identity would have been rendered broadly meaningful, despite (or, perhaps more appropriately, as a response to) intense intra-regional interaction. In other words, ethnic attribution would have been part of the public discourse, perhaps pervasively and prevailingly so. As such, we have suggested (Bell, Canuto, and Ramos 2001; Canuto and Bell 2008, 2013; Canuto, Bell, and Bill 2007; Canuto,

Charton, and Bell 2010) that *identity politics* played a key role in the development and management of Copán's Classic period polity.

ETHNOGENESIS AT EL PARAÍSO

How and why do we interpret the archaeological record in this fashion? We use Barth (1969) as a guide to determine if the conditions for *ethnogenesis*—the rendering salient of distinct ethnic identities—were present in the southeastern Maya area during the Classic period. Barth (ibid.) claimed that conditions needed for ethnogenesis between groups include structural complementarity, interdependence of resource management, and mutual and sustained interaction. We have found patterns that suggest these processes were present in the El Paraíso Valley and consider each of them below. Data from a wider region, including the centers of Copán, Quiriguá, Los Higos, El Puente, and Río Amarillo, also suggest that such conditions were present in much of the area Copán dynasts controlled during the Classic period, providing venues for further investigation of these processes.

COMPLEMENTARITY

Groups living side by side in the El Paraíso Valley were indeed structurally complementary. All data suggest that the residents of both El Paraíso and El Cafetal were organized hierarchically by status and wealth. Despite the different ways they were manifested, residents of both centers shared concepts of private versus public space, elite versus commoner identities, sacred versus profane places, and fine versus utilitarian goods. In the case of El Paraíso and El Cafetal, the differences between these two groups were "stable, so that the complementary differences on which the systems rest can persist in the face of close inter-ethnic contact" (ibid.:19).

INTERDEPENDENCE

For the further canalization in intergroup interaction to occur, some co-dependence must develop between groups as they vie for access to limited resources. In the case of the El Paraíso Valley and broadly throughout the southeastern Maya area, residents of El Paraíso and El Cafetal occupied the same environmental zone, likely leading to competition for similar resources that fomented border formation and border politics. The location of El Cafetal along an important communication route likely led to the establishment of El Paraíso in the same region, sharing the economic and strategic value of the valley. This paring was repeated at other important transportation chokepoints in the Copán region, such as in the Río Amarillo,

La Florida, and La Venta Valleys. The intermixing of these groups led to the development of several flashpoints where "border politics" was paramount.

Mutual Sustained Interaction

A final requisite for the encouragement of ethnic identity formation would appear counterintuitive—continued intense interaction. That is, for Barth, the practice that enjoins identity formation is knowledge and acknowledgment of the "Other." Interaction across boundaries, whether physical, social, political, or economic, provides opportunity for both, allowing for the recognition and refinement of differences. This is especially true if those interactions are limited despite being frequent. Moreover, this interaction also provides the opportunity for code switching, assimilation, and incorporation—all forms of interaction that lead to the explicit, assertive, and active use of difference markers. For the El Paraíso Valley and, indeed, the larger Copán region, there is little evidence that population movement was restricted or hindered. Considering the intermixing of utilitarian vessels and lithic tool styles found in the household middens of both sites in the El Paraíso Valley, it is clear that the exchange of everyday goods—and the interactions that accompanied it—was commonplace.

PERFORMING AND MAINTAINING ETHNICITIES: CREATING AND CROSSING ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

Considering that the Classic period El Paraíso Valley presented the proper conditions for ethnogenesis, we now turn to the evidence that supports the notion that the predominant public discourse in the Classic period Copán polity involved the development, maintenance, and allusion to ethnic identity. Like LeCount (this volume), we suggest that ethnogenesis would result in a marked rise in the deployment of materialized and standardized symbols of affiliation. Since there is no fundamental set of symbols that inherently represent social difference (Emberling 1997), any argument that depends on the use of such symbols—diacritics—must ensure that they were indeed meaningful.

We have discussed in detail (Bell, Canuto, and Ramos 2001; Canuto and Bell 2008, 2013; Canuto, Bell, and Bill 2007; Canuto, Charton, and Bell 2010) the large-scale differences between the two major Classic period sites in the El Paraíso Valley. We have noted major differences regarding access, site plan, architectural style, spatial organization, decorative motifs, use of open spaces, elite ceramics, and other portable material culture. Along all these distinct lines of evidence, we note that the site of El Paraíso consistently reproduced "Copán-style" attributes, such as red-painted

plastered buildings, enclosed patios, mosaic sculpture decoration, and Surlo ceramics. In almost symmetrical contradistinction, the site of El Cafetal reflected attributes more commonly associated with Honduran sites located along the Chamelecon, Sula, and Cacaulapa drainages, including un-stuccoed buildings made of perishable materials or lightly shaped stone, open plazas, no mosaic sculpture of any kind, and a preponderance of locally produced utilitarian and fine-ware ceramics.

The differences exhibited by these two coeval and neighboring centers reflect both isochrestic (unconscious) variation (Sackett 1990) and distinct assertive styles (Wiessner 1990). Certain attributes, such as Copán-style architectural sculpture, represent an assertion by leading El Paraíso families of participation and membership in a Copán-centered elite group. These decorative features likely could be and were bestowed on rulers, families, or groups that adopted a certain factional allegiance to Copán. In other words, the leading residents of El Paraíso were affiliated with the Late Classic ruling elite of Copán. They may even have been members of a noble house from Copán sent to the El Paraíso Valley to guard the socioeconomic interests of the Copán dynasty. The El Cafetal paramounts, conversely, likely shared no such affiliation with Copán elite.

These active (or assertive) stylistic differences are also accompanied by several examples of isochrestic (or unconscious) variation, including building techniques, spatial plans, and the use of open space. These latter distinctions support the proposition that differences between the inhabitants of these two sites reflect aesthetic and cultural distinctions among their respective inhabitants. In other words, these material differences between the centers are typical of groups that define themselves according to ethnic differences. These findings might be interpreted as suggesting that the residents of El Cafetal and its surrounding settlements did not see themselves as Maya (or, more specifically, as part of the social and ethnic group headed by Copán elites).

The combination of passive and active stylistic differences between these two centers speaks to differences of primordial as well as instrumental identity between their occupants. Not only did shared identities foster a sense of connection and belonging tied to shared traditions and experiences, but they could also be deployed strategically to achieve specific goals. The differences between these two groups asserted across the material and behavioral categories discussed above suggest the mutual participation of valley residents in boundary maintenance. This boundary did not separate two territories; rather, it was the consequence of local ethnogenesis that highlighted a local version of a Lowland Maya elite identity and a local version of a non-Maya identity.

In our model, ethnogenesis is an unintended consequence of the political expansion of the Copán polity. As Geoff Emberling (1997:308) claims: "A new

ethnic identity often develops when a state conquers or otherwise encompasses previously independent groups . . . The newly formed ethnic groups in these situations thus arise on the margins of expanding states. States very often attempt to dramatically increase the rigidity of cultural differences between these groups, as a strategy of control."

In the complex, multicultural milieu of the Classic period, Copán dynasts forged an administrative strategy that exacerbated rather than diminished difference. El Paraíso, the outpost center Copán elites built on the southeastern edge of the valley, was designed to contrast with local patterns at El Cafetal in nearly every way possible, standing out in stark relief against them. The research discussed above has suggested that these patterns extend beyond the two large centers to characterize at least some of the settlements that surrounded each. Copán elites drove wedges across cultural boundaries to gain access to trade routes, agricultural surpluses, and raw materials rather than seeking to fully assimilate regional populations and mask ethnopolitical differences.

DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY POLITICS

Although intergroup interaction, interdependence, and competition may fuel the *creation* of diacritics, their deployment is a fluid and recursive process prone to modification. In mature sociopolitical landscapes, some diacritics are discarded while others creep semantic value into other symbolic fields through forms of identity politics similar to those described above for ethnogenesis. The malleability of diacritics can be seen in the way ethnopolitical distinctions between Maya and non-Maya peoples eroded rapidly in the second half of the eighth century AD and old symbols of ethnicity were repurposed for new political ends. Stark differences between the two groups were carefully crafted and maintained from AD 600 to 750. However, in the middle of the eighth century AD, the multiethnic landscape of the Copán kingdom was plunged into political conflict. Given the El Paraíso Valley's location and cultural configuration, its residents would have had to have confronted the host of cultural, political, and economic upheavals that transformed the southeastern Maya area during the ninth century AD.

At the height of the Classic period, Copán's thirteenth ruler, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, met his untimely end. In AD 738 he warred unsuccessfully against his longtime ally K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Yopaat (AD 724–85), the ruler of Quiriguá. As a result of this military misadventure, he was beheaded, leaving the erstwhile subordinate lord of Quiriguá in control of the entire region. Furthermore, the Quiriguá ruler not only claimed to have destroyed his rival's gods but also subsequently adopted Copán's royal titles, claiming himself as the rightful successor to Copán's

dynasty (Martin and Grube 2008). He also claimed control over paramounts of several nearby centers to bolster his assertion of regional supremacy. References to these centers (including one nicknamed "Xkuy" mentioned in texts found at both Copán and Quiriguá) have yet to be linked to archaeologically known sites, but centers in the El Paraíso Valley and the larger region are possible candidates.

During this period of political turmoil, the distinctions between El Cafetal and El Paraíso faded somewhat. Several new residential, ceremonial, and administrative buildings—Structures 6, 7, and 8—that have no stylistic precedent were constructed at El Cafetal. Their platforms and superstructures are made of cut stone. Their facades and floors were coated with stucco. The buildings were not, however, embellished with any mosaic sculpture.

The unusual floor plan of the Structure 8 superstructure warrants additional attention. Its interior consists of a single transverse room that gives access to three much smaller rooms or niches whose floors are raised above that of the transverse room, all of which have plaster floors and stuccoed walls. Although smaller in size, this building is reminiscent of Structure 10L-22 at Copán and Structure 1B-5 at Quiriguá—both considered throne rooms for their rulers, Waxaklajun Ubaah K'awil (Ruler 13 of Copán) and K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Yopaat (ruler of Quiriguá), respectively. Moreover, both buildings date to the same time period in which El Cafetal Structure 8 was constructed.

While the specific affiliation of El Cafetal paramounts with Copán or Quiriguá kings requires further investigation, it is clear that at some time during the eighth century AD a building that fits perfectly within the Late Classic Maya elite aesthetic of the southeast Maya area was constructed at El Cafetal, perhaps as a reward for the paramounts' support. It resembles the architecture found at El Paraíso; and its construction techniques, architectural embellishment, and spatial organization contrast strongly with almost all other buildings at El Cafetal. Along with the contemporaneous Structures 6 and 7, which exhibit similar construction styles and embellishment, Structure 8 anchors a new elite ward within the center, possibly reflecting new opportunities and affiliations marshaled by El Cafetal paramounts even as direct Copán influence in the region faltered.

The Copán-Quiriguá conflict likely cleaved the region into at least two political factions (elite groups) with mutually exclusive and competing interests, both of which used the same diacritics to signal membership. The political conflict in the region gave El Cafetal paramounts access to resources, technology, and labor that in the Copán hinterlands had been limited previously to specific centers, such as El Paraíso. Consequently, the Late Classic Mayanization of the Copán region might be related more to the political fission between Copán and Quiriguá in AD 738 than to the (inexorable) enculturation of non-Maya peoples.

CONCLUSION

Questions about the salience of ethnic identity are broadly applicable throughout the Copán polity rather than just within the El Paraíso Valley. Identity was not so localized as to be limited to small geographic entities such as individual river valleys. Rather, the El Paraíso Valley is a space in which ongoing processes of ethnogenisis were foregrounded and intensified as Copán diacritics were marshaled for use in interactions outside the Copán Valley. The deployment of Copanec affiliation and identity in the El Paraíso Valley was a reflection of the assertiveness with which inhabitants of the region found it necessary to stake their claim. Heightened, perhaps even literally loud, proclamations of their identity throughout the region would have resulted in the marked differences between the sites that we have documented not only in the El Paraíso Valley but potentially throughout the Copán region.

With the conflict between Copán and Quiriguá in the mid-eighth century AD, the salience of these distinctions drained away as new and perhaps more chaotic and contingent networks of political alliance were developed. What likely had been predictable, canalized, and standardized interactions throughout the Classic period "might have become impossible with so many people linked in ever more complicated configurations" (Schortman and Ashmore 2007:23). The situation could only have been exacerbated by the seeming instability of the resulting networks, given that each included subgroups in active or potential competition with one another (ibid.).

The Copán-Quiriguá conflict undermined the canalized and restricted forms of interaction between the two groups in such a way that diacritics came under the aegis of political alliance rather than ethnic affiliation. Furthermore, group solidarity within these volatile networks would have been more difficult to maintain because there would have been much less impetus to establish cooperative, complementary, interdependent, and sustained forms of interaction. In the finale decades of the Classic period, the area would have been awash with now ambiguous symbols of affiliation that likely accelerated the collapse of the regional political system, the increase in self-sustaining communities, the reduction of interregional interaction, and a fading of the salience of ethnic identity.

In this way, research in the El Paraíso Valley brings an additional dimension to discussions of the "Mayanization" of Honduras in the present day. By providing a model in which the salience of ethnic affiliation and identity must be demonstrated rather than assumed and by demonstrating that diacritics commonly interpreted as direct indicators of the performance of ethnicity may be marshaled across etically defined ethnic boundaries as events warrant, this research underscores the complexities of identity formation and expression. It provides a broader framework within which to explore the use of "Maya-style" images, iconography,

architectural forms, and embellishments in modern practice in Honduras. Perhaps some modern ethnic identities prove to be the result of modern-day state-formation strategies.

However, it is also just as true that the incorporation (or co-option) of Copán-style architectural cannons by El Cafetal elites in the mid-eighth century AD may be understood not as the adoption of a new ethnic identity but rather as the marshaling of potent elite markers in a political milieu in which they become both accessible and salient. It follows, therefore, that the modern-day assertive use of "Maya-style" imagery in daily practice in Honduras could also be understood in the same light. In other words, the adoption of these symbols does not necessarily signal the erasure of difference and the (self-)denial of one's own identity. Rather, the symbols can be understood as modern examples of the long-enduring and effective strategy of pragmatic co-option of master narratives and symbols made available through the public sphere.

NOTES

1. "Copán was founded as a Toltec colony; its king dominated the country that extends to the east of the Maya of Yucatán, stretching from the Gulf of Honduras to near the Pacific Ocean" (translation by authors).

2. "For eight years I've known that Honduras was completely Maya and [the] teacher/master of Mayab; but not only foreigners, who usually see things superficially, but also Honduras's own sons deny their mother country that which is most precious, the maternal role, and one as noble as that of the Maya" (translation by authors).

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