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Rethinking Tafí: a political approach to the landscape of a Southern Andean Formative community.

Jordi A. López Lillio.

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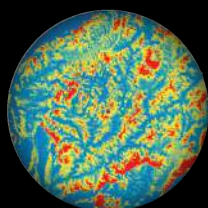
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HARVESTING THE BENEFITS OF
10 YEARS OF TRAINING IN THE
IBERIAN PENINSULA (2006-2015)



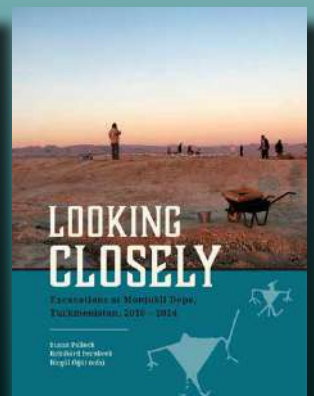
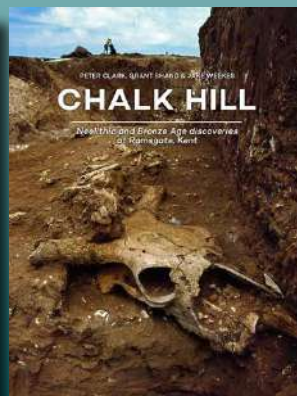
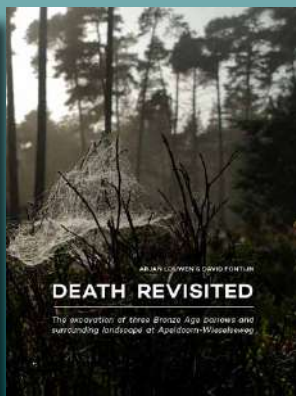
edited by
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Rethinking Tafí: a political approach to the landscape of a Southern Andean Formative community

*Jordi A. López Lillo*¹

Introduction: an aboriginal repolitization

In 1977, the French ethnographer Pierre Clastres (1994, 166) stated that a primitive society can be defined as *a multiplicity of undivided communities which obey the same centrifugal logic*. It was the response of an Americanist to a widespread problem in social interpretation dating back, precisely, to the European discovery of America: the mixture, within the framework of liberal cosmogonies (such as the thinking of Locke or Adam Smith), of the *logical fiction* of a so-called “state of nature” with an alleged *historical event*; a mixture which in turn leads to the “discovery” of Prehistory under the imagination of savages as “primitives” (Gosden 1999). As Todorov puts it, from the Enlightenment onwards, the conceptualisation of Humanity as a universal category conceals a strong by-product by which “the existence of a human substance actually ‘other’ is rejected, beyond a simply imperfect state of ‘ourselves’” (Todorov 1998, 157). In fact, the thread starting with the 19th century’s social evolutionism, pervaded with the idea of “progress”, promoting the common archaeological assumption of a “band - tribe - chiefdom - State” typological sequence is obviously enough to require no further comment.

Nevertheless, it is important to note the teleological bias incorporated into this kind of hypothesis, especially inasmuch as it runs the risk of leading us to forget its instrumental character (being a heuristic tool in a usually negative process of identification) and leads us towards a naturalisation of our own endocultural assessments without any serious attempt to cross-check. For example, this is what led to the *primitive barter* scenario in order to explain trading behaviour in modern societies, which is stubbornly upheld, even nowadays, by some authors despite the fact that a “savage polity” weaving its social tissue by such a trade

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has never been found (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992; Graeber 2011). On the other hand, it is also what underlies the *primitive communism* altar on which real ethnographic data are sacrificed. Both constructs share, and therefore inadvertently secure, an economy-oriented point of view which assumes politics only as a social epiphenomenon, even if the ethnographic record has actually started to point towards quite the opposite (Godelier, 1999; 2014). Both take part in a polarised argument between individualistic and holistic approaches with the same result: an evident inability to acknowledge even the possibility of different behaviours bearing different cultural targets, and therefore, bring forth an “Anthropology of operative logics”, which seems to be the only way of comprehending the *non-linear reality* revealed by the acceleration of contextual criticism since about 1970.

In this context, the Clastrean point of view might be privileged in re-evaluating social and political systems within the different cultural scenarios unearthed by Archaeology and also, as a matter of fact, by in re-evaluating own culture. By now, the detection of some precise institutions, which willingly prevent the formation of the State by promoting centrifugal logic over the centripetal, in case of systemic over-stress, produced a major change in a field in which politics could be hardly imagined without *domination* in a Weberian sense (except for a few noteworthy exceptions, *e. g.* the “ordered anarchy” of Evans-Pritchard, and some of his followers’ statements about primitive law and government (Gluckman 1973; Hoebel 2006; Mair 1962).

The aim of this contribution is to join the re-evaluation of the archaeological record and, thus, of the historical processes it reflects through the new light provided by this response in addition to exploring its potentialities. In order to do so, I will turn to one of the best known case-studies in the Formative period of North-Western Argentina, the Tafi tradition, and, more specifically, to the analysis of its landscape.

As will be seen, if, finally, some achievement emerges from this effort and Tafi history is shown in a more parsimonious way than before, it will come neither from a qualitative novelty in our knowledge of its material features, nor from a ground-breaking technological input in its analysis but rather, from a pronounced theoretical rearmament. It is not by chance that the communication which gave birth to this paper was originally entitled “A classical GIS implementation for a novel interpretation of the Formative landscape in Southern Andes”.

The Tafi tradition, in traditional Archaeology

Located in the Tucumán Province, nearly 120 Km from its capital at San Miguel, the Tafi Valley corresponds to the *keshua* biotope or “temperate high valleys” 2000 to 2500 MASL in this case, between the *yunga* forests and the chaco-pampean plateau to the east, and the *puna*, to the west. Together with its position on the main road through the Cumbres Calchaquíes towards the higher Yocavil Valley, the prairie vegetation typical at this altitude has evidently played a major role in the archaeological knowledge of the region, dating back to a work as famous as Ambrossetti’s notes on the so-called *menhirs* in 1897.

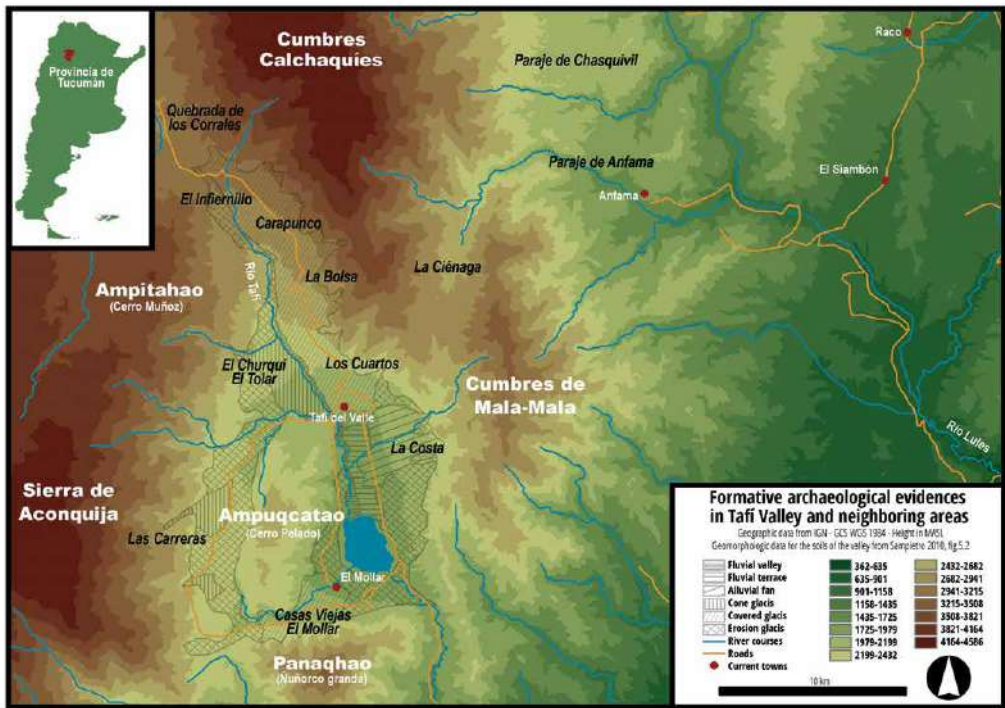


Figure 1: Formative evidence in the Tafi Valley and neighbouring areas (Tucumán Province); note that most of the Yunga forest, to the east, is still unknown to Archaeology due to environmental difficulties.

Furthermore, without any doubt, the more prominent elements in the record are the hundreds of widely scattered, highly surface-visible, circular stone structures dating from the Formative period, from *c.* 250 BC to 850 AD, in which the first agropastoralist settlements appeared in the Tafi valley. From Casas Viejas on the southern edge; all around the Ampuqcatao hill, noticeably denser at sites such as Las Carreras and El Churqui on the hillsides of Aconquija or La Costa and Los Cuartos, towards the Mala-Mala hills; to the north, at La Bolsa, Carapunco and El Infiernillo: the tear-shaped valley is practically covered with this kind of structure (figure 1). Most of them have been interpreted as house clusters and closely-related productive sites. In fact, the “Tafi Household Pattern” has become a common descriptor in regional archaeological analysis (Di Lullo 2012; Oliszewski *et al.* 2013; Álvarez Larráin and Lanzelotti 2013), emphasising its homogeneity both in a more extensive area than the valley and over almost a millennium. In turn, it reveals an unavoidable problem for any archaeological interpretation since this homogeneity, together with the paucity of data resulting from test pits and open-area excavations, generates a delicate “synchronic apriorism” by which all visible structures are supposed to have been occupied simultaneously at a cultural peak. However, the absolute dates available confirm an extremely long-term occupation for these houses (*e.g.*, between cal. 130-260 and 650-780 AD for La Bolsa sector 1, Unit 14 case (Salazar 2010).

This Formative household pattern consists of circular or sub-circular semi-subterranean rooms, ranging in size between 2 and 20 m², connected to a larger unroofed courtyard or patio. As can be seen in the aforementioned Unit 14 (figure 2), virtually the only fully excavated Tafi household (*cf.* Salazar *et al.* 2007; Sampietro 2010), a single entrance connected the patios to the outside areas. These clusters vary in size and number of attached rooms but in all cases the structures maintain the same spatial organisation. The entrance and pathways illustrate greater fluidity within the house than between the indoor and outdoor spheres and, to a certain extent, the areas of activity detected indicate a centripetal organisation. In this sense, the common presence of burial sites within the patios is remarkable, especially since stratigraphic sequences such as those unearthed at Unit 14 demonstrate that it was the result of complex depositional processes. This makes it quite evident that the corpses of ancestors were not socially dead but were continuously taken out from their tombs, shown, worshipped, fed, and buried again. What is more, this archaeological bundle indicates that they were part of daily activities, and the material configuration of the burial site generated a permanent interaction with the living.

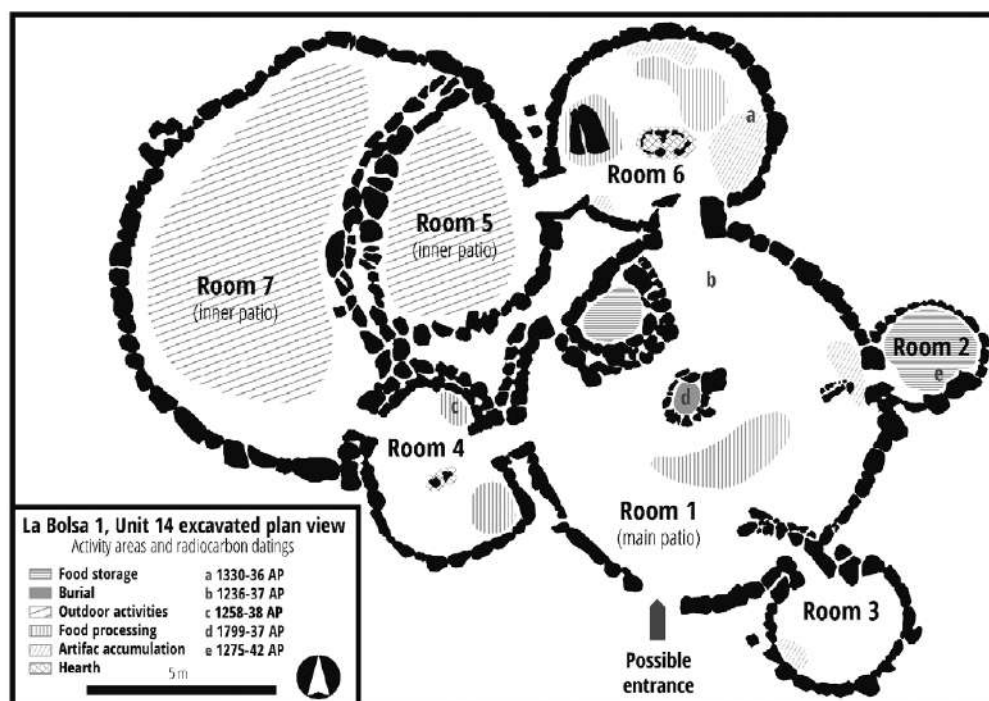


Figure 2: Planimetric plan view of Unit 14, La Bolsa 1 site, indicating areas of activity identified by Salazar (2010); note that not all attached rooms had identical functions, at least during the last occupancy prior to the abandonment of the structure. All AMS radiocarbon analyses were made from charcoals on the occupation floor, except for the dating of the burial site.

Indeed, this characteristic has consistently been bound together with the cultural interpretation of the other prominent element of the Tafi archaeological record: the carved monoliths, confusingly called *menhirs*. It is highly likely that these stones are to be identified as *wanka* or lithified ancestors (Duviols 1979; García Azcárate 1998). According to this widespread Andean belief, after death some people turn into stone with a specific ancestral status and are used by the living as strong landmarks of identity, territoriality and fertility. Unfortunately, despite these monoliths being recognised as early as the 19th century, relatively little information was recorded about their original location. Given that more than a hundred of them were relocated en masse to La Angostura during the nationalistic military process of the 1970s, and then to an archaeological park at El Mollar, any possibility of further spatial analysis is virtually impossible, although it is known that between thirteen and sixteen pieces were recovered around the Casas Viejas Mound and that others were found within household contexts.

Indeed, the Casas Viejas Mound is an outstanding entity and, of course, its discovery has traditionally influenced the entire social interpretation of this archaeological culture. Also located at El Mollar, within the south-eastern quarter of the valley, the mound was partially excavated by González and Núñez Regueiro (1962) and was interpreted as a ceremonial centre. It is mostly made up of consumption debris and, leaving aside the aforementioned monoliths, some inhumations were also found, presumably from a slightly later time with respect to the dating of its construction. Given this characterisation, according to current social theories for Andean prehistory (Tartusi and Núñez Regueiro 1993; Tarragó 1999), the presence of such a “central spot” has been used to hold, to some extent, the hypothesis of an emerging ritual chieftainship over Tafi communities. But only *to some extent* because the evident homogeneity both of pottery and architectural features throughout the chronological sequence, in turn, has prevented the furthering of the model, as was the case for other nearby regions such as Ambato, in the province of Catamarca (*cf.* Cruz 2007; Laguens 2014; Gordillo 2007; Zuccarelli 2012). Bearing this in mind, Núñez Regueiro’s first proposals in the 1970s consisted of a neo-evolutionistic explanation with a two-phase development named after the sites of La Angostura and Carapunco and relying mostly on the presence or absence of certain ceramic typologies. Under this framework, the early dates for the Casas Viejas Mound placed its ceremonial use in the La Angostura phase but, above all, it emphasised a *cultural stasis* for Tafi communities throughout the First Millennium AD.

The 1980s witnessed the appearance of a processual approach which reverted the former by proposing a hypothetical process of increasing social complexity based on settlement patterns. Unfortunately, however, it was based entirely on surface data, which was virtually the only option available. Again, Berberían and Nielsen (1988) distinguished two models, with chronological implications. In the first one, known as Tafi I, based on the Carapunco site pattern which is strongly centred on the household and is, therefore, widely scattered, agricultural strategy is extensive and there is little investment in infrastructure. Given that the polynucleated domestic groups seem to be quite clearly self-sufficient, the model proposes a slow vegetative growth which is reflected archaeologically in the progressive aggregation

of rooms and other unroofed areas in domestic compounds around a main patio. During a later stage of evolution, known as Tafi II, based on the La Bolsa site pattern, this growth led to a concentrated settlement pattern and the emergence of true villages. Nevertheless, this higher level of social integration, which supposedly developed after *c.* 500 AD, also lacks any archaeologically recognisable hierarchies. Therefore, the intra-social segregation had to be restrained in some way.

The crux of the question is that, as is the case with other materialistic paradigms, Processualism pays little or no attention to problems such as the social and cultural mechanisms securing this restraint and therefore reproduces the depoliticisation of non-hierarchical societies. As a result, these sorts of interpretations are quite compatible with the apriorism by which all social order tends towards a rationalistic centralisation, as materialised at the Casas Viejas Mound and its presumed ritual chieftdom. However, the specific cultural grounds of any reason, the character and the logic woven behind a given centre, are seldom truly explored.

In addition, this objection is fully coherent with the conclusions drawn from one of the most important systematic surveys carried out, not by chance, at the La Bolsa and Carapunco sites by an archaeological team from the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC), once directed by Berberían and Nielsen, whose main authors point out that (Franco Salvi *et al.* 2014, 318):

“The narratives which deal with the social process experienced by the First Millennium inhabitants of the Tafi Valley have some elements in common. Basically, a significant rupture between modes of social organisation, cultural patterns and ways of producing is expected [...]. But the observation of this rupture in the material record is, at least, blurry. The evidence presented here (pottery, architecture, radiocarbon dating, etc.) leads us to think that such a rupture has little empirical basis”.²

This is not to mention the fact that the first amendment to the “increasingly centred polity” hypothesis arises more quickly as the centre begins to be decentralised, such as when this survey found another mound at La Bolsa, in the northern half of the Tafi Valley.

Revisiting the Tafi “pathways”

One of the major projects of the UNC team over the course of the last few years has been the full topographical recording of surface evidence in wide areas of the valley. The aim is not only to document the current archaeological remains, but also to provide the necessary basis for carrying out a comprehensive spatial analysis and for planning further, more in-depth, interventions. Last but not least, the survey of archaeological remains constitutes one of the cornerstones of the collaboration with native communities, fostering mutual knowledge, comprehension and the preservation of heritage within their territory.

Given these aims, a single topographical form was designed. Among other descriptions and numerical identifiers, it comprises fields on “shape” (circular, linear or rectangular structures, stone pile, canal or fixed grinding element), a preliminary “functional interpretation” (patio, room, isolated hut, corral, platform

2 All translations from Spanish by the author

Shape
> Polygon
>> Area in square meters
>> Chrono-typology
0. No data
1. Formative room
2. Formative patio
3. Formative isolated
4. Formative productive
5. Historic
6. Second millennium prehispanic
7. Formative house cluster (addition of [shape/polygon/chrono-typology/1+2])
8. Stone pile
> Point
>> House cluster (centroid of [shape/polygon/chrono-typology/2])
>>> Magnitude index (number of attached [shape/polygon/chrono-typology/1])
>> IPS (centroid of [shape/polygon/chrono-typology/4])
>>> Magnitude index (mean of [shape/area in square meters])
>>> Arrangement in a cluster (centroid of [shape/polygon/chrono-typology/3])
0. No data
1. No
2. Yes
>> Isolated hut
>> Grinding element
>>> Type
0. No data
1. Vertical pressure
2. Horizontal pressure
>>> Arrangement in a cluster
0. No data
1. No
2. Yes
> Polyline
Degree of intervention
0. No data
1. Mapped from aerial or satellite imagery
2. Topographed
3. Surface gathering
4. Pit test
5. Excavated
Topographic series
0. Out of series
1. La Bolsa 1
2. La Bolsa 2
3. La Bolsa 3
4. Carapunco 1
5. Carapunco 2
6. Carapunco 3
Dating
0. No
1. By diagnostic artifact (only applicable when [Degree of intervention/3] or further)
2. By radiocarbon
Notes (text field)

Table 1: Organisational diagram for Tafi GIS, itemizing the categories employed in this study as well as some bases for future developments. With this in mind, the conversion from polygons into points for analytical purposes should be noted, especially in the case of house clusters. Also worthy of note is its potential as an archaeological chart.

field (*andén*), enclosed field (*canchón*) or indeterminate) and a preliminary “chronological adscription” (Formative, Regional Development, Inca or Historical periods). In this way, it was grounded on the proven chrono-typology designed by Berberían and Nielsen, and adapted by Salazar (2010) and Franco Salvi (2012). However, the new form introduces some slight differences: it is centred on architectural features regardless of their integration into larger built compounds, as a characteristic facilitating subsequent GIS processing. Indeed, despite this objective necessarily being postponed for the time being, these kinds of exercises may, in the near future, support the development of a more comprehensive archaeological chart. Hence, the emphasis placed on including some remains beyond those belonging to the Formative. A quick look at the organisational GIS diagram (table 1) will confirm this, whilst showing at a glance the internal structure of our data.

As mentioned above, the survey is limited to the northern edge of the valley, specifically to the hillsides of La Bolsa and Carapunco, the archaeological landscapes of which lay the basis for the cultural-ecological perspective on the history of the Tafi communities. Surface gathering of sherds and test pits carried out alongside the topographical survey do not reveal any significant chronological differences between the two sites (Franco Salvi *et al.* 2014). Therefore, whilst waiting for deeper open-area interventions, the “synchronic apriorism” still remains unavoidable. What is more, it seems to be the only meaningful approach at the present time. Therefore, the analyses presented here were carried out with the data from the two sites jointly, scattered over an area of almost 750 hectares. This sample (figure 3) comprises 155 house clusters (HC) with more than 550 rooms, 303 productive closed-structures among corrals and *canchones* (in fact, most of them probably served both functions alternatively so, for analytical purposes, were grouped as indeterminate productive structures (IPS)) and 71 isolated huts (IH), the function of which remains unclear. In addition, there are some constructed remains which are not currently included in the study, such as stone piles resulting from the *andenería* outfitting, fixed grinding elements and, above all, the *andenería* itself, which is not always well-defined on the surface. Finally, the La Bolsa Mound was also included: the *circumstances of its centrality* are, precisely, what we are trying to define.

Given that the household was quite obviously fundamental in Tafi communities, the study of the latter as a whole necessarily has to begin with the former. In this way, house clusters are reflected in the GIS taking the centroid of its main patio. A basic way of comparing them, given the state of our knowledge, is by a magnitude index equivalent to the number of roofed rooms attached to make up the cluster. In addition, it is important not to forget the fact that this index does not imply any direct demographic statement. In the case of La Bolsa 1, Unit 14, Salazar (2010; *cf.* Sampietro and Vattuone 2005) found that only two rooms contained a hearth, while another two were inner patios for these rooms, accessible exclusively through each room. Another was possibly a sort of storeroom. And the last one had been altered too much to be able to state anything about the activities carried out in it. Certainly, this picture belongs to the last occupation of the building before its abandonment around the end of 8th century and shows decisively the kind of problem we are dealing with.

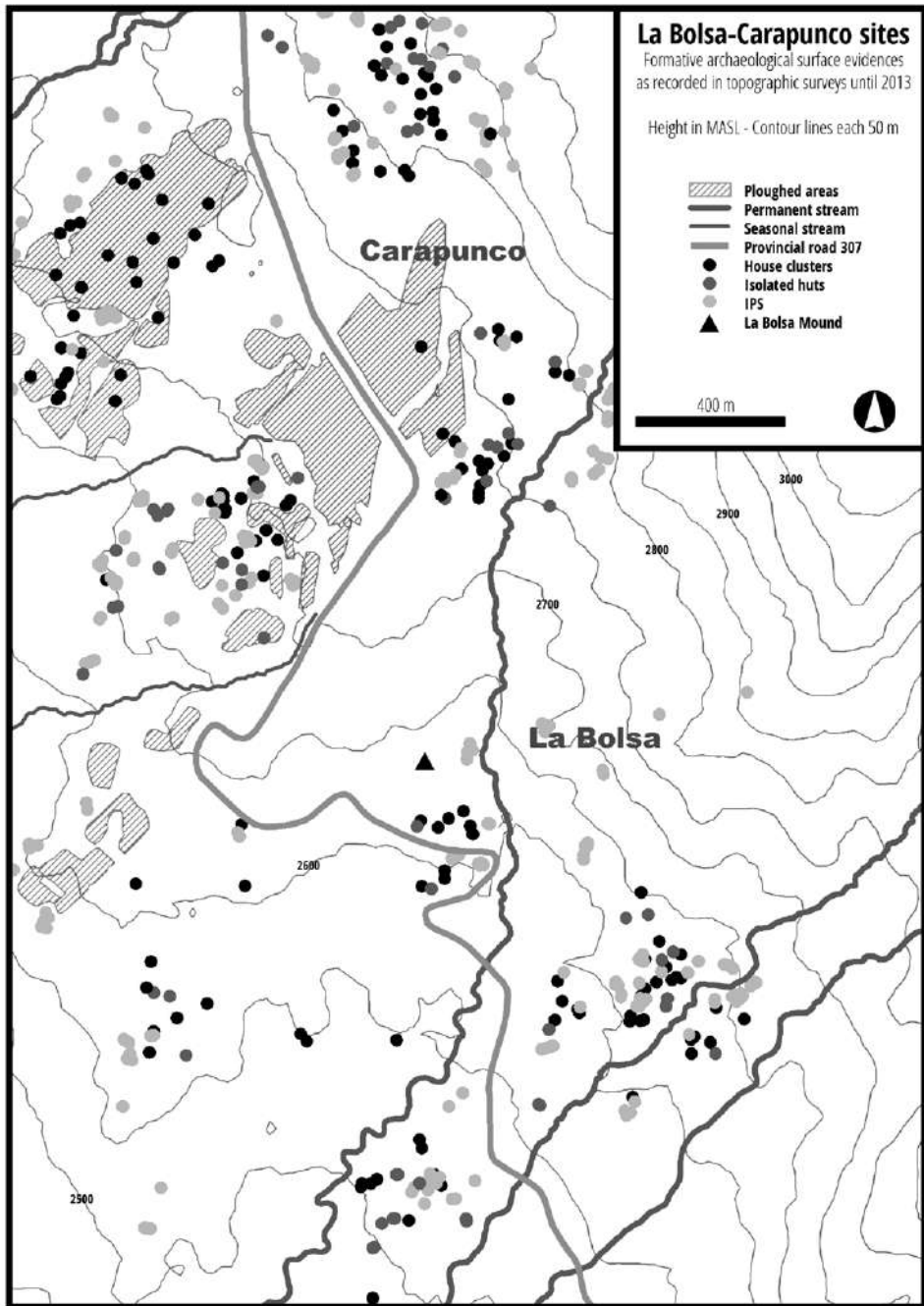


Figure 3: Formative evidence on the hillsides of Carapunco and La Bolsa in the northeast of the Tafti Valley. Despite the fact that other types of structures are partially visible on the surface and, hence, were recorded topographically, analyses presented in this study revolve around house clusters, indeterminate productive structures (IPS) and isolated huts, and their spatial relation with the La Bolsa Mound.

Magnitude index	Number of house clusters	%	Number of attached rooms	%
1	18	12%	18	3%
2	23	15%	46	8%
3	44	28%	132	25%
4	24	15%	96	17%
5	24	15%	120	22%
6	15	10%	90	16%
7	6	4%	42	8%
8	1	1%	8	1%
Total	155	100%	552	100%

Table 2: Some figures on the magnitude indexes of the house clusters sampled, and the allocation of attached rooms among them.

Most HCs, specifically 58% of the whole sample (table 2), have between 3 and 5 attached rooms. Less than a third of clusters have less than 3 rooms with only 5% of the HCs presenting 7 or more rooms. Their distribution on the map stresses the gaps between major units which, with the exception of the couple formed by the only eight-roomed house cluster and an adjacent seven-roomed one at Carapunco 1, to the northeast of the road, are located at an average distance of 400 to 600 m. The same is true for the nucleations they form, as can clearly be seen in a density analysis. If the directional distribution of settlements is taken into account (as shown in a standard deviation ellipse for HC points, weighted by its magnitude indexes), an orographic pattern is confirmed (figures 4 and 5). Above all, the Formative population appears to have been spread according to the parallel boundaries of the southern foothills of the Cumbres Calchaquies, to the east, and the upper Tafi river, to the west. There are, furthermore, no “central” inhabited structures or clusters, but rather a wide clear space between the La Bolsa Mound and the median centre of the sample.

In accordance with the relationship of this settlement pattern with the mound, the Tafi landscape could be characterised as centrifugal, due to the fact that this singular structure (and, therefore, the political centre it may represent) is outlined more as a common space than as a hierarchical magnetic pole. In fact, its location close to the southern rim of a slight depression both dissociates the spot from the nearer inhabited area, at La Bolsa 2, around 100 m to the south, and negatively determines its viewshed (figure 6). None of the northern settlements can be seen from the top of the mound and, despite some scattered HCs also being visible to the southwest, the only noteworthy nucleation is the distant sector of La Bolsa 1. Therefore, this architectural *unicum* can definitely not be considered as a strategic control entity. For the same reason, the mound itself is not a highly perceived spot in the landscape. Indeed, it should be remembered that it was not archaeological noticed until the UNC’s topographical surveys. However, the huge field where it is located was, perhaps, a little more prominent. Thus, turning to the cumulative viewshed derived from the addition of the visible areas from each HC (figure 7), the adjacent zone to the mound presents an index which is moderately higher than

that of many of the inhabited nucleations. However, in no way does the position of the mound stand out, nor it is comparable with the omnipresence of the Cumbres Calchaquíes. Furthermore, this analysis reveals a limited and relatively homogeneous intervisibility among house clusters.

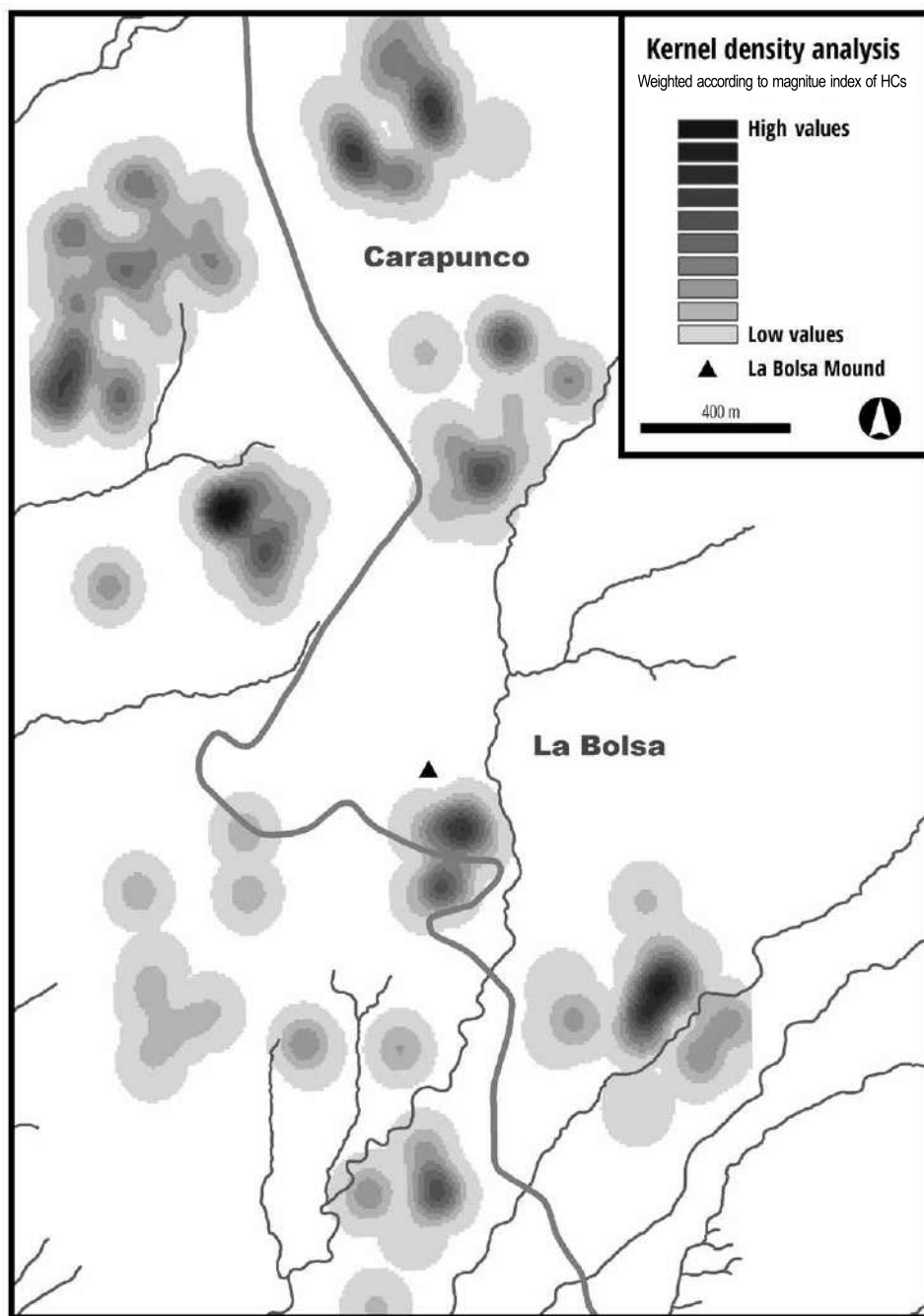


Figure 4: Kernel density analysis, weighted according to magnitude index of HCs.

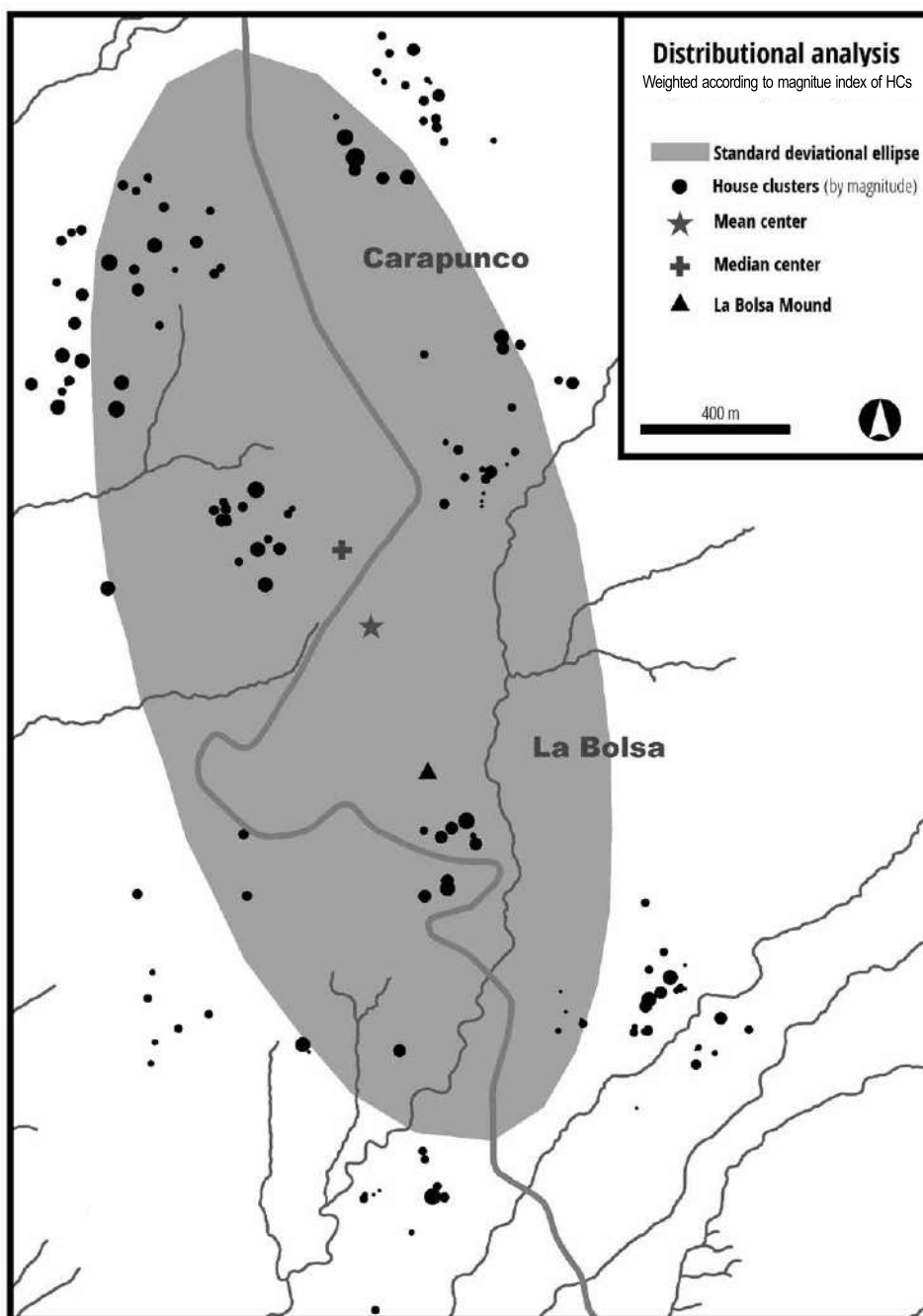


Figure 5: Distributional analysis, weighted according to magnitude index of HCs. It should be noted that the size of the points on the map also reflects the number of attached rooms composing each house cluster. It should also be noted that the shape of the standard deviational ellipse and, especially, the mean and median centres may vary if more data are added in further surveys from beyond the study area. In any case, current results seem to establish quite a definite logic. Therefore, no significant changes in meaning are expected despite the more or less mathematically centred appearance of the mound in the future.

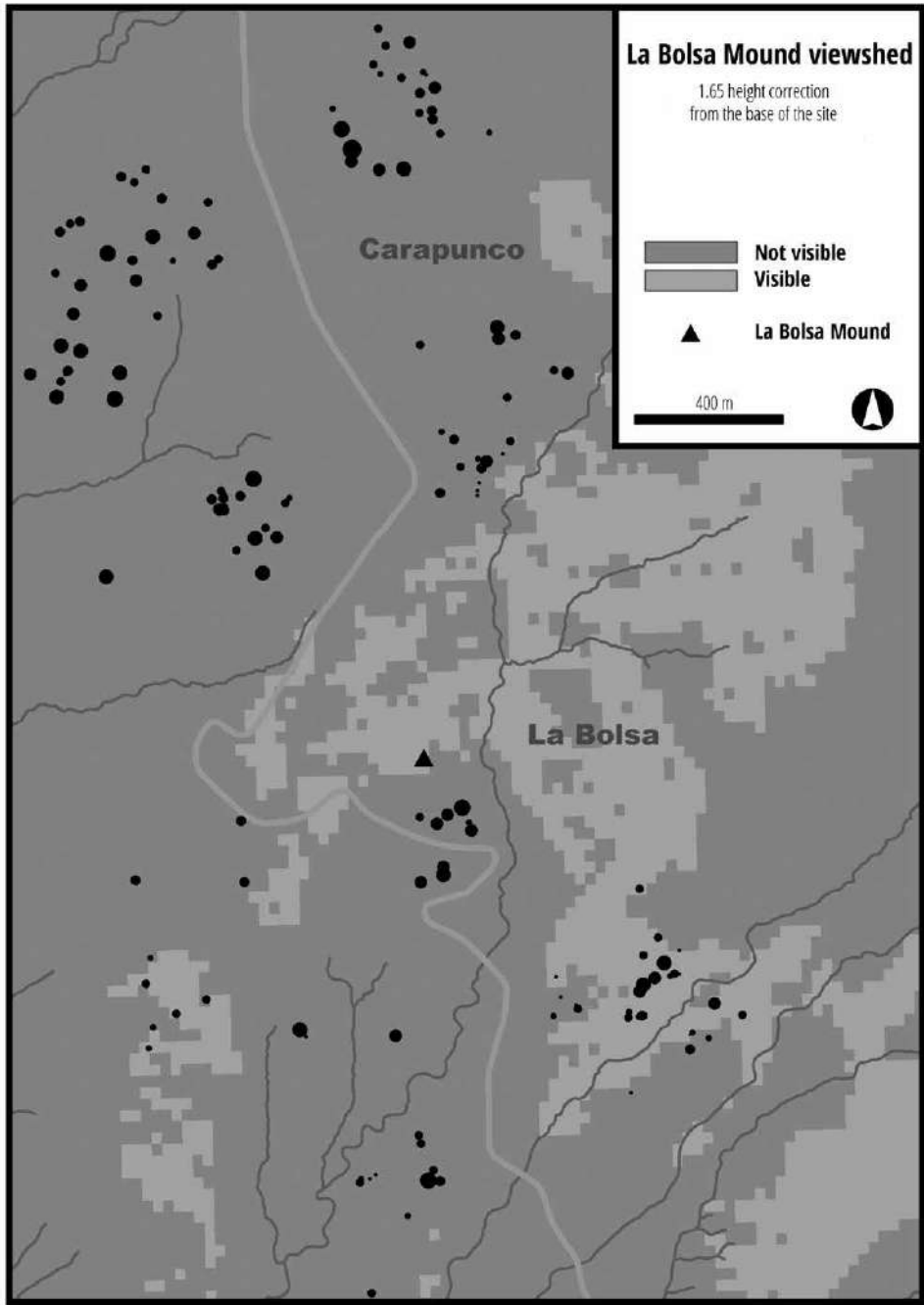


Figure 6: La Bolsa mound viewshed.

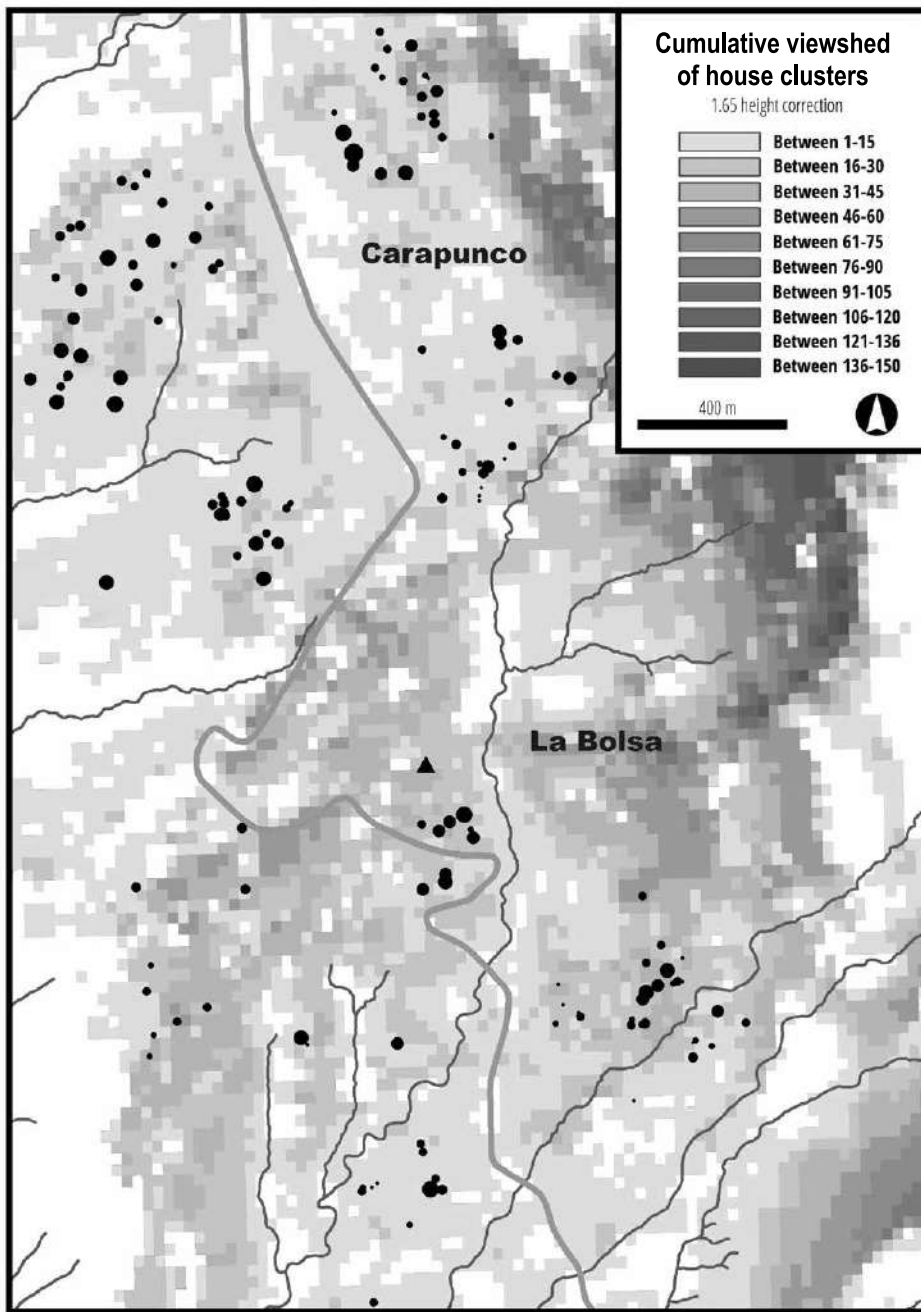


Figure 7: Cumulative viewshed resulting from the addition of the areas visible from each house cluster. Together with the viewshed of the La Bolsa Mound (figure 6), these analyses highlight the micro-topography of the slight hollow within which the mound is located and, therefore, its central but not dominant position in the archaeological landscape.

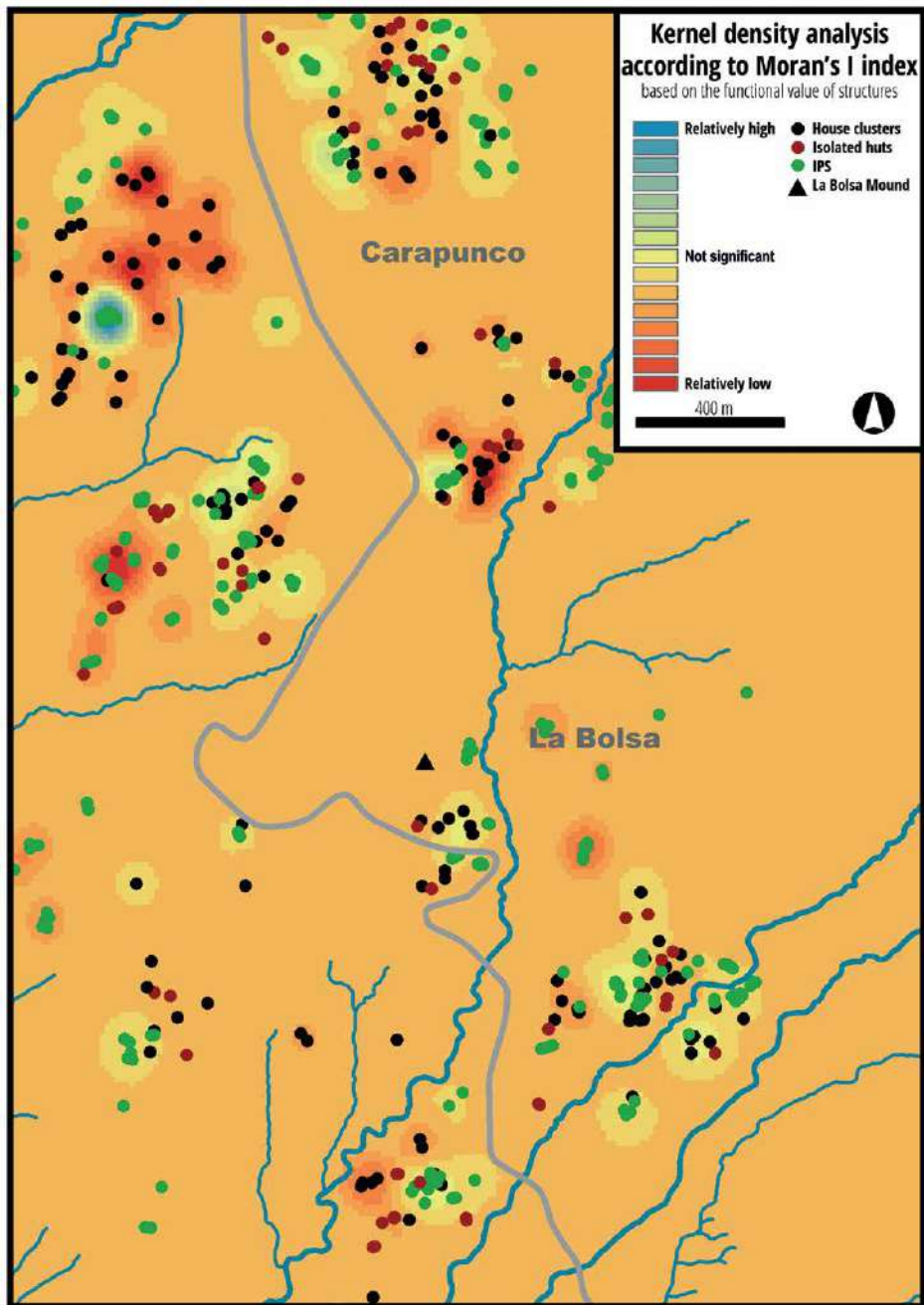


Figure 8: Kernel density analysis weighted by Moran's I index based on functional adscription; This can be compared with figure 3 in order to crosscheck the sharpest edges shown at Carapunco 2 with contemporary ploughed areas.

Some further remarks stand out from a Moran's I analysis regarding the functional adscription of the whole sample, also including IPSs and IHs (figure 8). As is known, the goal of this index is to set hot and cold points where a cluster of entities presents significant statistical variations in the spatial distribution of a given trait; the processing of the results by means of a density diagram shows those edges quite clearly. In fact, due to their relative softness, inhabited nucleations appear as more or less fuzzy spatial entities with permeable borders and even a low centripetal tendency towards themselves. It is certain that there is an exception at Carapunco 2 (to the northwest of the road) but if we take into account the fact that it is a ploughed area today, we can convincingly explain the lack of small units between the bigger and massive HCs, which are harder to remove by ploughing.

Finally, faced with the absence of a functional discretionality or any other maximal structuring focal points, the Formative landscape of Tafi (or, at least, the northern edge of the valley) seems to be something else besides "centrifugal": it is "continuous". In a cultural environment such as this, each household arises as the main central spot for the practices of its inhabitants, and probably also their self-representations: their *primary social identifiers*. Or at the least, it arises as the best defined and, therefore, the strongest one despite the *feasible possibility of some kind of middle-range grouping* which may be coherent with the nucleation instance, to some extent and degree, which, for sure, is still undefinable.

Discussion: Centrifugal landscape, continuous landscape and savage polities

Having reached this point, it is time to resume the thread started in the introduction by turning towards the ethnographic record of the neighbouring Amazonian lowlands and beyond. If we take for granted the fact that all human groups live, and have always lived, as a distinctive trait of cultural-semiotical gregarious animals, according to structuring-structured institutions, the government of stateless societies has traditionally been a major concern in both Anthropology and Prehistory. It is quite notable that the polysemic sense of "government" may imply here a biased interpretation. It refers to *the ruling faction* of a society, *the powerful*, although it also refers to the *system of political power* and this does not necessarily entail the existence of such kinds of factions. This is where Clastres comes in. In *Society against the State* he wondered about the inner logic of the so-called "savage society"; and the beginning of the answer could not be more suggestive: "power is exactly what these societies intended it to be. And as this power is -to put it schematically- nothing, the group thereby reveals its radical rejection of authority, an utter negation of power" (Clastres 1989, 43). Perhaps it is a somewhat naive starting point, but it had been dangerously forgotten until then.

First of all, his approach meant a radical development of Sahlins' intuitions regarding the under-productiveness of the Domestic Mode of Production, and hence the dismissal of every hypothesis relying primarily upon economic causality (Clastres 1994, 105-118; Sahlins 1972). Indeed, even the chieftainship models suggested in "Poor man, rich man, big man, chief" were put under quarantine by its own author due to the reasonably expected interferences in the indigenous political behaviour once they had been colonised by Europeans (Sahlins 1963,

291n13). Indeed, later Melanesia ethnographers and historians have stressed other sources of “power” as the backbone of politics, especially those exhibiting a given agent in a more or less specific *transcendence towards a sphere of significance beyond the cultural idea for “humanity”* (cf. Needham 1976; Dureau 2000; Lindstrom 1984; 1990; Görlich 1999), with certain economic practises being its epiphenomena, particularly those related with an *out-of-human-logic scale of consumption* (cf. Bataille 1988). All of this is entirely coherent with Clastresan statements on Amazonian chieftaincies, namely that their political sphere is arranged in the knowledge that “power”, in other words, the hazy social attribution referred to in our culture as “power” is essentially a manifestation of natural, non-human agency, the same that gives birth to the universe and, therefore, to the laws within which the community-of-the-humans lives.

“Hence, far from giving us the lacklustre image of an inability to resolve the question of political power, these societies astonish us by the subtlety with which they have posed and settled the question. They had a very early premonition that power’s transcendence conceals a mortal risk for the group, that the principle of an authority which is external and the creator of its own legality is a challenge to culture itself. [So] on discovering the great affinity of power and nature, as the twofold limitation of the domain of culture, Indian societies were able to create a means for neutralizing the virulence of political authority”. (Clastres 1989, 44-45)

In his eyes, those means consist mainly of maintaining the chief completely overwhelmed, crushed in his social intercourse within the community, while outside it, a fierce war is carried on against the “other”, according to the aforementioned centrifugal logic.

Maybe, if Clastres had not passed away prematurely, he would have deepened his theoretical formulation in order to resolve some voids and imbalances, which have been fairly pointed out. For example, Criado (2014) points out that, though inspiring, Clastres’s toolkit is still somewhat vague for any direct analytical application. In my opinion, this is completely true, and is rooted in a poor systematisation of the dynamics woven between “power” and “authority”, two quite different phenomena or, again, in the distinction between “dominancy” as put by Ethnology, and “domination” as a structured, coercive mutation in the intersection of authority and violence. What is more, perhaps driven by the “typological thought” denounced by Nielsen (1995), Clastresan statements have, too frequently, been taken as holistic social types instead of logics weaving the social tissue. Notwithstanding this, there is a lesson to be learned from Clastres’s anarchist Anthropology: having paid attention to what savage societies tell us by themselves, there is a kind of political behaviour which cannot be properly termed; it is *neither prestate, nor stateless, but counterstate politics*.

However, what can this tell us about Tafi?

From my point of view, it is quite evident that a human group living under such demographic pressure simply cannot do without some kind of “rule of law”. In fact, the community-of-the-humans is, above all, a moral communion found in mutual self-identification. This is why Gluckman (1973, 230-231) clarifies Evans-Pritchard’s Nuer paradox by stating that *if anarchy is ordered, it is because there is law*. This is a point easier to express in languages which make a distinction herein,

as does Latin, between *ius-lex* or the like. However, this does not entail the cultural recognition of any social agency invested with the power to create and manipulate this law. Recently, it has been recalled, after Nielsen, that “domestic architecture is one of the most effective means of spreading messages regarding identity, so it is actively handled in the negotiation of power” (Oliszewski *et al.* 2013, 42-43). Despite the still undefined use of “power” (which can probably be better explained in a wider sense, as political intercourse), for Oliszewski’s team the more or less homogeneous materiality throughout the Tafí Valley and its adjacent areas may imply some sense of community beyond the local nucleations. This hardly means that all Tafí-pattern house clusters and settlements conformed to a single polity, but it gives a clue on the area, where we can expect similar kinds of political behaviour.

In fact, evidence recorded at La Bolsa-Carapunco fits in well with a Clastean scenario. There is a proliferation of multiple self-centred, well-defined focal points, quite similar to one another, in which daily life took place. At the same time, these places acted as identifiers as is suggested by the management of burials within their patios. Consequently, house clusters seem to perform, at the same time, *the minimal and the main political role*, shaping a more or less continuous landscape in which no sharp-edges are noticeable. This in spite of the strong possibility of the existence of some instance of intermediate social grouping. If so, however, it seems to be beyond doubt that “village” and “segment” would be excessively heavy labels, at least until further archaeological investigation sheds more light on the precise character behind this more or less vague centripetal dynamic. However, at the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the actual extent of the statism of such social institutions is far from our all too frequently sclerotic views. Especially since, even in such classic cases as *The Nuer*, what is emphasised by a clear-eyed ethnographic observation is the *strategic processes of identification within a set of shared cognitive values*. Hence, “political relations are relative and dynamic. They are best stated as tendencies to conform to certain values in certain situations and the value is determined by the structural relationships of the persons who compose the situation” (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 137; *cf.* Karp and Maynard 1983).

In one way or another, it is here that the La Bolsa Mound, the uniqueness of which is self-evident, arises in a very different central role. As, without a doubt, was the case of Casas Viejas, the mound and the fields around it appear better defined as a scenario in which the collective ties are dramatized, bonding a political community which reproduces a counterstate logic while also securing the integration of a growing population; that is to say, one which enlarges, beyond Clastres’s case studies, the self-identifying group within which some kind of human law is recognised and arbitrary violence is discouraged, albeit not at the cost of increasing domination. Hence the restraint noted by Berberían and Nielsen. Even though the La Bolsa Mound was also an arena in which internal tensions are shown, negotiated, or simply fought, they would have run on behalf of dominance within a framework of fluid power and non-coercive forms of authority. This, in turn, gives back the full adaptive sense to Tafí polities from a point of view which is coherent with the objectives of the inhabitants of this landscape, rather than with a historical teleology towards the State. All things considered, perhaps

it is time to start analysing the emergence of the State as an accident, as the blockage of the political fluidity during some kind of environmental cataclysm; and the so-called failed processes as the strictly normal aftermath for the cultural community-of-the-humans.

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