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Chapter 6: The *Pueblo de Indios* and San Pedro

The town of Masca moved location at least twice in the colonial period: first from the coast to a location north of the modern town of Choloma, then to within two leagues of the known location of colonial Ticamaya. In the process, it also changed its full name from San Pedro de Masca to Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria. What did not change, however, is what, for the pueblo de indios, constituted a town: houses, cornfields, cacao trees, and church. Building on this indigenous definition of what made a town, this chapter will also look at the relationship between San Pedro and Masca at this time. What new social fields arose as a result of the new proximity of Masca to the Spanish city?

I will also talk about the continued importance of cultivating cacao for use, not just in Candelaria, but also in all the region’s Indian towns (especially Jetegua, Despoloncal, Santiago and Ticamaya). Comparison to Lenca ethnography will show how cacao, important for field agricultural rituals in the twentieth century, may have been valued for similar reasons in the colonial past as well.

The indigenous people were allocated under the encomienda system by assignment of whole communities, rather than individuals. These were the residents of distinct *pueblos de indios*, a term developed to describe legally regulated towns where, in theory, only indigenous residents would be found. Solórzano Fonseca (1985:93) writes that pueblos de indios were established during the second half of the 16th century as a consequence of the process put under way beginning with the "New Laws", in 1542...we could say that the colonial indigenous communities constituted a synthesis of the previous prehispanic village organization in combination with the new dispositions established by the political will of the colonial administration....the indio was subject to a determined pueblo de indios, subjected to a series of obligations and the control both of the colonial authorities as well as of the local indigenous authorities. Their essential characteristic was their category of *tributary*. (my translation; emphasis original).

He goes on to outline the ideal structure of pueblos de indios (Solórzano Fonseca 1985:94-98), beginning with governance by a cabildo made up of alcaldes, regidores, alguaciles, and justicias, modeled on Spanish precedents, charged with collection of tribute and oversight of land use by residents (see also Solorzano Fonseca 1982; Quezada 1985). Pueblos de indios held a common economic reserve, although over time, the control
and administration of this resource moved out of control of the local population. Solórzano (1985:118-121) also acknowledges a key role in the life of the pueblo de indios for the church. In contrast to the position taken in this study, he characterized the church as responsible for spreading an ideology of subordination, making it clear that he sees the church as contrary to indigeneity. This extends to an analysis of cofradias that emphasizes the way that they were sometimes manipulated by Spanish authorities and church officials to extract funds from pueblos de indios, without any consideration of the experiential dimension of community that they might foster.

Kicza (1988:474) recognized a very few studies at the time of his review that dealt with individual pueblos de indios, singling out the work of William Taylor as illuminating "the values, bonds, and tensions of Indian society and to show how these varied according to the type and degree of contact that villages had with the outside world". This summary reflects a traditional construction of the pueblo de indios as a closed community opposed to an equally uniform "outside". Kicza (1988:474) also noted the work of S. L. Cline on Culhuacan, dealing with "family structure and relationships, inheritance patterns, and social differentiation", based on wills by indigenous people.

It is in the context of maintenance of an autonomous república de indios that the legislation governing pueblos de indios was formulated. Keith (1971:439) pointed out that

the closest ties of the encomienda were with the corregimiento, in which the tribute system and the tradition of maintaining a separate república de indios were continued with some changes from the 1550s through the end of the colonial period.

Zeitlin (1989:24) discusses the variation in historical experiences of different indigenous towns, saying that

what remains to be explained satisfactorily is how some Indian groups managed to adapt themselves to dramatically different circumstances in ways that continued to support their cultural and linguistic separation from ladino society, while others, less successful at achieving a creative accommodation, saw their economic viability broken and their sons and daughters leave communities which no longer maintained ceremonial or social links to a distinctive tradition.

She cites work by Taylor (1974), Osborne (1973), and Grieshaber (1979) as exploring control of land as a factor in persistence of indigenous
communities. Lovell (1983:216) builds on Taylor's suggestion that there will not be a single historical trajectory of ever greater land dispossession in the transition from encomienda to hacienda, but rather a range from Spanish appropriation of land to indigenous retention of land, depending on local characteristics. Lovell's study of a region in highland Guatemala explicates the way that indigenous towns maintained communal title to land under Spanish law (Lovell 1983:220).

The 1711 and 1714 Petitions

The principal documentary sources for this chapter are petitions made by Masca in 1711 and 1714 (1714 AGCA A1.45.6 Legajo 368 Expediente 3413) in a land dispute with Juan de Ferrera. The outcome of these petitions is given in the Crown’s assent (1714 AGCA A1.24 Legajo 1581 Expediente 10225) which granted them the land they came to inhabit near Ticamaya.

In 1711, the Indians of the town of Masca thought they had settled a land dispute with their relatively new neighbor, Juan de Ferrera, over lands on which the Governor in Comayagua gave them permission to settle. Their move followed Antonio de Osaguera's delayed request for confirmation of his father’s encomienda, including Masca, in 1690. At the time, only eight encomienda grants totaling twenty-eight pueblos de indios still were listed in Honduras, including the then-unconfirmed but continuing Osaguera encomienda (AGCA A3.16 Legajo 190 Expediente 1927).

The Indians of Masca and Corporal Juan de Ferrera met in 1711 before Captain Juan Gutierrez, the teniente of the Governor of Comayagua, in the City of San Pedro, to subscribe to a land purchase of the site known as San Agustin, or later, the Estancia de San Agustin, by the indios of Masca, for 360 pesos. The 360 pesos was the equivalent of a debt that Juan de Ferrera owed to the Church. The Alcalde of Masca, Juan Chabacan, and Regidores Guillermo and Diego Chi, agreed to pay his debt within two years. This 1711 document is referred to in later documents as the “obligation” (compromiso).

It is in this context that we learn about the circumstances surrounding the movement of the town from its original location. Simon Cuculi, Mayor of Masca, in testimony from 1713 included in the 1714 petition tells us:

Our pueblo was in ancient times on the beach of the sea halfway between Puerto Caballos and Manabique, where the pirate enemy sacked and robbed it various times mistreating the sacred images and carrying off some families because of which and because we lacked spiritual care and our cura only
makes one visit each year it would be about 25 [years ago?] that, with a license from the Royal Justice we left to populate a place that they call Río Bijao, eight leagues from Puerto Caballos, inland.

[Nuestro pueblo fue antiguamente en la playa del mar en la mediania entre Puerto de Caballos y Manabique, donde el enemigo pirata les sacueo y robo diferentes veces maltratando las imagenes sagradas y se llevo algunas familias por lo qual y por que careciamos del pasto espiritual y sola una visita nos hacia nuestro cura cada año habra como veinte y cinco que con licencia de la Real Justicia salimos a poblar un parage que llaman Río Bijao, ocho leguas del Puerto Caballos, tierra adentro]

(1714 AGCA A1.45.6 Legajo 368 Expediente 3413, page 15)

In 1713, Simon Cuculi said it was 25 years ago (around 1688) when Masca moved to the Río Bijao location. A document listing payments from towns in all of the Audiencia of Guatemala in 1684/85 says of Masca:

That of Masca, if it is distinct from that of San Pedro Masca of the Corregimiento of Amatique, has to pay three reales; and if it is the same it need not pay a thing of these.

[El de Masca, si es distinto del de San Pedro Masca del Corregimiento de Amatique, ha de pagar tres reales; y de ser el mismo no ha de pagar cosa de condenaciones.]

(1685 AGI Guatemala 29 R. 2 N. 37)“.

This text could be used to argue that there were two Mascas at this time, one still on the coast, and one inland at the Río Bijao. More likely, the move from the coast to the Río Bijao location had already been authorized, and either had already happened, or was imminent. The coincidence in timing, just after the death of the encomendero Alonso de Osaguera in November 1682, is noteworthy; especially as the succession in encomienda was not immediately pursued and confirmed, the period starting in 1683 may well have allowed greater flexibility for the people of Masca. It may also be at this point that the patron saint of the pueblo de indios, previously San Pedro, was changed to Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria, a circumstance that would have added to the confusion expressed by officials in 1684-1685. After the questionable mention in this document there are no further references to a Masca along the coast during the colonial period.
In Simon Cuculi’s narrative, it was only 25 years ago that Masca was located on the Caribbean coast, increasingly being raided by pirates. Simon Cuculi particularly noted the attention the pirates paid to the town’s sacred images in their church, and commented on several families having been carried off. He also noted that their parish priest only visited them once a year because they were so far from San Pedro. This recalls the 1675 complaint from Masca in Chapter 4, about not receiving religious training from their encomendero Alonso de Osaguera. Part of the reason then offered was their distance from San Pedro, where the cura who ministered to the community resided.

In 1662, this might have been the result of a recent change in religious jurisdictions. There is some indication in Ximenez (1932, vol. 2, p. 20) that around 1600 a group of Dominican priests was stationed in Puerto Caballos by the Bishop of Comayagua to provide religious services and care for the indigenous communities along the north coast from Puerto Caballos as far west as Amatique in Guatemala. By the 1660s they were no longer there, and religious services and instruction for this region fell to the curate of San Pedro. Puerto Caballos itself may have been a vacant town for much of the 17th century, repopulated from San Pedro only when ships called at the port, because of pirate and privateer activities along Honduras’s north coast.

Interpolating from the 1711 and 1714 petitions, by no later than 1689 Masca had abandoned its location along the coast, and moved inland, closer to San Pedro, relocating initially to a location on the Río Bijao, where the road between San Pedro and Puerto Caballos crosses a river, north of modern Choloma. They did so with the permission of the Governor at the time.

It is not a small undertaking to move an entire town from one location to another. Simon Cuculi wrote:

And being populated with houses, church, and having formed some gardens and planted fields, the enemy entered by the Río Ulúa, and by night through the pass that is called Bardales entered into our pueblo and robbed us and carried off some tributaries.

[Y estando poblado con casas, yglesia, y formadas unas guertas y sembrados, entro el enemigo por el Río Ulúa, y de noche por el paso que se llaman de Bardales entro en nuestro pueblo y nos robo y llevo algunas tributarios.]

(AGCA A1.45.6 Legajo 368 Expediente 3413, page 15)
In Simon Cuculi’s timeline, it was about a decade later, in 1698, when with the express permission of the Governor Antonio de Ayala, and the permission of San Pedro, and, according to Simon Cuculi, with the consent of Juan de Ferrera, Masca moved from the Río Bijao location to a place called “boca del monte”:

We went to settle at the Boca del Monte in a plain in the midst of the said ranch (San Agustin) where for 16 years we have been settled with houses, church, cacao groves, platano fields, corn fields, and other and cultivated fields and plantings without in this time having had contradiction or harm, living in peace and the town growing, enjoying spiritual care with frequency.

[Salimos a poblar a la boca del monte en una sabana yn media a dicha estanzia [San Agustin] donde a dies y seis años estamos poblados con casas, yglesia, cacaguatales, platanales, milpas, y otros sembrados y plantios sin que en este tiempo ubiesemos tenida contradizion ni perjuizio, vibiendo en pas y aumentandose el pueblo, gozando de pasto espiritual con frecuencia.]

(1714 AGCA A1.45.6 Legajo 368 Expediente 3413, pages 15-16)

The name of San Agustin remains preserved in the name of a stream at the north end of Lake Jucutuma, north and east of San Pedro. The site where Masca moved is described as “en la boca del monte”, a description that matches the land immediately west of Lake Jucutuma, where a small plain is surrounded by low hills. This area is actually known today as El Boqueron. It was described as located on the road between San Pedro and the port town of Puerto Caballos, 4 leagues from San Pedro. This also fits the plain north of El Boqueron, which also matches the description of Candelaria as being two leagues from Ticamaya.

By 1711, the town was known formally as Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria de Masca, though the town officers still referred to it simply as Masca in documents from 1714. The change in the name of the town, from San Pedro Masca to Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria de Masca, may have something to do with having moved so close to San Pedro Sula. Having two towns named San Pedro so close together would have potentially created confusion.

The change in location was good for the town. They were able to establish new cacao groves, plantain groves, milpas, and other plantings, in
addition to building houses and a church. They indicated that they were still located on the road between San Pedro Sula and Puerto Caballos, and as such continued to act as watchmen to warn San Pedro of pirate activity.

But in February 1711, a dispute erupted between the occupants of Masca and Corporal Juan de Ferrera, the alleged landowner. Juan de Ferrera ran a cattle ranch, and his cattle were getting into the milpas and cacao groves, eating everything. Simon Cuculi, testifying in 1714, described the problem:

for three years the cattle of Juan de Ferrera owner of the neighboring estancia have been let into this area and it began to make notable damage to the cacao groves and other cultivated fields so much so that we did not realize a harvest and finding the pueblo afflicted we took advantage of the occasion of Juan de Ferrera to exonerate himself in a certain sense that he was obligated offering to remove the cattle within three months with which the pueblo would be obligated in the sense and in conformity to redeem the vexation that they suffered with the cattle and without knowledge of the quantity that is that of 360 pesos the alcalde who was in office in that season made the commitment and obligation.

Unfortunately for Masca, Juan de Ferrera died shortly after the compromiso was struck, and by 1714 his heirs were pressing for payment of the funds to the church. In this, they enlisted the aid of the priest, Juan Lopez de Chavarria, who threatened the people of Masca with excommunication for not paying the amount owed. So in 1713 they began, with the testimony of Simon Cuculi, to petition first the Governor of Comayagua, then the Audiencia of Guatemala for relief from the compromiso, which they characterized as an illegal document because it was not permitted for them to engage in such a contract for land. Anyway,
they argued, Governor Ayala had given them that land to live on, without objection by Ferrera at the time.

In the 1713 petition submitted in Comayagua for the Governor of the Province of Honduras, Enrique Logman, Simon Cuculi speaking “en nombre y en voz del comun y naturales de su pueblo [in the name and with the voice of the community and natives]” gave a power of attorney to Captain Don Miguel de Uria, a regidor of Guatemala, to act on their behalf. He attached copies of a decree in their favor by the Governor of Comayagua, and two additional background documents. He requested that they be supported in the possession of “the land they settled with a church [tierras que tienen pobladas con iglesia]” where they have lived for the last 12 years. Cuculi requested that the Audiencia nullify the obligation and that it declare they didn't have to pay the debt. They asked that the 365 pesos held by a third party in San Pedro, Captain Francisco Gomez de Tejada, be returned to them and that the ecclesiastical judge be required to reverse the excommunication if the priest had already acted.

In support of his argument, Cuculi again recited the history of the town, of its original location on the beach between Manabique and Puerto Caballos, of the move to the Río Bijao location 25 years previously, and how they were attacked yet again at that location, and how they then sought and obtained Governor Ayala’s permission to move to their current location, where they had been for the last 16 years. He argued that Juan de Ferrera did not remove the cattle, per the agreement, until 1712, and that as a result “with that time, the cattle destroyed the pueblo because we could not harvest, which is well known [con cuia tiempo se aniquilo el Pueblo por no lograr cosecha alguna como es publico].”

Simon Cuculi then cited the tenor of Reales Cédulas and the laws that instructed the colonial authorities to give native people the land that they needed for their towns, plazas, common land, sowing crops, and herding cattle. Cuculi cited the Recopilacion de Leyes de las Indias Book 4, Law 14, title 12 of the new edition which instructed colonial authorities to give Indians the lands they needed for their livelihood, and prohibited the sale of that land to others. He also cited Book 4, Law 16 as conditioning the sale of lands on the good and use of the nearby Indians, as well as Law 18. Cuculi also cited their service as watchmen greeting ships that arrived at Puerto Caballos.

In December 1713, the Governor of Comayagua, Enrique Logman, found in favor of the pueblo de Masca, and issued an order instructing the priest, Juan López de Chavarria, to refrain from pursuing the 360 pesos.
In May, 1714, the Fiscal in Santiago de Guatemala found for the residents of Masca, noting that under royal law, they could not enter into contracts, and that if the heirs of Juan de Ferrera really held a just title, which was unlikely, they should be required to show it, and then be compensated by lands elsewhere. On the 17th of May of 1714, the Audiencia found in favor of the Indians of the town of Masca, ordering that the heirs of Juan de Ferrera pursue any appeals of this decision to the justices of the Real Audiencia, and that the Governor of Comayagua ensure that the Indians of Masca were not charged any kind of rent. It granted them the land they lived on and used for subsistence.

Social Fields

The 1711 and 1714 petitions demonstrate that by moving, the pueblo de indios of Masca entered into a series of new social fields with the city of San Pedro Sula and the government of the province in Comayagua, all the while maintaining their ties to the Audiencia in Guatemala. Both petitions show that Masca, by positioning itself differently on the landscape, also positioned itself differently in its relationship to the city of San Pedro Sula.

As we saw in Chapter 4, in 1675 the residents of Masca, through their agent Blas Cuculi, petitioned the Audiencia in Guatemala to relieve them from the requests by residents of San Pedro Sula to provide labor. Their argument consisted of indicating that they already provided service to the crown through their participation in the coastal watch, and they owed and provided tribute to their encomendero, even though they were not receiving the religious instruction for which he was obligated to pay.

The Audiencia in Guatemala was where the earlier petition from Masca was first heard, and the Audiencia found in their favor, recognizing that their tribute to the encomendero was all that they owed and ignoring their argument about service in the coastal watch. Their complaints about not getting religious instruction caused the Audiencia on that occasion to ask the provincial government in Comayagua for an audit of the encomendero’s spending for religious education for the town. In 1675, the provincial government in Comayagua was inconsequential to the town, and the city of San Pedro Sula was too far away for its residents to interact regularly with the residents of Masca. The Audiencia in Guatemala was the first place they turned to for justice.

The 1711 and 1714 petitions transform that relationship. The first evidence of this is in the 1711 compromiso, a document written in San Pedro Sula with the participation of the provincial authority, Capitan Juan
Gutierrez Marquez, representing the Governor (Antonio de Monfort), and of Diego Herrera, then Alcalde and Regidor of San Pedro. This could be the same Diego Herrera who had previously represented Masca's encomendero, Alonso de Osaguera, in collecting their tribute for him, or perhaps a son. The agreement carried out with the Alcalde and Regidores of Masca, Juan Chabacan, Guillermo and Diego Chi, and Marcos Chabacan, set a legal framework for the purchase of the land claimed by Corporal Juan de Ferrera (of the San Pedro militia) called San Agustin, by the Alcalde, Regidores, and “demas principales y comun”. The document noted that “parecieran los naturales del pueblo de la Candelaria y el cabo de esquadra Juan de Ferrera todos juntos en comun”: the people of Masca (or Candelaria) appeared along with Juan de Ferrera. The presence of the governor’s representative made the governor himself a super-addressee of the compromiso.

The “compromiso” was an agreement made by the entire community brought together with the seller of the land, in San Pedro, in front of a representative of the governor of Honduras. The people of the town took up a position as equals of Juan de Ferrera, able to make contracts, and engage in financial transactions other than the typical tribute. They told Capitan Juan Gutierrez Marquez that they (the town of Masca and Juan de Ferrera) had “discussed and arranged [tratado y concertado]” the purchase of San Agustin in exchange for paying Juan de Ferrera’s debt to the church within two years.

Not only was Masca in 1711 oriented to San Pedro as the first place to turn to receive justice, but also the people of the town saw themselves as potentially equal participants with Spaniards in the economic realm. Yet, two years later, in 1713, they found themselves launching a new petition.

This petition, featuring testimony by Simon Cuculi who by then was Alcalde of Masca, along with Diego Hernandez, regidor of Masca, was directed to the Governor in Comayagua. In some ways, it repudiated the position the town had taken as equal participants in the economy of the colony, by pointing out that it was against the law to sell lands that the Indians need to survive, that the law said to take into account the good of the Indians in any such sale. It required the Spanish authorities to give them the land that they needed. The authorities of Masca cited relevant book, section, and clauses from the Recopilacion de Leyes de las Indias, the rules that governed the colonies, and gave paraphrases of their meaning.

In this 1713 petition by Simon Cuculi, the people of Masca took up the position of Indians, demanding to be treated as Indians were supposed to be treated under Spanish law. They no longer claimed to be equals, able
to enter into contracts. They noted that the lands had been improved and planted in good faith for twelve or thirteen years and that it would put them back several years to leave their houses and church and go back to the old town (near the coast), to be at the mercy of the enemy and lacking in religious care.

By authoring the petition the people of Masca took up a position as supplicants of the Governor and as residents of the province of Honduras. Whereas in 1675 they ignored the Governor of Honduras in Comayagua, this time they recognized his authority and addressed their petition to him.

Moving Coastal Honduras

Because pueblo can be glossed as "town", we may think of “pueblos de indios” as fixed locations on the landscape, but in Northern Honduras, they were not. Instead, it is better to think of the pueblo de indios as a community, a people, who made their own place wherever they were through a series of practices.

Masca was not the only pueblo de indios to move in reaction to pirate and privateer activity along that coast. Both the pueblos de indios of Quelequele and Jetegua, located along the Ulúa and Chamelecon rivers, moved far inland as well. Jetegua reported being sacked by Dutch "pirates" in 1678 who took 40 residents as prisoner (1679 AGCA A1.60 Legajo 5364 Expediente 45339). The testimony offered makes it clear these were Dutch mercenaries serving the Spanish, who had been sent to Jetegua to get supplies. Among those giving testimony were Gaspar Sima, the alcalde of the town, and Luis Toquegua, a regidor. Their testimony indicates they went in search of a new place to locate the pueblo of Jetegua after this attack. It might be a coincidence, but this development dates to within a few years of Masca’s first move inland to the Río Bijao, which indirect evidence suggests happened between 1682 when their encomendero died, and 1684 when a tax was levied with some uncertainty about Masca's current location.

In 1709, Jetegua renewed their complaints, and petitioned to move the town to the region of Yojoa, well inland, where the enemy could not go:

Let your [officials?] give us another place called Yojoa which is good for growing cacao groves and as well, to plant gardens for our foods; sir, the cause of this request that we make for the transfer is that we are very afflicted and disconsolate from the invasions of the enemy privateers every day robbing us, sir. Now the Moskito Sambos are not lacking at the mouth of the
river and who took to Lemoa all the people, men and women on which occasion [they were] disconsolate; and every day afraid fleeing into the brush with the saints' images; and our women and children dying from the fright the sambos give us every day.

[Dexe sus ce nos concede otra paraxe que se llama Lloxoa que es propio para cenbrar cacaguatales y demas cenbrar huertas para nuestros alimentos señor las causas deste pedimento de que pedimos el traslado es que nos bemos y mui afligidos y desconsolados por las inbasiones del Enemigo casario cada dia robandonos señor Casas oy los sombos de le mosquittos que no faltan de la boca del Río y que llevaron a lemoa todo el pueblo onbres y mugeres por culla occasion desconsolados y cada dia sustados hullendo por los montes con los santos y muriendo nos nuestros ijos y mugeres con los sustos que nos dan los sanbos cada dia.]

(AGCA A1.12 Legajo 50 Expediente 493).

That Jetegua moved is incontrovertible. A map by Diego Navarro from 1758 in the AGI shows both the old and new locations of Jetegua along the Ulúa river, marked as "Jetegua" and "Jetegua Vieja" (Davidson 2006:115; 1758 AGI Mapas Y Planos Guatemala 49). While we have no documents petitioning a move, we see the pueblo de indios Quelequele relocated to the southern valley on the Diez Navarro map as well. Quelequele was originally located in the northern valley, along a river course that in the sixteenth century was a tributary of the Ulúa river. Today this channel is occupied by the Chamelecon River. The original location of Quelequele was just north of Ticamaya, near Timohol, where even today there are geographic features called Quelequele. In the Diez Navarro map, the town of Quelequele is in the southern valley, located near the confluence of the Comayagua River with the Ulúa, not far from relocated Jetegua.

Like Masca, one of the arguments that justified the relocation of Jetegua was the impact of uncertain conditions on their production of cacao. When Masca and Jetegua cited the destruction of their cacao groves or haciendas, they were doing more than making an economic argument: they were advancing a claim that has to be understood from an indigenous perspective, about the role of cacao in community life.
Cacao in Colonial Indigenous Practice

In 1713, when Simon Cuculi petitioned the governor of Comayagua to undo the 1711 compromiso, he stated

Sixteen years we are settled here with our houses, church, cacao groves, plantain groves, corn fields and other sown things and plantings….

[dies y seis añ.[os] estamos poblados con casas Yglesia Cacaguatales plantanales milpas y otros sombrados y plantios”]
(1714 AGCA A1.45 Legajo 368 Expediente 3413, page 16)

This claim was picked up and echoed by the lawyer given power of attorney in Guatemala, Salvador Cano, in 1714:

For 16 years my clients have been settled in the said place with houses and church, cacao groves and plantain groves, corn fields and other plantings which by the force of much toil and work they have acquired

[a diez y seis años que mis partes. estan Poblados en el dho. parage con Casas y Yglesia Cacaguatales Platanales Milpas y otros senbrados que a fuerza de mucho afan y trabajo an conseguido]
(1714 AGCA A1.45.6 Legajo 368 Expediente 3413 page 2).

This passage described the people's sense of Masca/Candelaria as a place situated in a landscape that was the product of their actions, an assemblage of houses, a church, and specific agricultural areas. Particularly noteworthy is the emphasis on cacao groves in the petitions by Masca and Jetegua.

Newson (1986), approaching the question from the perspective of the Spanish economy, considers it puzzling that cacao is still important this late in the colonial period. To understand the emphasis on cacao we have to take a different, local perspective. Cacao was being grown for cultural and social purposes. It perpetuated a regional network between the indigenous producers and consumers of cacao, and only secondarily was grown for tribute. The continued growing and use of cacao was one of the tactics of persistence used by the indigenous people of the lower Ulúa river valley.

Cacao had been grown and consumed in the lower Ulúa river valley for a long time. Its first appearance in Honduras is in the valley, about the time that the first settled villages were developing, where Joyce and Henderson (2007) argue that it was consumed as a fermented alcoholic
They confirmed cacao use through residue analysis of samples dating from 1150 BC to ca. 400 AD, and it is likely cacao was continuously used after that, although no samples have been tested to confirm this.

In the sixteenth century, the province of Ulúa entered Spanish accounts as one of the major cacao producing areas in Central America. Landa mentioned that a member of the Cocom lineage of Yucatan was spared being killed by the Xiu lineage because he was away trading on the Ulúa River (Landa 1941:39). Landa also said of the Maya of Yucatan that they liked trading “taking salt, clothing, and slaves to the land of the Ulúa and Tabasco trading everything for cacao and stone beads that were their money”. Many early Spanish records for Honduras mention abundant cacao along the Ulúa River. The Chontal manuscript account of Acalan-Tichel (Scholes and Roys 1948:372 and 391) attributes the following to Martin Cortés:

Ruler Paxbolon, I have come here to your lands, for I am sent by the lord of the world, the emperor who is on his throne in Castile, who sends me to see the land and the people with whom it is populated. I do not come for wars. I only ask you to facilitate my journey to Ulúa, which is Mexico, and the land where the silver (mistranslation of Yucatec word takin meaning gold) and feathers and cacao are obtained, for that is what I wish to go see.

[Rey Paxbolon, aqui he venido a tus tierras, que so enviado por el señor del mundo, emperador, que está en su trono en Castilla, que me envia a ver l tierra y de que gente esta poblada; que no vengo a guerras, que solo te pido me despaches para Ulúa, que es México, y la tierra donde se coge la plata y la plumeria y el cacao, que eso quiero ir a ver.]

Roys (1943) has previously used this passage to argue for the presence of Nahuatl speakers along the Ulúa. Alonso de Avila wrote in 1533 that “from the pueblo de Campeche and the provinces of Guayamil and Tutuxio and Cochuah all trade in cacao and other merchandise in the said Ulúa river….all trade of this land is in the Ulúa river” (Scholes and Roys 1948: 130, footnote 15). He went on to note that all of the above places maintained agents in the Ulúa to trade for them.

According to Diego Garcia de Celis, Çocamba was a grand merchant in cacao. De Celis described his town, Ticamaya, as “of great enterprise for the abundant cacao which they collect, that is the Guadalcana of the Indians
After the Spanish conquest of Honduras, pueblos de indios along the Ulúa River, and the pueblo de indios Naco, in the Naco valley, paid cacao in tribute. By 1588, cacao tribute was limited to towns along the lower Ulúa River (Despoloncal, Santiago Cocamba, Ticamaya, and Tibombo). Cacao continued to be paid in tribute throughout the 17th century from towns like Despoloncal (1591), Masca (1627, 1662), Timohol (1627, 1662), Quelequele (1627), Lemoa (1662), and Santiago (1662). Linda Newsom (1986:147, footnote 144) refers to this as a late continued practice of paying tribute in cacao, and calls it unusual in Honduras.

The 1711 and 1713-1714 petitions from Masca give us insight into the persistence of cacao cultivation in this region. Petitions from Jetegua provide even more clarity on why cacao cultivation was important. In 1679 Jetegua petitioned the government in Guatemala, citing the need for protection of their cacao groves:

Since we are vassals of your Majesty, with the fruits of the cacao that god gave us we give comfort to all the land and since we moved away to the uncultivated areas, so we are with the other towns fearing the second invasion in this time the harvest of cacao that god gave us was lost….We ask aid in the name of your Majesty (that god grant many years) because in any other way we would be forced to go away and seek a place to settle if we are not aided our haciendas of cacao would remain lost and the land would remain lacking in the fruits that god gave us.

The 1679 petition from Gaspar Sima (alcalde) and Luis Toquegua (regidor) and the rest of the nobles of the town of Jetegua calls cacao “the
fruits that god gave us” and says with them “we give comfort to all the land”. What did the people of Jetegua mean when they said “we give comfort to all the land”?

According to twentieth-century ethnography, modern Lenca use cacao in rituals, called compostura in Spanish, for the health of their agricultural fields (Chapman 1985). The modern Lenca towns involved, in central and southern Honduras, lie outside the zone in which cacao grows, so they must obtain cacao for these ceremonies from producers in low-lying areas, along the north coast of Honduras. Today, this is a market-based mode of acquisition. During the colonial period, in addition to market exchange, it is likely that informal exchanges following social relations between families and towns allowed cacao to move through the countryside. As late as the eighteenth century pueblos de indios in the Ulúa river valley were cultivating cacao, both for their own use, and for the use of others, potentially supplying towns far from the north coast.

The persistence of cacao production in northern Honduras puzzled Linda Newsom (1986), who expected it to die out by the end of the 17th century, as it did almost everywhere else in response to lower value in the Spanish market and a turn by European consumers toward plantations located closer to hand. The persistence of cacao production in Honduras might have something to do with cacao production never having been integrated in the late 16th century Spanish cacao exploitation centered along the Pacific coast from Central America to Colombia. Cacao from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Colombia was extensively traded to Mexico, where it was both consumed, and exported to Spain, but this trade declined in the 17th century, and production went back to being handled on an individual basis. In the Ulúa valley, a major prehispanic cacao growing area, pueblos de indios never abandoned cultivation even though the low Spanish population apparently never even attempted to maintain the large plantations of cacao that were present in the sixteenth century in the area.

When Jetegua says it comforted all the land it most likely meant they supplied cacao to the interior of the country to indigenous peoples for their use and consumption, just as towns in the north coast had done prior to the arrival of the Spanish. Smaller quantities of cacao were not seen by the Spanish as viable commercial levels of production, yet cacao continued to be an important part of the landscape of the lower Ulúa river valley to the turn of the nineteenth century. Honduran Bishop Candinaños, in 1791 (1791 AGI Guatemala 578) and Governor Anguiano, in 1804 (1804 AGI Guatemala 501) both comment on abundant “wild” cacao in the Ulúa
valley, and the fact that the local Indians used it every day. What appeared to these Spanish observers as "wild" may well have been managed groves.

The significance of cacao in persistence of indigenous communities can be seen in modern Lenca traditions about cacao. For the Lenca of central Honduras, cacao is a gift from god, given to them at the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Lenca storyteller Julio Sanchez told the story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Paradise, and the first "veneration of the earth" or compostura ceremony (Chapman 1986:15-20). Once they were out of Paradise, God gave Adam and Eve nine grains of corn and nine of beans, and said one of each a day will be enough for you to eat. As Adam cleared the land to plant these seeds, the trees he cut screamed and bled, then grew back overnight. God told Adam to build a ritual altar and that nine angels would arrive:

I am going to give you nine grains of dead maize and nine cups and one large jar will appear; throw one grain into each ...then go seek a wild turkey and two doves...look for a palm frond and throw a drop of palm juice into each cup and jar....In returning to where you have to go, you will find some pods. Cut them open right there. In the pods you will find some seeds. These are cacao.

[te doy ahora otros nueve granos de maize muertos y alla van a aparecer nueve copitas y un cántaro grande. En cada copita vas a echar un granito muerto (que se convertirá en chicha) y... los echen en el cántaro....ahora vas a buscar un pavo y dos palomas...Busca por allá ...una mata de palma. Vas echando una gotita del jugo del palma en cada copita y otra en el cántaro...en el regreso por donde vas a ir, hallarás unas bellotas, las cortas allá mismo. En las bellotas vas a ver unos granitos, estos son el cacao.] (Chapman 1986:17).

Nine angels showed up on time, and a tenth angel showed up late. They were served a meal that included chilate, a corn and cacao drink. Adam invited the angels to sacrifice the birds and they did so. The tenth angel then drank up the alcoholic chicha in the cups of the other nine angels. Everyone got drunk, and then the angels fought and went off at three in the morning. Adam went back to work clearing the field the next day and the vegetation didn’t cry or bleed or grow back. The spirits responsible had been compensated, Sanchez told Chapman.

Such agricultural field rituals are called composturas, literally a thing made up of many parts, a way of repairing that which is mistreated or
broken, and an agreement between parties (http://rae.es/compostura). All of these senses of compostura come into play in the Lenca use of the term.

For the people of Masca, as for the people of Jetegua and others outside the cacao-growing region, cacao beverages quite likely served purposes not explicitly recorded in Spanish texts, but implicitly echoed in the phrases that are indirectly cited in their petitions. Cacao was “the fruits that god gave us” with which “we give comfort to all the land”. Salvador Cano perceived the argument advanced by Masca as one reflecting the industry of the town: "other plantings which by the force of much toil and work they have acquired". The petitioner from Masca made no such reference to their labor. Instead, they link their cultivated place to freedom from harm, "living in peace and the town growing". Their references to cacao are in effect parallel to their references to the spiritual care from the cura that they claimed explicitly as a right, spiritual care that is in fact cited immediately after the descriptions of cultivated fields and the peace they allowed.

As we will see in Chapter 8, cultivation and use of cacao is not the only material practice through which the people of pueblos de indios in northern Honduras maintained and reproduced their own community history and identity. The people of Candelaria were drawn into a new set of fields around the new Spanish town of Omoa in the second half of the eighteenth century. Yet with the background provided by the examination of petitions through which the people of Masca and Candelaria recreated their own community under shifting conditions of Spanish administration prior to the founding of Fort Omoa, it is possible to recognize how what appear to be novel or even destructive practices of the late eighteenth century were actually means of coping, tactics of persistence.