



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Colonial Masca in motion: tactics of persistence of a Honduran indigenous community

Sheptak, R.N.

Citation

Sheptak, R. N. (2013, June 19). *Colonial Masca in motion: tactics of persistence of a Honduran indigenous community*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20999>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20999>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20999> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Sheptak, Russell Nicholas

Title: Colonial Masca in motion : tactics of persistence of a Honduran indigenous community

Issue Date: 2013-06-19

Summary

This study of an indigenous town in the district of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, long considered to have been the earliest part of Honduras to see indigenous people "disappear", places indigenous actors and communities at the center of colonial history. It combines the use of archival documents with evidence from archaeological excavations. Offering an anthropological analysis, it draws on concepts of dialogics, doxa, and practice to show how we can understand historically obscured people and histories.

Masca, later known as Candelaria, exemplifies the experiences of *pueblos de indios* that persisted from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries in Honduras' northern Ulúa Valley. The people of Candelaria identified with a local community as defined by the presence of their houses, church, agricultural fields, and cacao plantations. This community originally spoke a Lenca language scholars have called Toquegua whose use persisted in the community through the mid-seventeenth century. Their decision to use Spanish after this point did not affect their sense of community.

The community of Candelaria used a variety of tactics to persist in the colony. These included understanding and exploiting the colonial legal system to achieve community goals, the continued use of indigenous family names by community elites, moving the entire community to avoid violence, and exploiting the *casta* system to change the perceived identity of individuals including those from other *casta* groups marrying into the community.

Indian communities in the Ulúa Valley of Honduras underwent a population collapse during the sixteenth century. Those communities that persisted from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries were able to rebuild population throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and even into the nineteenth century when epidemics of cholera and measles along with civil unrest again took their toll.

At the scale of the valley a network of *pueblos de indios* integrated themselves in colonial society through service in a coastal watch, while resisting exploitation beyond the legal requirements of *encomienda*. The network of *pueblos de indios* of which Candelaria was a part served to perpetuate indigenous practices, most notably the cultivation, circulation, and use of cacao, likely for ritual purposes. The continued use of chipped stone tools by *pueblos de indios* in this network implies the persistence of exchange networks between *pueblos de indios*. The known circulation of people as in-marrying spouses among these *pueblos de indios* allowed for both the persistence of population and a sharing of colonial experiences.

Successful tactics of persistence likely circulated between communities through these flows of people.

The viability of Spanish jurisdictions like San Pedro Sula and later Omoa depended on *pueblos de indios*. This is most visible in their service in the coastal watch, which is repeatedly cited as the basis for consideration of legal claims presented by the people of Candelaria/Masca. Especially in the later colonial period it is evident that the *pueblos de indios* exploited the possibilities for commerce created by conflict between European powers. *Pueblos de indios* participated in the receipt of contraband shipments, which would have given them access to a broad range of European goods, especially high value consumables such as sugar, wine, and oil that are highlighted in many contraband cases. It also provided access to European clothing, necessary for the transformation from *indio* to *ladino*.

Pueblos de indios participated in the broader Spanish colonial economy beyond their participation in networks of contraband goods. After the end of the *encomienda* system in the 1690s, *pueblos de indios* were able to use Spanish merchants as buyers for cultivated products like cacao and gathered plants like *sarsaparilla*.

In common with other parts of the Spanish colonial world, distance from administrative centers and the presence of external threats may have provided more opportunities for residents of the *pueblos de indios* in the Ulúa valley to negotiate their position in the colony.

We lack the documents common to other indigenous communities in Honduras emphasizing the importance of the church and the use of town funds and indigenous *cofradia* income to improve the church building in Candelaria. But documents from *pueblos de indios* in the Ulúa valley are suggestive of what likely were persistent traditional rituals for the earth. Petitions emphasize on church as central to community, and make claims for pastoral care. Like the more visible foodways documented archaeologically, for *pueblos de indios* in the colonial period community-level religious practices were probably important everyday practices through which people coped with the challenges of coloniality, and recreated the colonial world in ways that allowed them to persist as individuals, families, and communities.