

The man seated on a stone in the first image of Figure 2.2 is not pondering his somber destiny. Weeping is associated with vision, as discussed in Chapter 1. The naked man, devoted to Tezcatlipoca, is beginning his journey to reach the world of the ancestors and know his fate, which may mean death in battle or as a war captive, as also suggested in the above-quoted Nahuatl text from the Florentine Codex. As further discussed in Chapter 8, the intellectual missionary experiment that led to the creation of the Florentine Codex demonstrates the limits of the cultural encounter when it is framed by evangelical ideology. It was the missionaries' intention to represent, with the authority of the victor, Mesoamerican culture at the moment of its declared death. As modern heirs of Sahagún's ethnographic and encyclopedic method, Western scholars fall victim to the same mistake all too often.

Anthropologists have long turned their attention to shamanism and ecstatic techniques, building on the classic study by Romanian historian Mircea Eliade (1964). Furst (1972), Harner (1973), and Wasson (1980) are the most important contributions for the present study, which seeks to uncover the shamanic aspects of Mesoamerican being in the world, as expressed through visual and other artistic means (see also Harrison-Buck and Freidel 2021). Mazatec ceremonies and their language provide a key to the identification of elements in the pictographic and textual descriptions of Indigenous ceremonies, which speak to an enduring Mesoamerican paradigm of vision quests (or, as Santiago suggested, quests for an encounter) and spiritual transformations.

2.2. Mazatec night ceremonies

Night ceremonies have been referred to as *veladas* (vigils) since the work of Wasson (Wasson et al. 1974, IX), who also provided detailed descriptions of the general outlook and development of the performance he attended (Wasson and Wasson 1957b, 215–329, reprinted partially in Wasson and Wasson 2003). *Velada* is a translation of the Mazatec terms *tsaka tio' nko* or *kjoabijnachon*, both of which refer to the act of being awake at night. All ceremonies take place after dark, most often in the curandero's house. Usually, people other than the curandero and the patient are in attendance, such as members of either family or close acquaintances. The entire ritual, which lasts between two and five hours, entails different kinds of activities. Every time that I attended a *velada*, the curandero or curandera made a divinatory reading both before and after the ceremony using corn kernels, eggs, or candles, as explained in the previous chapter, which helped to clarify the prospect and outcome of my visit. At the same time, it seemed to me that these divinatory rituals, held in daylight, also served as a kind of introduction and closing for the nocturnal experience by connecting the dark time with the light of day. Praying with Catholic litanies, such as *Avemaría* and *Padre nuestro*, in either Spanish or Mazatec, accompanied the entirety of the night ceremony. Long periods of silence and casual chatting were also part of the communication

established between participants. Plants, such as *hoja de Pascua*, as seen in the preceding chapter, and *aguardiente* (a distilled spirit) were frequently employed; they were mostly rubbed on the head, temples, and forearms of the patient, a procedure that was intended to “raise” (*levantar* in Spanish) them—that is, to infuse strength or calm. Copal smoke served the same function, and it was often blown on the participant's face and body. While these aspects are almost universal, every curandero has their own style of conducting the ceremony and sings in remarkably different ways. In my experience, the most important factor that determined the outlook of a ceremony was the severity of the issue to be addressed, which could be physical, psychological, or social (e.g., interpersonal conflict). If the curandero themselves had unresolved problems, these would also greatly interfere with and affect the quality or, more accurately, the intensity of the ceremony.

Although I attended five ceremonies, I was only able to record on three occasions because curanderos often do not want mechanical devices to disrupt the ceremony or their words to be recorded. During chanting, language could become rather obscure, but this was usually because recordings cannot reproduce the complexity of the lived experience and interactions shared by participants during the ceremony. Wasson's 1974 publication is the only one that includes a complete tape recording, transcription, and translation (in both English and Spanish) of a ceremony conducted by María Sabina in 1958. By contrast, earlier published recordings (Wasson and Wasson 1957a) only contained excerpts from chants. For this reason, I believe that the latter publication only included partial transcriptions and translations, which could not be completed due to a lack of necessary context. In her later years in the 1970s, María Sabina was asked to perform a ceremony several times purely for the sake of being recorded, which she resented. She complained that the little mushrooms had lost their powers because of this. Even in earlier recordings from the 1950s, she agreed to the intrusion in the ceremony out of courtesy; however, in her own opinion, it came at a great cost (Estrada 1981, 90–92). The ceremony recorded in 1958 (Wasson et al. 1974) involved a young man called Perfeto José García who had fallen severely ill. It is important to mention Perfeto's illness because, as seen in some of the following chants or excerpts, the quest, struggle, and longing for knowledge (to identify the origin and cause of the illness to cure it) is a central aspect of and indeed the driving force for the ceremony. Without it, it is unclear what the purpose of the ceremony would be.

2.2.1. Marina Mendoza

As can be gathered from the full transcription in Wasson et al. (1974), ceremonies are punctuated by long and strenuous requests to God and saints to elucidate why the patient is suffering and to plead for clarity on the causes and outcome of the illness. For example, the following excerpt represents an invocation performed by Marina Mendoza on my behalf in Boca del Río, a dependency



Figure 2.3. House of Marina Mendoza, Boca del Río, San Mateo Eloxochitlan. Photo by Alessia Frassani.

of San Mateo Eloxochitlan located near Huautla on the federal highway, during a ceremony held on August 24, 2014 at her house (Fig. 2.3):

Na'inaa xi tsi so'nde, sije'ña kjoanda tjatse ndili'ji
My Father of the World, I ask for a blessing for your little one

¿Cómo se llama? — Alessia
What's her name? — Alessia

Nga'i'sin'nga jtino ko'na nda'i, na'i xi tsi so'nde
She is here with me now, Father of the World

Kata én, katana kjoale koi'nixin, koi'nitjen je'ndai
May [God] consider your words, may he consider you, on this day, on this night, right now

Nga'ndai ka'ni ka'bijin nio'xtila'li ya'ni'ya oracion'li
Now you gave your bread in your house of worship

Ka'bi'ni kjoanda'li xi'koi'nixin je'ndai, na'i xi tsi so'nde
You gave your blessing on this day, now, Father of the World

Ji kajen'li sondeli ji, aliya'jin'sa, nai tao'ngo xi tsi so'nde
You won in your world and nobody else [but you did], only Father of the World

K'oasin si'isenli ji ndi'li
So you will enlighten your little one

Tisiko, chomi'tje, chomi'yajin me'ni chiin xi tjin'le
Help her, raise her, lift her from the disease she carries

Ñani, ñani nda, sate'ta ndi'li
Where, wherever she is blocked, your little one

Tojñani nga ñai chón, ji xi nkoali k'oana i'sain, na'i xi tsi so'nde
Wherever there are difficulties, you will shed light on the path, Father of the World

Na'inaa Scribano, na'inaa San Isidro, ndi na'naa Natividad, ndi'chjon Pastora, ndi'chjon nda 'be
Father Notary (grandfather of the underworld), Father San Isidro, Mother Nativity, Lady Pastora, lady of the running water

Sijena án kjoanda xikoi nixin, je tsee San Pedro, San Pablo
I ask for a blessing on this day, of San Pedro, San Pablo

Na'inaa San Miguel Arcangel, kata én, kata kjoali ji
Father San Miguel Archangel, consider her words, may he consider you

San Ramon, sijena án kjoanda
San Ramon, I ask for a blessing

Ndi'nanaa Guadalupe, José y María
Precious Lady Guadalupe, Joseph and Mary

Xi tjen, xi xo'má katabitjo
May what drips like mucus go away

K'oasin si i'sen í, k'oasin k'oe je kjoandali
So enlighten here, so give your blessing

Tjana i'sen niji tsa meni xichon, meni xitjin, na'i xi tsi sonde
Enlighten, you, where the problems are, where there are
issues, Father of the World

Kata én, kata kjoani
May her words be considered, may she be considered

Nga'i skotsen ndiasai, ndiajtsoko, ndili ji
(God) will look after the path of the calf, of the foot (her
destiny) of your daughter

Transcription and translation by Alessia Frassani and Santiago
Cortés Martínez

Although Marina refers to God as a Christian entity, as evidenced in her mention of the bread given in the house of worship, for example, several other supernatural beings are more clearly Mesoamerican. Na'inaa Scribano is an elderly and authoritative figure, akin to Cipactonal introduced in Chapter 1. Although rendered with a Spanish word meaning “notary,” Na'inaa Scribano's powers consist in his ability to read and draft written documents, such as the ancient painted books. Ndi'chjon nda 'be, the Lady of the running water, a well-known supernatural among the Mazatec, is the local equivalent of the central Mexican Chalchiuhtlicue (Fig. 7.4). Some of the same expressions are found again in the following chant, although the tone and intensity attained during chanting is quite different. On the same night, Marina performed only one chant during a three-hour ceremony.

Án'jña nga'nirole so'nde, ti'tso
I am the strength of the world, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole kjoa'nichikon'ta'in, ti'tso
I am the strength of the blessing, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole so'nde, ti'tso
I am the strength of the world, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole kjoa'kjin tokon, ti'tso
I am the strength of wisdom, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa ni'ndayaa chjota, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to cure people, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fe'e, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to come forth, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fitje'en, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to fly, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fe'e, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to come forth, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole so'nde, ti'tso
I am the strength of the world, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole nangi, ti'tso
I am the strength of the earth, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole kjoa'kjin tokon, ti'tso
I am the strength of wisdom, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole son'de, ti'tso
I am the strength of the world, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole na'chja ninda'jba, ti'tso
I am the strength of the grandmother of the broken bones, is
saying

Án'jña nga'nirole na'chja Lisabe nginde, ti'tso
I am the strength of Grandmother Lisabe of the underworld,
is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fi'tjeen, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to come forth, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fe'e, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to come forth, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa ni'ndaa chjota, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to cure people, is saying

Án'jña na'chja Lisibe, ti'tso
I am Grandmother Lisabe, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole cho'o nro'jbi, ti'tso
I am the strength of the opossum, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole xa i'ndo since, ti'tso
I am the strength of the spotted jaguar, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole na'chja ninda'jba, ti'tso
I am the strength of the grandmother of the broken bones, is
saying

Án'jña nga'nirole kjoa'bi'jnachon, ti'tso
I am the strength of life, is saying

Án tisije kjoanda nai'taongo xi tsi so'nde
I am the one asking for a blessing, oh Father, guardian of the
world

Tai'nai kjoanda, tai'nai nga'nio kjoan'kji tokon'li
Give me blessing, give me the strength of your wisdom

Ji'ni nai taongo xi tijnli nga'nio, na'in
You are, my father, the one who gives strength, Father

Ji'ni xi mali ni'ndaya'ai chjota
You are the one who knows how to heal people

Ji'ni nai'naa San Isidro
You are my father, San Isidro

Ji'ni nai'naa Escribano
You are my father, Escribano

Ji'chjon Pastora
You mother, Shepherdess

Si'jee án kjoanda
I ask for your blessing

Tai'ñe kjoanda'li, tai nga'nioli ji
Give your blessing, your strength

Ni'kia'jinla ti'ska'ngini x'oa'inaña
My incense burner will never fall and break

Ni'kia'jin koi'tsaoya'jin x'ao'inaa
My incense burner will never stop burning

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Transcription and translation by Santiago Cortés Martínez
and Alessia Frassani

The chant is the only instance during the entire ceremony where Marina openly states that she identifies with natural and supernatural beings, such as animal and saints. While she invoked God, saints, and other divine beings throughout the ceremony, as seen in the first prayer, it was only during this chant that she claimed otherworldly powers for herself. In other words, while she addressed supernatural beings during prayers and invocations, she only claimed to be or become them in a few minutes of chanting. In this respect, Marina's chant is similar to María Sabina's (Wasson et al. 1974, Wasson and Wasson 1957a).

Marina closed the sentences with the verb *tso* (says) or *ti'tso* (is saying), with the subject of the verb left implicit. Munn (1973, 89) remarked on this characteristic of Mazatec chanting, in which the speaker appears to quote someone else: "I am the strength of the world, I am the strength of the opossum, etc." It appears that God or another religious authority is telling the women (i.e., bestowing upon them) the strength and powers of various animals. At the same time, the use of direct quotation makes the "I" in the embedded sentence a co-reference to the subject of the main clause "says/is saying," whose subject is implicit. Not only is the "I" an indexical pronoun, but it also moves in a continuum from the relational stance of the present speaker to the fixed proposition expressed in the sentence: "The curandera is a spotted jaguar." Thus, the speaker fluctuates between simply being themselves to being the narrator of the event and seeing themselves from the outside looking in, finally returning to the initial quoted proposition: "I am the spotted jaguar." This initial and final statement is not declarative but rather expresses

an embodied experience: knowing is not believing but experiencing.

2.2.2. Baldomero Pineda and the chant of the grandparents

Chanting is a particularly lively aspect of Mazatec culture and not restricted to night ceremonies (Quintanar Miranda 2007, Faudree 2013). Baldomero Pineda (Fig. 2.4) from Santa Cruz de Juárez, a small dependency of Huautla, composes and performs his own songs for the yearly celebration of the Day of the Dead (Cortés Martínez and Frassani 2017). During one such occasion, when Santiago Cortés and I visited him in his shop in Santa Cruz, on November 2, 2014, he sang the following chant:

Jonga inda jonga nangi, tso el oro
Slowly, calmly, says the gold

Án k'jinten, k'jitje tojme tikina, tso
I jump, I overcome any obstacle, says

Jñan kjoa'nii, jtji ma, jti'tsa kja'ngi, tso el oro
Wherever it is hidden, concealed, says the gold

Án k'jinten, k'jitje tojme tikina, tso
I jump, I overcome any obstacle, says

Jñan kjoa'nii, jtji ma, jti'tsa kja'ngi, tso el oro
Wherever it is hidden, concealed, says the gold

Án fa'xoe án fa'nia, tso
I implore humbly and reverentially

Tojñan kjichoi'ñen
As far as you reach

Atsin ma'sinlee, atsin ma'sinlee
Don't you feel bad for me? Don't you feel bad for me?

Nga k'oasin ti'jnan nion'noo án
That you are keeping me closed in?

Tonga nda'i tokjoa' mana
Now I feel nothing, I have no fear

Tjen k'aoñan chjota titjona
I now come with my big people

An'nan xi koan'na si'tsín si'faneña
I am the one who knows how to thunder and rumble

Tsatsín k'oakonai ñan' tinamali
If you do not tell me where you keep it hidden

K'oa me kjoa'ni ximeli, Jo kjoa'tjin taón jme'li jí
What do you want? How much do you want?

Kjoe'e kiechi'tjaiña án, chjota'na án
I am coming to pay for my people