

A SAINT ON THE RUN

THE DYNAMICS OF HOMEMAKING AND CREATING A SACRED PLACE

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In this paper, I present a Maya legend of travelling saints and people searching for their home. The story shows the ways in which a sense of belonging is contested, recreated and sustained within the context of place and pilgrimage. I argue that to understand such a narrative, a phenomenal and existential experience associated to particular collective memories and performances must be taken into consideration in addition to historical, political and cultural backgrounds.
Keywords: place, home, pilgrimage, lived religion, legendary narrative, collective memory, the Maya

V članku je predstavljena majevska legenda o potujočih svetnikih in ljudeh, ki iščejo dom. Pripoved kaže na načine, kako konteksta kraja in romanja preprašujeta, prenavljata in krepiča občutje pripadnosti. Da bi razumeli takšno pripoved, je potrebno poleg zgodovinskega, političnega in kulturnega ozadja upoštevati pojavnost in bivanjsko izkušnjo, ki je povezana s posebnimi kolektivnimi spomini in dogodki.
Ključne besede: kraj, dom, romanje, živeta vera, legendarne pripovedi, kolektivni spomin, Maji

INTRODUCTION¹

A legend told in one Maya community in the Guatemalan Highlands has it that during the civil war a group of soldiers stormed the church and turned it into a prison. This angered the patron saint of the community, who was disappointed by the behaviour of the people and decided to leave. He took on the form of a pilgrim and went to another community, asking for shelter. A family let him stay at their house, only to find him leave behind a statue dressed up in the costume typical for his original community. People then moved the statue to the local church, where it would be taken care of and worshiped along with other saints. They were very happy to have this new saint with them and did not wish for him to leave. By contrast, the people of the saint's original community were unhappy about his departure and began to organize pilgrimages to visit him.

This is a story of travelling saints and people searching for their home. It addresses the question of belonging within the context of place and pilgrimage. It also says something essential about collective memory, trauma and guilt. Home is often associated with care, protection and security. In his book *At home in the world*, Michael Jackson (1995: 9) uses the Latin proverb *ubi bene, ibi patria* – your home is where they treat you well – to preface one of the chapters. In this paper, I will be arguing that the legend mentioned above is,

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substantially, about a very similar subject – namely the lived experience of home as a place where they treat you well and where you can live in peace. In addition, I will argue that the legend shows the ways in which a sense of home is contested, recreated and sustained and the ways by which the living strive to achieve the existential maxim of “being at home in the world”. This imperative refers to a struggle, as Jackson says,

between the world into which we are thrown without our asking and the world we imagine we might bring into being by dint of what we say and do. In this sense, at-homeness suggests an elusive balance which people try to strike between being acted upon and acting, between acquiescing in the given and choosing their own fate. (Jackson 1995: 123)

Just as a place only exists in a never-ending process of placemaking, home only exists in a never-ending process of homemaking. Places or homes are never finished or simply given (regardless of whether they are considered to be inherently present in an objective space or to be culturally or socially constructed and actively projected by people onto passive objects); they are the ever-emergent outcomes of the joint activity and mutual regeneration of all the human and nonhuman beings involved. Such a view, which is less representationalist and more performative, corresponds to what Tim Ingold called the “dwelling perspective”, by which he meant

a perspective founded on the premise that the forms humans build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the currents of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings. (Ingold 2011: 10)

Ingold contrasts this term with that of the “building perspective”, which presupposes that people make their worlds based on some pre-existent or precursive forms or ideas, so that worlds are made before they are lived in.

Home refers to *particular* places, which are phenomenologically distinct from undifferentiated space (Tilley 1994; Casey 1997). However, home may also be associated with *sacred* places – bestowed with essential cultural meanings, values and ideals – as well as with pilgrimages (Morinis 1992). The anthropology of pilgrimage has shown that these places, long interpreted through the sacred/profane dichotomy, are not sacred as such but rather become sacred through pilgrim practice (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Coleman and Eade 2004). Home, as the sought-after place *par excellence*, began to be perceived as something constantly contested and re-established. This can be seen in heritage or roots tourism – in which people visit their ancestral homeland marked by sacredness (e.g. Basu 2004) – as well as in emigration and the subsequent homecoming, which again very often takes place in religious contexts (e.g. Vásquez and Marquardt 2003).

I contend that the concept of sacred place needs not to be discarded, if only for the fact that it is used by the interlocutors themselves when they think, act and feel. In this article, however, I will not use it to refer to a geographic schedule of divine epiphany, but simply to talk about places considered important by a given group for its very existence. In my phenomenological definition, a sacred place is neither a culturalist projection of a culturally valued ideal (Morinis 1992) nor is it a social constructivist arena of competing discourses (Eade and Sallnow 1991), but an expression of lived experience of being-in-the-world, which is embedded in all sorts of mundane as well as extraordinary activities that are recognised as central to the continuation of life and to regeneration of the world. The phenomenon of pilgrimage, I am suggesting, is primarily shaped by mutual relationships, interactions and co-constitution of the life's paths of both pilgrims and places.

The interplay between sacred place and pilgrim practice is obviously linked to their relation to knowledge and memory. Historical events are legendised and individual memories collectivised to establish a shared meaningful narrative. Ethnography has shown that memory is not only collective and selective, but also performative and embodied (e.g. Connerton 1989; Stoller 1994; Mitchell 1997). In this paper, I will argue that to understand the narrative, a phenomenal experience of place and an existential experience of home associated to particular collective memories and performances must be taken into consideration in addition to historical, political and cultural backgrounds.

THE SAINT WHO LEFT

Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, where I conducted my fieldwork,² is a mountainous hard-to-access region in north-western Guatemala. The Todos Santos Cuchumatán municipality is located at an altitude of between 3,000 and 4,000 metres above sea level and has a population of over 30,000, of which, however, only a tenth lives in its centre. This Mam Maya town is not named for a concrete Catholic saint, which is something of a habit going back to Spanish colonialism, but for *all* saints, i.e. *todos santos*. The patron saint's day therefore falls on 1 November and is followed by All Souls' Day. Since traditional Maya religiosity is largely particular and immanent, the fact that the *Todosanteros*, the inhabitants of the municipality, wished to have their patron saint embodied in a specific image does not come as a surprise. Thus a statue was created, dressed in the costume of the community and placed on the main altar of the church – the Saint All Saints (*Santo Todos Santos*).

Staying with a local family, I was soon told that the statue in the Catholic church is not the *real* patron saint. The image of the patron saint is but a replica that the church administrators use to deceive people. The real Saint Todos Santos resides elsewhere – in Chimbán.

² I collected the ethnographic data discussed in this text during my fieldwork in Guatemala in 2009 and 2013.

What follow are couple passages from one of the longest versions of the legend that I have been told:

I was told the story of the saint. He disappeared from Todos Santos during the war, sometime in 1980 or 1981. According to this story, when the violence [la violencia] started, the patron saint of Todos Santos was against what people were doing. Moreover, the soldiers [los militares] had turned the church into a prison where they would lock up anybody who was considered or, sometimes, known to have worked with the guerrilla [la guerrilla]. So the army was fighting the guerrilla and the guerrilla was fighting the army, there were two kinds of people. The army detained those people that worked with the guerrilla and imprisoned them in the Catholic church. I think the patron saint of Todos Santos did not like to see his church made into a prison for people, and so he left. It is said that some people saw a child dressed like Todos Santos leaving the church at around eleven or twelve in the night. They found it strange to see, and difficult to believe, that a child was leaving the church at this hour. A lot of time has passed; the whole period of war was a very hard time to live in Todos Santos, very hard, very sad... Then we learned that our saint arrived in Chimbán; it is said that he arrived there as a commoner, as a pilgrim, asking to be put up for the night at one house. The people there told him that he could stay but that they did not have a suitable place in the house itself, only in a small shed next door. The next morning the family was very surprised to see a statue dressed in the costume of Todos Santos standing at one of the shed's corners. They told everyone about it, and people started bringing in candles and praying there. Then they moved the saint to the church where they began to take care of and worship him. The community was very poor; it was located far away from the centre of the municipality. They did not have maize or beans, there was nothing to sow, it was a very poor community. But it is said that since the saint came, things have turned out for the better and it began to prosper... In Todos Santos the times were bad. When people learned that their saint was in Chimbán, they went there and asked for him to be returned. But the community refused to give him back; they were even offered money but still did not want to... The church administrators [la comité] now want us to believe that the statue in that church is the patron saint of Todos Santos; but people know he is not... There is now a new image, but it is not the real one [la verdadera imagen]... That one is no longer here, but in Chimbán.

Chimbán is a settlement belonging to the San Miguel Acatán municipality, located north of Todos Santos Cuchumatán. It is accessible by road, but the car journey there takes several hours and is a difficult one. Chimbán is a very traditional Akatek Maya community, which takes pride in adhering to the traditional ancestor customs – the *costumbre*. The local church is considered to be, first and foremost, a home for the saints. There is very little that reminds the visitor of the Christian role of the church: there is no altar, no pulpits and no pews.



The image of the Saint. Todos Santos Cuchumatán, 2013. Photo: J. Kapusta.



The saints venerated by the prayersayers in the church of Chimbán. San Miguel Acatán, 2013. Photo: J. Kapusta.



The central park and the church during the fiesta. Todos Santos Cuchumatán, 2009. Photo: J. Kapusta.



The *ordenanza*. Todos Santos Cuchumatán, 2013. Photo: J. Kapusta.

There is just a table in the left corner at the entrance where a group of traditionalists offers candles and collects monetary contributions. There are wooden cases with saints along the walls, with the patron saint of the municipality, St. Michael, and the patron saint of the neighbouring municipality, St. Eulalia, placed prominently in the middle.

There is also St. Todos Santos. When visiting Chimbán, I asked the wardens of the church, the elders and the prayersayers (Maya ritual specialists) why that was the case and why there are pilgrims from Todos Santos Cuchumatán. What follow are extracts from the conversations we had:

“The elders [los principales] say that the Catholics, the religious ones [los religiosos], who burned the images, would hurt the patron saint, they dragged him out of the church, and so he came here. It happened a long time, some 40 years, ago.”

“They did not respect him, they would touch him and beat him up.”

*“There is no *costumbre*, so he left that place and came here.”*

“The real patron [el mero patrón] is here.”

I asked about the saint’s return to his hometown:

“Is the patron saint of Todos Santos here?”

“He is and has been for a long time, there are many candles for him to make his life good, to make his life good.”

“Doesn’t he want to go back to Todos Santos?”

“The people of Todos Santos want to move him back, but that will not happen... The lords [señores, that is prayersayers] asked him already, and he said no... When they were praying to him, they told him ‘go back to your people, if you wish to’, but he said no.”

THE SENSE OF HOME IN A MAM MAYA COMMUNITY

Maya traditionalism, called *costumbre* by the indigenous people, includes elements of both pre-Columbian religion and Spanish Catholicism.³ With the advent of the post-colonial era, the Maya had taken the religious administration into their own hands and the fraternities (*cofradías*) () had gained an important role in taking care of the saints and sacred objects, such as *ordenanzas* – the chests containing important documents and valuables. The change took place in the mid-20th century, when the colonial churches managed by Maya traditionalists were targeted by the US Catholic organization Maryknoll. Paradoxically, it was

³ In fact, this is currently a minor form of Maya religiosity. The majority of the Maya identify as Catholics or Protestants of various strands. A recent trend is the rise of *espiritualidad maya*, which a feature of the pan-Maya cultural revival. This new spirituality distances itself from both Christianity and *costumbre* (see Cook, Offit and Taube 2013; MacKenzie 2016).

not this fervent missionary activity that brought about the demise of the fraternities and of the prayersayer hierarchy, but the civil war of the 1980s. The Guatemalan army and its sympathizers, associated with Protestantism, would openly attack both Catholics and *costumbristas*, whom they labelled communist and devilish.⁴

The first guerrilla group arrived at Todos Santos Cuchumatán in 1979. For several months it would spread its propaganda there, gaining sympathy with some people thanks to its promise to redistribute land and bring about social justice. The army came into the community in spring 1982 and, as a consequence, several men were imprisoned, women raped and houses burned. A key event was a convention in the church at which two hundred people were labelled as “guerrillas” (regardless of their actual allegiance) and “subversives”. Some of them were subjected to torture and some were murdered (Ikeda 1999). A long period of violence, fear and uncertainty followed when the army imprisoned adult men in the church and left the municipality. This prompted many people to flee into exile to Mexico, while many others simply disappeared or were found dead (see Perera 1993).

Following this shock caused by the war, the prayersayers’ public role, consisting in offering regular prayers and sacrifices at places important to the community, was not fully restored. If one asks the few surviving traditionalists the question of whether the *costumbre* is still being adhered to, the answers will be evasive or outright negative. The prevailing opinion is that it is dangerous to do, or even to talk about, such things, and the response will usually be accompanied by references to the Protestants (*evangélicos*), who reject, demonize or actively oppose such activity. Protestant denominations, which have appeared in the region in the last few decades, seem to be even more die-hard adversaries of the *costumbre* than the Catholic church. In spite of that, it is not true that there are no *costumbristas* at Todos Santos. A few individuals are still there, they visit their favourite places in the town and in the mountains and caves around it. The official prayersayer group (*chimanes*) has even been renewed: they take care of the *ordenanza*, which the locals call the Royal Coffin (*Caja Real*). The current organisation is dominated by women, although it used to be dominated by men historically. Now, the chief *chimán* Andrea’s and her colleagues’ practice is devoted to helping individuals in questions concerning matters such as health, the choice of partners, migration, trade or agriculture.

Maya traditionalists distinguish a number of places of significance, through which the community is outlined, defined and expressed. The valley of Todos Santos is surrounded by many peaks (*witz*), which have their own spiritual masters or owners (*dueños*) and where there still are small sacrificial grounds. The most sacred place, however, is the centre of the municipality itself, located near the church and the unexcavated mounds or ruins of *Tujqmantsun*. These two places (or rather, the crosses standing there) have been the focus of the ritual activity of the prayersayers. The busiest places are the central

⁴ For key ethnographic evidence concerning Todos Santos Cuchumatán, see Oakes 1951; Burrell 2013; Rodríguez Balam 2014.



The *corrida de caballos* at the All Saints Day celebration. Todos Santos Cuchumatán, 2009. Photo: J. Kapusta.

park (*parque*) and the main street, including the market (*mercado*), where the key annual celebration of All Saints Day, featuring a horse run (*corrida de caballos*), would be held in the past. Every year, on 1 November a couple of spruced up teams – which had to have performed the required sacrifice rites, dances to marimba music and liquor drinking in front of the houses of their captains before the actual start of the event – gallop on horseback along a new path near the centre, there and back again, for as long as they are able to stay in their saddles and the audience cheers them on. It is often said that for the *Todosanteros* this fiesta is not only the most important event of the year but also a cornerstone of their identity and sense of belonging, even though the festival itself is now challenged by flows of cultural revitalization, international migration and globalization (Burrell 2013). The matter is also made more complicated by the religious situation: about a third of the population are Protestants, who tend to ignore or regulate the festival, which they view as a cultural anachronism, irrational waste of resources and a generator of alcoholism and violence.⁵ Perhaps this is then, as argued by Annis (1987), a sort of cultural tax, an investment in community and solidarity that the Protestants fail to understand.

Todos Santos is no longer a closed and united community. The church, festival or holy crosses and mountains do not connect all its members, as it used to be the case in the past. The division lines are cosmologies, with many strands including various types of Protestantism, Catholicism, *costumbre* and *espiritualidad maya*. However, despite some divisions and wounds, the municipality considers itself to form a unique and exceptional whole. The people I met were proud of their community: they stressed the preservation of their traditions, language and costume (with the male *traje* donned by the majority of the population, which is something not usual for other Maya groups). They also mentioned frequent tourist visits, although their attitude to them remains deeply ambivalent. The suggestion by John Watanabe, based on his research in the nearby municipality of Santiago Chimaltenango, that it is the links between the place, people and premise which underpin the sense of community identity and home, now perhaps holds more than at any other time.

By existential sovereignty, I mean the conjunction of place, as an ongoing here and now, with individuals committed to the emergent possibilities and conditions of that place. Together, place and people precipitate commonly held conventional premises about how to get along in that place with those people. (Watanabe 1992: 12)

For Todosanteros, too, existential sovereignty is embedded in the landscape and fundamental social conventions, such as the correct use of language, donning of local costume or proper conduct towards people and the environment. Although it is no longer entirely true that saints, especially patron saints, make for real members of the community and take

⁵ During my first stay at Todos Santos in 2009, prohibition was in place and the sale of alcohol was banned all year round. Those wishing to partake of alcohol needed to bring it along from the town of Huehuetenango.

part in its activities (cf. Watanabe 1992: 72–74), they remain intimately associated with the symbolism of home. People are aware of Saint Todos Santos and of his story. Whenever this legend is recounted, the sense of home is expressed, questioned and confirmed again. This sense of home is not fixed; it is negotiated and recreated in a never-ending chain of locally situated ritual and everyday practices. To be a Todosantero means, first of all, to have a lived relation to certain sacred places, endowed with a certain memory. In this context, home and sacredness more or less blend into one.

In Todos Santos, the key symbols of home were trodden down and defiled by the experience of civil war. The individual houses, the church, the marketplace and the other places of social life have been tainted with blood. The sacred sites, mountains and woods were affected by the war and the suffering of the persecuted who have sought refuge there. The *costumbre* has been severely restricted if not totally eliminated (Rodríguez Balam 2014). In the air, there was not just the trauma of the atrocities committed by the army but also the guilt felt by members of the community who had fought each other and thereby transgressed against the code of conduct applicable to relations between people and between people and deities. This trauma and this guilt, it seems to me, were materialized in the patron saint. In one conversation, an interlocutor responded to the question concerning a possible return of the saint as follows:

“He himself would have to want to come back. I think that if he sees that there is peace, it may well happen that he’ll come back to Todos Santos in the future. But I don’t know if that is what he wants...”

“It’s not good for the patron to be so far away from his community,” I said.

“Of course... It is the patron saint of Todos Santos. Since the time he left, there have been many calamities. There have been many hardships and harvests have been yielding less.”

Sacredness, home and pride of the community are, however, subject to an ongoing process of regeneration. I once decided to visit Chicoy, a settlement of Todos Santos Cuchumatán, since I had learned that a new patron saint appeared there. The administrator of the chapel explained to me with pride and full of enthusiasm that their St. Todos Santos has been here since 2001 and his presence has helped the settlement.

It’s history, yes, it’s been 12 years. We went to Chimbán, where Saint Todos Santos had gone because of the Protestants. We went there to talk with the locals, but they didn’t want to give us the saint back, so we made a photograph and arranged for a new larger one to be made in Esquipulas,⁶ to live here... We brought him in on May 26, which is the date of our festival.

⁶ Esquipulas is a town located on the opposite side of Guatemala. It is known as the most important place of pilgrimage in Central America (see Kapusta 2016a).

AN AKATEK MAYA COMMUNITY AS THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD

Chimbán, a settlement in the San Miguel Acatán municipality, is a religious centre whose importance reaches beyond the areas inhabited by the Akatek Maya.⁷ It derives its fame from the rigorous keeping of the *costumbre*: it is the number of saints in the church, which according to Maya traditionalists is a proof of the good work of the local prayersayers. There is still something going on in Chimbán, as the then *mayordomo* told me:

People from a lot of municipalities come here to visit. It's quite cheerful here [bien alegre], this is the centre of the world, the original one. They come here from Soloma, Todos Santos, San Juan, and also from Coatán... It's cheerful here, as there are still people here, there is still the costumbre...

The beginnings of this tradition are dated to the time when San Miguel saw an escalation of the relations between the *costumbristas* and the Catholics. Since the Maryknoll missionary organisation got a foothold there in 1946, the new priests had been striving to cleanse the church of the *costumbre*, which they considered to amount to serving the devil. The prayersayers eventually decided to move their ritual activity away from the centre of the municipality to the settlement of Chimbán. They took Saint Michael from the church and the statue then appeared in Chimbán – which was naturally surrounded by standardised legends (Deuss 2007: 127). The conflict peaked with sad developments, including the imprisonment of one prayersayer, the attempt of a group of Catholics to burn the *ordenanza* and, finally, the theft and destruction of Saint Michael's statue. However, this did not eradicate the *costumbre*. In the 1960s, Chimbán saw the completion of a church with a new patron saint statue and the designation of a new *ordenanza* house with two new sacred chests, featuring original contents. It also became an important settlement with a busy marketplace (Jafek 1996; Deuss 2007: 126–128).

While in Todos Santos prayersayers' public practice by and large disappeared, in Chimbán that is not the case. Although there is no *cofradía* in the exact sense of the word, the settlement boasts a hierarchically organised group of prayersayers, just like it boasts a local political administration: the *alkal txaj*, the *regidor*, the *mayordomo*, the *mayor* and the *alusel* are elected for one-year terms by the elders (*principales*), that is by those who throughout their lives climbed to the top of the hierarchy. By accepting the office, the men and their wives leave their day-to-day productive and reproductive lives and devote all their time to ritual activities. These activities take place on two planes: the individual, where they consist in catering to the particular visitors and their specific questions, difficulties and illnesses; and the collective, where they consist in taking care of the community as a whole.

⁷ For key ethnographic evidence concerning San Miguel Acatán, see Siegel and Grollig 1994; Jafek 1996; Deuss 2007.



The *casa de ordenanza* at Chimbán. San Miguel Acatán, 2013. Photo: J. Kapusta.

In Chimbán, the prayersayers live in the *ordenanza* house (*casa de ordenanza*) throughout the year, in a semi-monastic state. The house needs to be built using traditional techniques and materials, such as clay, wood and grass. Opposite the entrance, there is a table with two wooden chests – the larger is called *ordenanza* and the smaller *san gaspar*. To the left of the chest are chairs and beds of the *alkal txaj* and his wife, to the right the chairs and beds of the *regidor* and his wife. The left section of the house features a kitchen, consisting of an open fireplace and a circle of chairs; the right section the beds of other officials and supplies of wax, candles and other ritual materials. There is an arch decorated with palm leaves and hydrangea over the *ordenanza* and two candles are constantly burning in front of it. Regularly, day and night, the *alkal txaj's* wife and the *regidor* use censer to apply incense smoke to the *ordenanza*, while the *alkal txaj* directs his prayers to it. The ritual activity, which includes regular sacrifices of turkeys, is understood as an obligation and a necessity to ensure good weather and good crops as well as the health and happiness of the entire community and, last but not least, the course of the world as such.

It is said that the contents of an *ordenanza* may only be seen by the prayersayers, and only on exceptional occasions. In Maya communities of the region, the sacred chests have contained colonial documents, such as tribute lists, land deeds or missals, but they are also associated with the pre-Columbian bundle cult (Deuss 2007: 30). Siegel (1941: 68) notes that the *ordenanza* in Chimbán might also have included two saints' images and a

crown of gold. My impression from the conversations I had with the locals was that while *ordenanzas* are filled by ancient documents and ritual artefacts by the prayersayers, the laypeople tend to believe that they contain valuables. One young traditionalist told me that the *ordenanza* in Santa Eulalia contained a replica of the human head made of pure gold. While I do not expect this to really be the case, I consider this idea to reflect the attempt to link the *ordenanza* contents with whatever is deemed most valuable. This (treasure) chest is the most sacred object that the (home) community possesses and it forms a “real centre of the world” (Jafek 1996: 38).

The prayersayers’ organisation reflects some of the political elements present in the municipal administration, which was modelled on that used by the colonizers: Spanish names are applied to the religious offices which, just like their profane counterparts, are filled at the beginning of the Christian New Year. Even the carefully guarded *ordenanza* is an item of Spanish origin. Thus, Maya traditionalism clearly carries a collective memory of colonialism and the politics of the region. At the same time, it retains the specific features of Maya religion and culture. The content of this phenomenon is, however, not fully exhausted by that. The *ordenanza* is not just a symbol of the political and cultural but also of the existential power: the artefact enshrines the *trust of the community in the world* – in its continuation, prosperity and order. Native cosmology and ritual practice are expressions of respect to the world that people live in and on that they depend on for their very existence.

Apart from the *ordenanza* house the most important building in Chimbán is the church with saints. It, too, has a thatched roof, floor of clay and its entry arc is decorated with palm leaves and hydrangea. The saints, stacked in cases along the walls, are carefully guarded and duly revered. Some of them tend to regularly leave their home: for instance, Christ-carrying-the-cross performs a series of processions to Calvary in Lent. In fact, all the saints are travellers, as they *arrived* here at some point in the past. Their motive was basically always the same: a saint from a community or place was not happy with how he was treated and taken care of there and so decided to leave. Saints live and have it good in Chimbán and, in return, they are kind to the people: they listen to their pleas and thanks concerning, first and foremost, good crops, since growing crops, chiefly maize, beans and potatoes, is still the dominant economic activity.

I did not personally witness the arrival of a saint in Chimbán. However, a testimony from 1995 is available in Deuss (2007: 161–162): St. Mark and St. Sebastian arrived in trucks, and – to the sounds of marimbas and in the smell of candles – they were carried to the church on litters (*andas*), introduced to every one of the saints present and, finally, placed next to them.

[According to a prayersayer,] they had fled their villages because they no longer received nourishment (candles and incense). They had sought permission to come and live in Chimbán as long ago as 1987 [...], but as the other saints had to be consulted, and the answers given in dreams, it was only now that they had arrived. (Deuss 2007: 161–162)

The arrival of saints in Chimbán by trucks, plain to see, is not at variance with legends talking about their arrival as strangers asking to be put up for the night. Maya cosmology does not form a single narrative that everyone would subscribe to without reservations: quite the contrary, there is a remarkable plurality and a great deal of ambiguity and doubt in this regard. I have come across people who believed the saint to have arrived as a commoner, a stranger or a pilgrim and I have also met people very sceptical or outright sarcastic about such ideas. For the prayersayers, however, there is no reason to be worried, as the essence of the event is the same in both cases: it is always the saint *who decided* to move and to speak to the prayersayers in dreams, or – in other words – to act. This is not altered in any way by the specific manner and form of his arrival.⁸ The narratives may therefore be seen as particular articulations of one and the same fact, although we tend to classify them, seeing matters through our Western prism, as metaphorical representations or “symbolic-interpretative elements” (Crapanzano 1973: 5–6), subject to the limits of a given idiom or discourse. Yet, Maya saints remain “real presences” (Orsi 2010: xxi), as they continue to have a presence that becomes autonomous within the particular lifeworld.

HUMANS AND SAINTS AT HOME AND ON THE ROAD

In the context of Maya cosmology, it cannot be simply said that home is made and represented by ritual or everyday action that is connected to sacred places and objects. Rather, home is mutually shaped and jointly recreated in the dynamic relatedness of human and nonhuman beings, including saints, crosses, mountains and places. It is not the case that people would actively project their cultural ideas of home and sacredness onto passive objects; rather both sides are involved in the process of their becoming. To be at home and in the world – and to be at home in the world – means to participate in the stream of being and in the lives of others and to negotiate one’s position within a complex network of relations. The practice of placemaking (including the making of a pilgrimage site) is therefore not a one-sided affair, it is a reciprocal flow of the, more or less, “physical” and “spiritual” things involved in the process.

This network of relations should encompass principles of respect, reciprocity and commitment. The Maya have traditionally perceived many things that we tend to view as material and lifeless as ensouled and animate, as beings analogous and complementary to people, who share a single world with them. Mountains, for example, are endowed with life and agency. They have their names, sexes and characters. They have their physical (as a mountain, they are visible and tangible) and spiritual (as the mountain’s master or owner) dimensions. What is important is that they feed people by providing land and

⁸ Maya traditionalism, like many other Amerindian cosmologies, features the possibility of body or form transformation, thus “representing a Mesoamerican take on multinatural perspectivism” (MacKenzie 2016: 112).

other sources of livelihood and are responsible for good or bad crops by virtue of making clouds and rain. Despite being powerful deities, the mountains are, in turn, dependent on humans. Both sides need, strengthen and sustain each other. One cannot live without the other. This is most evident in the alimentary terms used by the prayersayers: when they offer sacrifices to the mountains and crosses, they literally say to be “feeding” them, since mountains and crosses “eat” candles and copal and “drink” turkey blood. The relation is a reciprocal one (Wilson 1995: 57), it is an existential economy (Kapusta 2016b: 37–38). People and mountains sacrifice a part of themselves to be able to live on: this way, drops of blood offered to the deities become grains of corn for the humans. Many Maya myths tell the story of how the first maize was found in the ground, inside a mountain or a cave. Just like the earth lord once emitted the first grain of maize from his heart, that is from a cave in the mountain, and just like he lets new plants grow on his land every year through rain, man, too, opens his chest to feed the lord with his blood, or slices the throat of a turkey as a replacement instead.

Mountains communicate with people, especially through dreams. Prayersayers say that nonhuman beings need to be treated with respect and warmth just like people. Traditionalists, when they meet, sometimes greet each other with the question “How is your heart doing?” or “How is your stomach doing?” This is not just a polite expression of respect towards the conversation partner, it is a thoroughly pragmatic question regarding the nature of the communication that is about to happen, roughly equivalent to: “How do you feel in relation to your surroundings” or “What can I expect from you?” Prayers and sacrifices to the mountains are a similar type of communication. They feature both anxiety and hope, as mountains, too, are morally ambivalent: they are unpredictable and feared. Yet, they are associated with home. They are not only called *dueños* (“masters” or “owners”) but also *patrones* (“patrons” or “protectors”), because they surround, embrace and protect the community. To leave the town means to move away from the reach of the protective forces of its mountains. This is captured in Wilson’s description of the relations between the Q’eqchi’ Maya and their mountains as very personal and moral, but also very localised and particular: “Followers of the earth cult are lost in this respect if they move to another area, because they do not know the names and the character of the *tzuultaqas* [earth lords]” (Wilson 1995: 55).

For saints, the sense of belonging is even stronger. In Maya cosmology, the saints, too, are endowed with will and agency. They are considered to be active persons, not passive artefacts. The saints are not simply transcendental symbols; in the eyes of the Maya, they are really alive and the statues are their embodiments. Traditionalists know that saints have the power to influence their lives and that they therefore have to show them respect (*respeto*) and have good and balanced relationships with them. They take care of them, decorate them on holidays, pray to them and offer them candles and copal in sacrifice, as recklessness or carelessness can result in the illness of a specific person or misfortune for the whole community.

The principle of reciprocity and mutual dependency also applies here: the community will not experience good times unless its saints also do, and vice versa. To feed and sustain each other is an obligation and a commitment. For Maya traditionalists, sacrificial giving means enacting the interpersonal relations and participating in the course of the world. In a similar vein, Christenson notes that the images of saints are seen as ensouled figures by the Tz'utujil Maya: "They are a living part of the everyday lives of the people of Santiago Atitlán. They need each other in every sense of the word, particularly in times of crisis. [...] They] work hand in hand to give rebirth to the world" (Christenson 2016: 11–12). In relation to the K'iche' Maya, MacKenzie (2016: 93) stresses that the establishment and renewal of order in the cosmos is a collective work of both humans and deities. This is also true for Chimbán, where the church with the saints, the *ordenanza* house and the important crosses and mountains collectively contribute to an orderly functioning of the entire community, which they can feel proud about as the centre of the world, which is their home and where they can live.

However, the world is not always orderly and liveable. Saints leave their community if it does not treat them with respect, if they are subject to beating, if they suffer from hunger or if they are afraid for their lives. People act the same way and they, too, leave – be it, like in the 1980s, for Mexico to escape the terrors and murders of war or, like today, for the US, to escape the poverty and to earn money under difficult circumstances to improve their and their families' lives (cf. Loucky and Moors 2000). As noted by Lutz and Lovell (2000: 11), migration has been a "crucial element in the story of Maya survival" since the colonial and post-colonial times, when people were leaving to work on large farms and plantations on the coast. Today's migrant workers often visit the sacred places of the community, its saints, crosses and mountains. Sometimes they wait for a sign to be revealed to them in a dream. They also seek out prayersayers to undergo a financially expensive ritual to ensure good fortune for the journey. Hagan (2008), who worked with Maya migrants from Guatemala and Mexico, has found similar patterns across all regions. When they are staying abroad, the migrants sometimes go visit their families. They want to touch their native ground, feel their home, not just to maintain contact via telephone or e-mail. Many of these visitors are undocumented migrants who have to hire smugglers (*coyotes*) to cross Mexico and the fiercely guarded US border and they risk being assaulted, pick pocketed and raped as well as their health and life. They return home for a couple of weeks or months, often falling on the patron saint fiesta. If they succeed in obtaining residence permits or permanent residence status abroad, they come back regularly.

Although they might have suffered a great deal of injustice and grievance in their native communities, migrants tend to return to them. In Todos Santos and San Miguel, almost all families have at least one of their members who left to earn money in the north (*el norte*). Only rarely do these migrants fail to send remittances homes and only rarely they do not intend to come back. The prospects of buying new land, founding a store, and – especially – building a new large house are enticing. There are also social and political impacts to an

improved economic standing. Higher status and more prestige can be shown off but may also enable the person to do what is traditionally held appropriate: to express generosity by sponsoring holidays and serving the community. It is “the values of respect, communal solidarity, and the relation of humans with their environment” that are, according to Montejo (2005: 142–143), a well-known migrant from the region, the key attributes of appropriate relations among the traditional Jakalteq Maya. Wellmeier (1998: 148–149, 186–187), who studied Maya emigrants from this region, notes that self-sacrifice in the form of work for the community remains their basic value and source of prestige in the USA, too. After all, as pointed out by MacKenzie (2014), even in the very international environment of global networks and mobility, much of Maya religious thoughts and practices can “travel well”.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND THE PLACING OF HOME

Let me now in conclusion return to the story about the travelling saint. Both versions of the legend – the one from Todos Santos and the one from Chimbán – share a number of motives. First, the saint leaves his original community to find his new home in another. Second, in his bodily spiritual or immanently transcendental substance, the saint is considered to be a living person endowed with agency, who requires to be respected and taken care of. Third, the saint is a powerful being, a deity that shares the world with people and affects their lives: crop yields, prosperity and well-being decrease in Todos Santos following his departure, while they rise in Chimbán after his arrival. Fourth, the reason for the saint fleeing his community consists in bad or immoral behaviour of the people – who broke their obligations and commitments, based on the imperatives of reciprocity, mutuality and coexistence.

However, the moral failure is embedded in different historical contexts in the two communities: in Chimbán it is linked to social conflict between the *costumbristas* and the Catholics (the Catholics are supposed to have been handling the saint roughly, beating him up, and insulting him and the like). In Todos Santos, it is linked to social conflict between the army, associated with the Protestants, and its critics, opponents and victims (it was the army that defiled the church and turned it into a place where members of the community were held prisoners, tortured and murdered). I would argue the difference between the narratives to consist in prominence being given to different parts of the collective memories of the communities: in Chimbán to the escalated situation surrounding the Catholic mission in the middle of the 20th century, in Todos Santos to the traumatic experience of the civil war of the 1980s.

The fact that Todosanteros tend to project onto the legend the motive of civil war, while the people of Chimbán do not does not imply that San Miguel did not experience *la violencia*, and it does not imply that Todos Santos did not experience the suppression of the *costumbre*. However, as we have learned from Halbwachs, collective memory is very

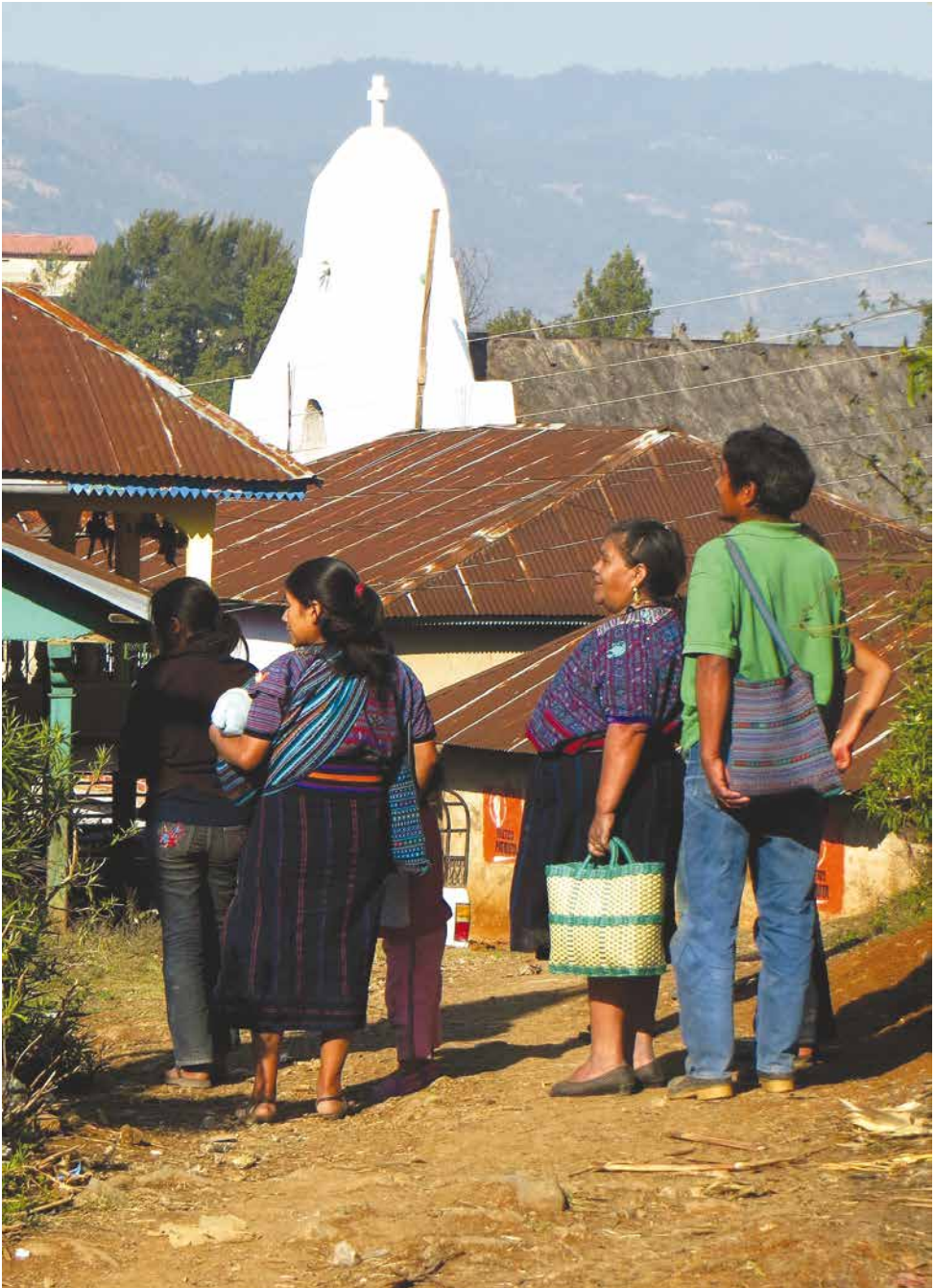
selective, as its purpose is to give history a meaning relevant for the *present* (Halbwachs and Coser 1992). Drawing from Carruthers (1998), Ingold (2013: 79–80) calls this a kind of “memory-work”: even in European pilgrimage, the sacred places have not simply been capsules, where durable relics are preserved, but places of memory, where the remembering goes on in the very activities that the people, like their predecessors, carry on around them. Place is something to be lived – to be continuously regenerated in a complex and dynamic network of mutual interconnections of various human and nonhuman entities. Following Ingold, it can be said that it is not the case that we build any place, let alone home, rather we dwell in that place – and we are thus part of its becoming.

In sum, the legend can be read as an articulation of collective memory, trauma and guilt and it can also be read as a story of homeseeking and homemaking. An important role is played by the motive of pilgrimage. Saint Todos Santos left his original community and made a long journey to find a new home elsewhere. Those inhabitants of Todos Santos Cuchumatán who believe that the statue standing in their church is not the real one and that the real patron saint lives in Chimbán, began to organize pilgrimages to visit him. Some of the pilgrims who seek out the patron saint with their personal wishes and thanks also visit the *ordenanza* house to greet the *alkal txaj*. The *chimán* Andrea told me that she also visits Chimbán regularly to ensure the well-being of her community. Thus, the legend has become a part of *lived religion* that must be approached, as Robert Orsi emphasizes,

in its place within a more broadly conceived and described lifeworld, the domain of everyday existence, practical activity, and shared understandings, with all its crises, surprises, satisfactions, frustrations, joys, desires, hopes, fears, and limitations. (Orsi 2010: xxxii)

The patron saint of Todos Santos became a memento of the time when the world turned against the community, in which global developments tore apart the local interrelationships. This collective memory has materialised in this statue. While the collective memory is embedded in culture (in the cosmology and rituality of Maya traditionalism) and politics (the social conflicts of civil war and religious conversion), it also involves the dimension of experience of home as an existential universal, irreducible to the preceding two. The saint has become the personification of a home whose security has been compromised and whose part has been moved somewhere else. There are many matters that can be called existential, and the sense of home is one of them. As noted by Jackson (1995: 122–123), many definitions of home are possible, but what is substantial is describing home as a lived relationship, endowed with a single existential question: “how do people transform givenness into choice so that the world into which they are thrown becomes a world they can call their own”.

Most readers of this article will probably not believe that mountains, crosses and images of saints are living beings, and that statues can turn into pilgrims and walk from



Pilgrims from Todos Santos Cuchumatán at Chimbán. San Miguel Acatán, 2013. Photo: J. Kapusta.

one town to another. Notwithstanding that, for me the story of the travelling saint, as I have heard it, is not just emotionally powerful, but also essentially true. This legend is naturally important for an ethnographer, because it contains the characteristic cultural traits of the particular society studied; it is important, because it represents a given collective memory, embedded in the history and politics of the region. However, these are only *some* of its content layers. The mixture of history and myth – as a Western observer would undoubtedly classify the genre – gives rise to a story of home and homelessness, of sense of place and its uniqueness and of the conditions prevailing in a place in which life can be lived and in which it cannot. The legend of the travelling saint who is, in turn, visited by travelling people, tells us how home is questioned, sought after and discovered again. As such, this narrative is definitely meaningful and, most importantly, phenomenologically and existentially true.

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SVETNIK NA BEGU DINAMIKA USTVARJANJA DOMA IN USTVARJANJA SVETEGA KRAJA

Legenda, ki jo pripovedujejo v majevski skupnosti na Gvatemalskem višavju, poroča, da je med državljansko vojno skupina vojakov zavzela cerkev in jo spremenila v zapor. To je razjezilo zavetnika skupnosti, ki je bil razočaran nad ravnanjem ljudi in se je odločil, da odide. Kot romar je odšel v drugo skupnost in prosil za zavetišče. Družina mu je dovolila ostati pri hiši, a so ga našli v bližini kot kip, opravljen v oblačilo, značilno za njegovo izvirno skupnost. Ljudje so nato kip premaknili h krajevni cerkvi, kjer naj bi skrbeli zanj in ga častili skupaj z drugimi svetniki. Bili so zadovoljni, da so imeli novega svetnika in mu niso pustili oditi. Nasprotno pa so bili ljudje v njegovi izvirni skupnosti nesrečni zaradi njegovega odhoda in so začeli organizirati romanja, da so ga obiskovali.

Večina bralcev tega članka najbrž ne verjame, da so gore, križi in podobe svetnikov živa bitja ter da se kipi lahko lahko spremenijo v romarje in hodijo iz kraja v kraj. Ne glede na to je za avtorja članka zgodba o potujočem svetniku, kakor jo je slišal, ne le čustveno močna, temveč v bistvu resnična. Legenda je seveda pomembna za etnografa, saj vsebuje značilne kulturne poteze preučevane družbe; pomembna je, ker predstavlja njen kolektivni spomin, ukoreninjen v zgodovino in politiko območja. Vendar so to le nekatere od njenih vsebinskih plasti. Mešanica zgodovine in mita – tako bi zahodnjak nedvoumno označil ta žanr – napeljuje k zgodbi o domu in brezdomstvu, občutenju prostora in njegove enkratnosti ter razmer v kraju, kjer je mogoče živeti, in kraju, kjer to ni mogoče. Legenda o potujočem svetniku, ki ga potem obiskujejo potujoči ljudje, govori o tem, kako se spraševati o domu, kako ga iskati in znova odkriti. Kot takšna je legenda vsekakor smiselna in, kar je še pomembnejše, fenomenološko in eksistencialno resnična.

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