

Re-contextualizing Traditions:
The Performance of Identity in Festivals of Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalenteño Songs in
Mexico

By

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ABSTRACT

Among the many musical traditions of Mexico, the *son* is an expression of the richness and diversity of Mexican culture. This vibrant musical genre—performed by small ensembles, with or without singing, and danced—appears throughout Mexico, marked by regional differences in both instrumentation and performance style. Thus, *son* traditions can be seen as a genuine indicator of the idiosyncrasies of the various Mexican cultures. My dissertation deals with issues of representation and construction of identity and tradition through musical events showcasing *son* traditions from the Huasteca, Jarocho, and Tierra Caliente cultural regions.

Drawing on extensive ethnographic work conducted in these regions, I examine how the concepts of identity and tradition are performed, renewed, and negotiated through festivals and other cultural (both educational and performative) projects seeking to revitalize the Mexican *son* and the production and transmission of cultural heritages. Chapter One sets the theoretical framework for my study of identity and tradition as represented and negotiated in festivals and cultural events. Chapter Two presents a historical overview of the musical genre, focusing on the three *son* subgenres under study. Chapter Three examines the cultural politics that prompted the founding of several festivals and cultural in the 1980s. Chapters Four, Five, and Six discuss music festivals that feature *sones* from the Huasteca region, *sones jarochos*, and *sones* from Tierra Caliente, respectively. Included in these chapters is a discussion of various educational and performative projects that are representative of private initiatives that have received on-and-off sponsorship from state institutions. Finally, Chapter Seven focuses on two festivals that feature several *son* subgenres in both rural and urban contexts. My study of these festivals will serve as a medium to examine issues of cultural promotion, cultural politics, and the use of music as a tool for social change. Lastly, Chapter Eight presents a summary and conclusions.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION—MEXICAN *SONES* AND KEY CONCEPTS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND TRADITION

Among the many musical traditions of Mexico, the *son* is one of the most representative of the richness and diversity of Mexican culture. *Son* (or *sones*)¹ is a generic term that describes both a complex of genres and the various regional subgenres that make up that complex. *Son* is a type of popular music performed by small ensembles, with or without singing, and danced. It serves to entertain, but is also performed at celebratory occasions and festivals as well as in rituals

Although *sones* appear throughout Mexico marked by regional differences in both instrumentation and performance styles, they share common characteristics that define the genre as a whole, musically (i.e. their rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic structures), lyrically, and choreographically. *Sones* always involve instrumental ensembles consisting primarily of chordophones, and may also involve singing. The *tarima* or wooden surface where the dancing takes place is considered an instrument within the ensemble, played by the dancers, whose dance usually takes the form of *zapateado* (foot tapping/stamping).

As shall be seen, regional subgenres such as the Terracalenteño, Huasteco, Jalisciense, Jarocho, and Abajeño² *sones* present differences in instrumentation, dancing,

¹ Throughout my dissertation, I use the singular (*son*) or plural (*sones*) of the term interchangeably to refer to both the musical style and the various musical subgenres. In either case, semantical and contextual meaning does not change. I specifically use the term in singular when referring to a single piece of music within any given *son* subgenre and as a collective noun. In other situations, the use of singular or plural is context-dependent.

² I use adjectives such as Huasteco, Jarocho, or Terracalenteño in concordance with the words they accompany. That is, I use the terms as singular (e.g. *son huasteco*) or plural (e.g. *sones huastecos*), as well as masculine (*huasteco*) or feminine (*huasteca*) depending on the situation. For example, I use “Huasteca region” as the word region is considered feminine in Spanish. I italicize the adjective when using it after the word it accompanies (in keeping with Spanish usage), and keep it in plain text when it appears before the word it accompanies (in keeping with English usage).

singing, and overall performance styles. Because of these differences and the particular cultural traits and socio-cultural contexts that each *son* subgenre encompasses, it can be argued that regional *sones* are genuine indicators of the idiosyncrasies of the various Mexican cultures and traditions. Performers' identification with their region of origin brings a strong social component to each regional *son*.

Born as a hybrid genre out of the intermixing of European, indigenous, African, and Afro-Caribbean musical elements and contexts, Mexican *sones* have moved through time as a symbol of Mexican identity, even as the very concept of "Mexican identity" has changed over time.³ What might be called the *son*'s "Golden Age" lasted from the 1890s until the middle of the 20th century. By the 1960s, *son* subgenres were in serious decline all around Mexico: the *son* had lost the favor of its audiences, old performers had passed away, and new generations did not engage with the musical tradition. With fewer performance occasions and little support from either the government or private patrons, several regional *son* subgenres became thin and isolated, with minimal projection outside their regions.

In the 1980s, however, some of the *son* subgenres underwent a renaissance owing to various private and official initiatives that infused new life to the music. The organizing of music festivals by researchers, musicians, and cultural promoters, among others, was one example. Festivals served as vehicles to share and revitalize regional music cultures and to bring together and give visibility to musical traditions and musicians scattered through Mexican rural areas. Festivals did not supplant traditional

³ During the independence movement in the first half of the 19th century, *sones* were associated with an emergent Mexican identity and came to be considered as national symbols. Even though the different *son* subgenres were closely linked to regional identities, they were permeated by nationalistic feelings inspired by the Mexican Revolution at the beginning of the 20th century. See chapter 2 for further discussion.

contexts for the music (i.e. funerals, weddings, and other life-cycle celebrations), but rather created new spaces for interaction and connection. They served as venues to create and reinforce regional identities and as sites to share *sones* and other traditional musics within and across regions. At festivals, music functioned as a way to provide a sense of belonging to both particular places of origin and a broader pan-regional space represented by a cultural community created around traditional music.

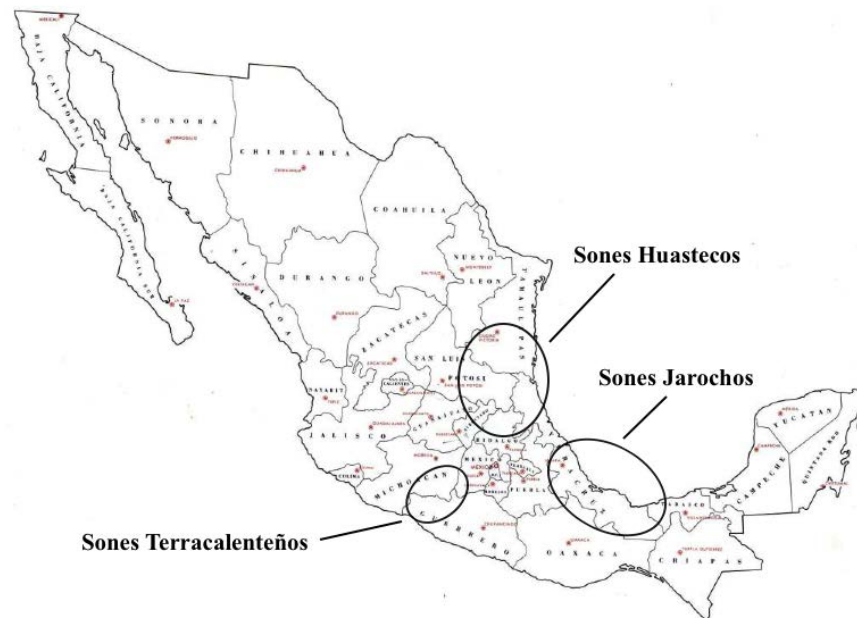
Along with festivals, educational and performance projects have been developed over the last two decades in various Mexican regions around the idea of revitalizing traditional music cultures. Cultural centers and associations such as El Tecolote in Arcelia (Guerrero), Jardín Kojima in Otatitlán (Veracruz), El Huerto in Morelia (Michoacán), and Tamoanchan in Citlaltépetl (Veracruz) were created to teach, exchange, and rescue music and musical experiences as well as reconnect with a cultural past. These projects facilitated the gathering of people of different ages (often spanning three generations), a key social process in the construction of musical traditions that are mostly passed on orally.

My Study: Overview

My study focuses on Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalenteño *sones* (see figure 1),⁴

⁴ These *sones*' geographical areas are the Huasteca, Jarocho (also known as Sotavento), and Tierra Caliente regions, respectively. The Huasteca region comprises a territory that overlaps into the states of Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, Puebla, Querétaro, and Veracruz from the Gulf of Mexico to the Eastern Sierra Madre Occidental mountains. The Jarocho region occupies a territory that extends throughout the southern coastal plain of Veracruz on the eastern Gulf of Mexico. The Tierra Caliente region is located in the northwestern part of Guerrero State, southeastern Michoacán State, and southwestern Mexico State. Setting aside for now the issues posed by the concept of cultural region, I refer to these three cultural areas according to the way they have been defined by CONACULTA (Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes / National Council for Culture and the Arts), in collaboration with musicologists and historians and through its cultural programs for the Huasteca in 1994 (Programa de

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalenteño *sones*



(Map outline taken from <http://mapasdemexico.org/maps/caps2.html>)

which bear musical and contextual characteristics that are found throughout the wider complex of Mexican *sones*. These subgenres have experienced different trajectories and impulses that have been factors in their levels of survival and success. They enjoy different levels of popularity among young generations, which has led to varying degrees of experimentation, renewal, and “modernization” of the genre. This dissertation deals with issues of representation and construction of identity and tradition through musical events within these three regional *son* subgenres. I examine how the conceptions of

Desarrollo Cultural de la Huasteca), Sotavento in 2001 (Programa de Desarrollo Cultural del Sotavento), and Tierra Caliente in 2003 (Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de Tierra Caliente). These divisions were established in tandem with state cultural institutions to facilitate the administration and distribution of funds towards cultural projects for the revitalization and promotion of regional cultures and the sponsoring of new such projects. See more on these projects at http://vinculacion.conaculta.gob.mx/prog_vinregional_programas.html

identity and tradition are performed and renewed through festivals of Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalenteño *sones* and through other educational and performance projects seeking to revitalize the *son* and the transmission of cultural heritages in order to bridge the generational gap of the 1980s.

I study festivals and other cultural projects as catalysts for experiencing processes of identity formation. Festivals are cultural events sought-after by music lovers and professional, amateur, and semi-professional musicians and dancers as these events bring together music performances as well as individual and group experiences different from the structures of everyday life. In them, musicians overtly articulate their sense of identity and belonging as they come into contact with other musicians and audiences. Thus, a comparative study of the construction and representation of the three *son* subgenres at festivals may shed some light onto the intimate connection between music and society in their particular historical trajectories and social circumstances. Analysis of the differences and commonalities in the recent histories of these subgenres underscores how the social influences the musical (and vice versa), the relevance of music and dance performance in the cultural production of identity, and the ideologies behind the cultural politics involved in the production of festivals and cultural events.

Like festivals, cultural projects (e.g., weekly workshops and performances, music schools, music camps) that have been created in the last twenty years function as a medium for community-building, cultural transmission, and inter-generational communication. I will focus on festivals and cultural projects as the core of the process of re-contextualizing traditions that is taking place across the regions under study. In this process, music is key as a means of rebuilding social and cultural practices in response to

changing economic realities, media saturation and global orientations. This process of re-contextualization speaks to issues of community-building within and across Mexican regions and a preoccupation with the conceptualization of identity in general and collective identities in particular, as they are “fundamental to forming and sustaining social groups, which are, in turn, basic to survival” (Turino 2008:2). A driving force within this action is a new awareness people have attained as owners of their own culture and cultural traditions.

Following linguist Per Linell, re-contextualization can be broadly described as a dynamic process in which there is a transfer-and-transformation from one interaction to another (Linell 1998:145). Thus, the revitalization that the Mexican *son* is undergoing is forcing re-significations of this musical style, once considered “traditional” and therefore connected to rural contexts, removed from modernity, and unsophisticated. The revival is resulting in an authentication of traditional music in modern contexts, infusing tradition with new meanings that validate cultural roots and belonging, re-contextualizing the musical style to energize the present through its connection to the past. Festivals and other cultural projects have been a means of raising the profile of some musical traditions that would have died out otherwise (e.g., some musical traditions in Tierra Caliente and southern Veracruz).

My dissertation focuses on the Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalenteño regions, three broad cultural areas with various historical narratives and multiple modes of identity construction. Although the geographical area may seem broad, the goal is to understand similarities and differences among these regional traditions that bear common roots in their pasts and divergent developments according to their particular regional and

local histories. Such a broad comparison may shed light on the processes that govern local identity construction in globalized scenarios where local and regional borders are decreasing in relevance. The advantage of studying all three regions as opposed to looking at only one will be to be able to analyze differences and commonalities in their approaches to the revival of musical traditions and to investigate the possibility of a supra-regional social movement centered around traditional music and culture as a response to other musics saturating the market.

As previously mentioned, musicians articulate their sense of identity and belonging when they come into contact with other musicians and participants in their preferred genre. In the following chapters, I analyze how identities are performed at festivals that feature a particular *son* subgenre (e.g., Festival de la Huasteca and Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan) versus festivals that showcase a variety of them (e.g., Son Raíz and Son Para Milo) and bring together musicians from different musical regions and cultures. Although regional and ethnic identities are performed in both types of festivals, such identities present as more localized and nuanced in festivals featuring a particular *son* subgenre. In festivals that include different *son* subgenres, performances deliver an image of Mexican culture and identity that positions cultural and ethnic diversity as an integral part of a broader entity. That is, while regional and ethnic differences are acknowledged and highlighted, people construct a broader cultural identity under the banner of traditional music. It is a type of collective identity that Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero (2007:748) conceptualize as “bundles” of shared values, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and roles.

Across the Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalenteño regions, various cultural projects have come to life in the last twenty years at the hands of young entrepreneurs, cultural promoters, and musicians who strongly believe in traditional music as a way to heal society and rebuild its damaged social fabric.⁵ These projects encapsulate the idea of articulating collective identities through music, dance, and other cultural expressions, reinforcing the importance of these expressive cultural practices in identity formation processes. As Turino says, “cultural practices like music and dance from different societies can help us achieve a balance between understanding cultural differences and recognizing our common humanity” (2008:3). As I have witnessed during my fieldwork in Mexico, traditional music is particularly helping children and young population to feel connected to a collective of people and to their regional cultural heritages, reinforcing their sense of belonging. Traditional music is also bridging at least three generations of practitioners, a process that has allowed older musicians to be respect and recognized as tradition-bearers.

Many of the people I have spoken to in Mexico express a powerful sense of connection to their places of origin. No doubt historical narratives are articulated by the musical traditions in the various regions. The point will be to demonstrate how traditions are lived, negotiated, and reconstructed, and how re-contextualization may articulate processes of identity construction.

⁵ Worldwide capitalism and globalization, harsh economic conditions during the 1980s, and migration to urban areas and to foreign countries (particularly the United States) contributed to changes in both social structures and cultural values throughout Mexico. Also, drug-trafficking-related violence is rapidly transforming Mexican society, traditions, and lives. People perceive a loss in traditional values and reciprocal human relationships needed to create a balanced social environment.

Through ethnographic accounts, my dissertation addresses the meanings ascribed to music-making by people attending these festivals and how such meanings may be essential to the construction of the self through the experience of sameness and difference. I am interested in the way musicians, practitioners, and audiences negotiate identities, tradition and modernity, and continuity and innovation while singing, playing, listening, and dancing to (old and new) *sones*, inherited structures with new musical idioms, new structures with established musical idioms, new improvisations and contexts within the framework of the old. I consider *son* as a malleable musical genre capable of accommodating the old and the new, a hybrid genre that bridges time periods and is renewed as musicians imbue new meanings into the genre and their music-making activities.

Thus, I aim to demonstrate how different festivals manifest different articulations of culture, accommodate specific institutional requirements, make evident present-day preoccupations around music-making as well as discourses around ethnic, cultural, and regional identities. I also investigate how individual practitioners talk about themselves in terms of such attachments, and how these practitioners negotiate the performance of traditional music and dance styles within a globalized and modern world in which massively disseminated musical genres dominate the media, and why young musicians choose Mexican *son* as a way of expressing themselves, having fun, making friends, and experience belonging.

Notions of Identity and Culture

In 1996, Stuart Hall, in a seminal piece in which he attempted to make sense of the profusion of academic writing about identity, asked, “Who needs identity?” Although the sense of self and selves and the notion of belonging that identity implies are not new concepts, it has been since the mid-1980s, and even more so the end of the 1980s, coinciding with sweeping changes wrought by globalization processes, that the notion of identity has been subject to relentless discussion across academic disciplines. Hall’s response acknowledged the immanent nature of identity and the need to deal with deconstructive theories that had placed the concept of identity “under erasure”; that is, identity cannot be thought as an essentialist notion and one without which we cannot get by. Moreover, Hall argued that the question of identity is recurrent as we “attempt to rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices” (1996:2), or how the self is rearticulated within the processes by which cultural meanings are produced and understood.

While essentialist notions of identity have been reconsidered, the relativity and situational characteristics of the fragmented and modern conception of identity need to be grasped in the midst of globalized contexts. By now, we have learned that identities are constructed, and though

they seem to invoke an origin in historical past, [...] identities are about *questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves*” (ibid., 4, my emphasis).

In Mexico, the construction of identities through musical traditions is taking place across regions, and traditional forms are being redefined to incorporate more inclusive ethnic discourses as well as new discourses of Mexicanness. Certainly, the sonic and social experience of the Mexican *son* is part of a larger phenomenon of musical communities grappling with social mobility, musical change, globalization, and representation of social (Henriques 2012; Manuel 1989; Turino 1984; Waterman 1982), ethnic (Castaldi 2006; Guerrón-Montero 2006; González 2010; Ingram 2008; Romero 2001), class (Peña 1985), regional (Lucas 2000; Sutton 1991), cultural (González 2004; Sans 2008; Turino 2004), and collective identities (Gardner 2004) from constructivist positions, that is, identities constructed “from cultural resources available at any given moment,” rather than from essentialist and seemingly immutable qualities (Rice 2007:24).⁶ While these experiences and processes are not new in the history of the Mexican *son*, its regional, national, and international projections have gained relevance due to the interconnectedness that social mobility and mass media bring to the world’s communities. Redefinitions of identities through musical traditions and projects seeking the re-contextualizing of traditions are indicative of a critical consciousness by some researchers, musicians, and cultural promoters to regain control of cultural practices.

Current views of individual and group identities (ethnic and social) consider them as negotiated, fragmented, multiple, fluid, relational, and in constant formation and reformulation.⁷ Identities are situations and are constructed within discourse. Thus, as Hall points out, they need to be understood within specific practices and historical and

⁶ See Rice (2007) for further references to works on identity and music.

⁷ See Ali Rattansi in Shay 2006:53; Cerulo 1997; Giménez 2000; Hall 1996; Jaúregui 2007; Mendoza 2000; Noyes 1995; Pérez-Torres 2000; Sans 2008; Turino 2004, 2008; and Wade 2000, among others.

institutional circumstances. In the festival scenes, processes of identity formation take place as identities emerge in contexts where many elements are at play. Identity emerges, as Hall argues, within specific modalities of power to mark “difference and exclusion” (1996:4). It also emerges as marker of sameness, though this does not imply that there is no internal differentiation and that identity is all-inclusive and seamless. Within identification processes and expressions, there is always room for difference, so mobility within and outside the self and the group can take place.

In my study, I take up Turino’s conception of identity as “the representation of selected habits foregrounded in given contexts to define self to oneself and to others by oneself and by others” (2004:8). This definition of identity is closely related to that of culture as shared features within a group and in the function of establishing the difference between human groups (Wallerstein 1990:33). Culture, a “model of significations,” provides, then, the “construction materials” of identity, which could be understood as interiorized culture by the subjects (Giménez 2009:7–11). In its capacity to contrast and differentiate human beings, culture is bound up with identity.

Generally speaking, in the festivals I study, culture is understood as a conglomerate of communication that a given people have in common: their shared experiences, perceptions, values, and consciousness. This conception of culture coincides with Giménez’s definition of it as

[l]a organización social de significados, interiorizados de modo relativamente estable por los sujetos en forma de esquemas o de representaciones compartidas, y objetivados en formas simbólicas, todo ello en contextos históricamente específicos y socialmente estructurados (2009:8)

([t]he social organization of meaning, internalized in a relatively stable

manner by subjects as schemes or as shared representations, and objectified in symbolic forms, the whole within historically specific and socially structured contexts).⁸

That is, cultural meanings are both objectified as cultural expression—such as music and dance—and internalized as social representations, what Bourdieu calls “habitus” or cognitive patterns through which externalized cultural forms could be interpreted (1990:53).

According to several authors, identities are articulated in a constant selection of elements that get re-signified in a process of redefinition such that the sense of “belonging” to a collective or to a social group is linked to an ideology that legitimates that belonging (de la Peña 2008:124). Through this take on identity, I investigate the social organization of cultural difference inherent in the identity formation process (Rice 2007:34; Shay 2006:16; Wade 1997:16). Thus, my research into festivals aims to explain how that cultural difference is represented in different scenarios, and answers questions such as whether place matters for the performance of identities and the conceptualization of tradition in festivals of Mexican *sones*.

Taking into account the notions of identity and culture mentioned above, I investigate representations of identities—cultural, ethnic, collective—in different festivals and educative projects. Rather than individual identities, which involve both oneself and others as selected habits are chosen over others by the individuals in given contexts (Turino 2004:8), I focus mostly on group identities, which Rice refers to as “collective self-understanding as represented by various characteristics, activities, and

⁸ This and all other translations are my own.

customs, including music” (2007:23).

Group identities, such as ethnic and cultural identities, are basic to social life. They provide the connection between the individual self as s/he chooses to be represented (self identity) and the structure of the group in which the individual is embedded. That is, self identity is understood as self-understanding (the self and the habits specific to the individual that develop through social interactions between the individual and his physical and social surroundings) (Rice 2007:25). Although not exclusively so, ethnic identity is particularly relevant in the Huasteca region among indigenous groups (see chapter 4). In the Huasteca, as in the Jarocho and Tierra Caliente regions, cultural and regional identities play a significant role among mestizo population. Also, common to these regions is the negotiation for a collective identity that stresses shared attributes around which the group comes together.

Ethnic, Cultural, Regional, Social, and Collective Identities

As defined by Schermerhorn, an ethnic group is “a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood” (Schermerhorn in Isiksal 2002:2). Examples of such symbolic elements are kinship patterns, physical contiguity, religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these (Smith in *ibid.*, 2).

Fredrik Barth was the first to persuasively argue that “ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification” by the actors themselves and by others (1969:10).

This notion implies that ethnic identity is part of a dynamic social process. Subjectively constructed, ethnic identity is a collective form of identity through which subjects mark what is theirs and what is not,

For Barth, what identifies the group is not objective differences, but the elements chosen by the group as significant, that is “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (1969:15). Instead of focusing on cultural traits encompassed by such boundaries, Barth examines the processes of formation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries of identification and differentiation, specifically upon contact between collectives— ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ (Eriksen 2002:11; Jenkins 2008:12).

This take on ethnic identity is significant as it allows us to differentiate between culture and ethnicity. Such difference is pertinent in festivals where ethnic identity gets to be performed and produced (see Festival de la Huasteca in chapter 4) by ethnic groups and others. According to Barth, “ethnic identity is associated with a culturally specific set of value standards” (ibid., 25). Such a “culturally specific set of values” is constructed, leaving space for the “cultural stuff” that can be assigned within the boundaries of the ethnic group as long as the ethnic group opts for inclusion of such stuff as part of the symbolic repertoire of ethnic difference (ibid.).

Important within this notion of ethnicity is Joane Nagel’s analysis of ethnic identity and culture, which are the two basic building blocks of ethnicity and fundamental to the central projects of ethnicity: the construction of boundaries and the production of meaning (1994:152–53). For Nagel, culture is associated with meaning and ethnic identity with the construction of boundaries:

Culture dictates the appropriate and inappropriate content of a particular

ethnicity and designates the language, religion, belief system, art, music, dress, traditions, and lifeways that constitute an authentic ethnicity. While the construction of ethnic boundaries is very much a saga of structure and external forces shaping ethnic options, the construction of culture is more a tale of human agency and internal group processes of cultural preservation, renewal, and innovation (ibid., 161).

In the Huasteca, a multi-ethnic region, the boundaries of cultural and ethnic identity often get blurred and the regional interplay of ethnic identities is embedded within a wider Huasteca ethnic identity. Nahuas, Teenek, Otomí, Tepehua, Pame, and Totonaco people, consider themselves (and are considered by others) as Huasteco people as defined earlier by Schermerhorn: they have a real or putative common ancestry (dating from at least the 10th century B.C.), a shared history, and common cultural and symbolic elements defined as embodiment of their peoplehood.⁹ As mentioned above, ethnic identity—the social organization of cultural difference—is socially constructed. It is chosen by the individuals and determined by their “perception of its meaning to different audiences, its salience in different social contexts, and its utility in different settings” (Nagel 1994:155). The application of systematic distinctions between insiders and outsiders is key in this process. If there is no distinction between “Us” and “Them,” Eriksen argues, there can be no ethnicity, since “ethnicity presupposes an institutionalised relationship to be culturally distinctive” (2002:19). In the Festival de la Huasteca, for example, Huasteca identity is stressed by the choice of dress (i.e. each Huasteco indigenous group has its distinctive clothing), food consumption, and symbolic elements such as the burning of *copal* (incense) to open a concert, which is common to all Huasteco groups. At this particular festival, Huasteca ethnic boundaries, identities, and culture are “defined, negotiated, and

⁹ See Escobar Ohmstede 1998 and Ramírez Castilla et al. 2008, among others.

produced through social interaction” (Nagel:152). Central to this negotiation is the function of culture as authenticating ethnic boundaries and providing a system of meaning to the group.

The main difference between ethnic and cultural identity lies then in what Barth called boundaries, the selection of some of the “cultural stuff” chosen by the group to differentiate itself for itself as well as for others. Also, the construction of ethnic identity takes place within the groups as “they shape and reshape their self-definition and culture” as well as by external processes and actors as “they shape and reshape ethnic categories and definitions” (Nagel 1994:152). The construction of culture is more an internal group process while the construction of ethnic boundaries has to do more with “structure and external forces shaping ethnic options” (ibid., 161).

Closely related to ethnic identity, cultural identity can be understood as the ideas members of a group—who share models of signification—have of themselves as set against other groups. While ethnic identity is constructed through a selection of some of the “cultural stuff,” cultural identity is more inclusive. Jeannette Mageo takes cultural identity as “a group’s self-image,” which is constructed in contrast to and in comparison with other cultures, “always oppositional and incorporative, rejecting some features of other groups, indigenizing other features” (2002:493): that is, elected habits shared by the group are chosen to represent it for themselves and for others. Other authors (Poyer 1998; Thomas 1992; Turino 2008:95) share this view and equally stress the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural identity, which is particularly discursive in the Jarocho region and in festivals such as the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan and the Encuentro Jardín Kojima (see chapter 5).

Regional identity is ever-present in the festivals I discuss in my dissertation. As Paasi argues, regional consciousness points to people's multi-scalar levels of identification "with those institutional practices, discourses, and symbolisms that are expressive of the 'structures of expectations' that become institutionalized as parts of the process that we call a 'region'" (2003:478). Narratives of regional identity lean on various elements used contextually in practices and discourses that create such narratives. In the various Mexican regions, these elements are significant for mestizo and indigenous people and attend to multiple categories such as ideas about nature, landscape, culture/ethnicity, and images of people/community, among others (ibid., 477). Culture, media, and administration are crucial in the production and reproduction of a regional identity. Thus, regional identification is one more element in the constellation of identifications that people may manifest. Most of such identifications are constructed socially and "may well cross the borders of bounded spaces" (Paasi 2009:146).

Handler and Linnekin argue that social identity "is formulated in interaction with others" and depends upon evolving categories that are "symbolically constituted" and not naturally given (1984:287). To this symbolic construction of social identity, Tajfel adds the role the individual plays in shaping his or her social identity through membership in (a) social group(s). Tajfel defines social identity as "that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel in Brewer 2001:251). Most useful for my discussion of identity in festivals and educative projects in Tierra Caliente, as well as at the Festival Son Raíz, is Brewer's taxonomy of social identity. Brewer defines social identity as "aspects of the self that

have been particularly influenced by the fact of membership in specific social groups” (Brewer 2001:118). He distinguishes between four types of social identity: person-based, relational, group-based, and collective. Person-based social identities emphasize the content of identity—the acquisition of expectations, customs, beliefs, and associated with belonging to a particular social group. Relational identities are role-based or identifications of the self as a certain kind of person (i.e. in work teams, family, social clubs, and personal relationships). Group-based social identities refer to the perception of self as an integral or interchangeable part of a larger group or social unit. Collective identity is primarily concerned with the process by which a group-self representation is formed rather than the meaning attached to specific group identities. Rather than emphasizing what category members have in common, this type of identity emphasizes collective efforts (ibid., 117–119).

For my examination of the performance of identity in the regions I cover in my study, person-based identities and collective identities are most relevant. Person-based identity is present in most of the festivals and cultural projects, particularly El Huerto Cultural Center in Tierra Caliente (see chapter 6). According to Brewer, this type of identity emphasizes the content and acquisition of customs, beliefs, and ideologies associated with the belonging to a particular group. Person-based identity refers “to aspects of the self that have been particularly influenced by the fact of membership in specific social groups or categories and the shared socialization experiences that such membership implies” (ibid., 118). Person-based identification, then, refers to the importance that a particular group membership has for a person’s sense of self and the meaning that results from such identification (ibid.).

Understood as norms, values, and ideologies that an identification with a group involves, collective identity is important in all the festivals I discuss in my dissertation. Like group-based social identities, collective identity entails “shared representations of the group based on common interests and experiences,” referring as well to “an active process of shaping and forging an image of what the group stands for and how it wishes to be viewed by others” (ibid., 119). Thus, collective agency implies a deliberate sense of group agency and emphasizes common characteristics shared by the groups and around which the identity is forged (ibid.). Belinda Robnett refers to these shared attributes as “cultural capital” (2002:267) and stresses the centrality of collective identity for participation in a movement. As we shall see, group agency and social action are key for the Festival Son Raíz and El Tecolote Cultural Center (see chapter 7) as such action is felt as a means for social movement in more political arenas.

Lastly, to stress the notion of identity as a shifting feature of individuals and communities, I would like to point out John R. Gillis’s conception of identity. According to Gillis, “the core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity. [...] We need to be reminded that memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena” (1994:3). Thus, I investigate identity and tradition as “human constructions,” exploring the role(s) of Mexican *son* festivals and other cultural projects built around the notion of traditional music. Invoking a historical past and the utilization of resources of history, language, and culture to “become” rather than “being” frame a space where my thesis of re-contextualization of tradition and the performance of

identity in *son* festivals in Mexico take place.

My analysis of the performance of identity at festivals, while vital in its own right, has to be understood within a broader context in which musical practices are being transformed by an imaginary other—those who listen to a live radio broadcast of the festival, who receive instant digital photos and videos of the actual performance/music scene, who view the festival on a television or computer screen as it is being streamed live. In spite of descriptions of *son* as a traditional music genre with attendant connotations of a static past, oral transmission, and unsophisticated performance practices and contexts, the genre is being revitalized in multiple ways. It is experimented with at compositional and performative levels, as well as resignified as a political tool for social action.

Tradition, Heritage, Agency, and Re-contextualization

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines tradition as “the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on from one generation to another.” This definition makes reference to both ownership and inter-generational exchange (and continuity) of beliefs, rules, and customs that make up a corpus of experiences handed down and observed by many. A difficult notion to pin down, tradition is also part of larger debates on cultural issues, and is talked about in very different ways and with a variety of meanings within both academia and mundane circles.

The notion of tradition as a fixed and timeless convention has been subject to reformulation since Hobsbawm and Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* (1983).

Hobsbawm defines “invented tradition” as

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past (1983a:1–2).

The reference to a historical past and the sense of continuity to such a (real or invented) past is, for Hobsbawm, what makes invented traditions what they are. What is pertinent to my work is how “the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant” (ibid., 2) plays out in the music scenes that I discuss in my dissertation.

Hobsbawm made his case in connection with the creation of European nations in the 19th century. Invented national traditions were put forward to serve various nationalist agendas, always in response to novel situations, and invented by individuals (e.g. Boy Scout rituals by Baden-Powell) or by a group (e.g. the Nuremberg rally rituals by the Nazi party). Invented traditions, Hobsbawm argued, gain momentum when rapid transformations take place in society, thus threatening the (real or invented) past:

...when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated (ibid., 4–5).

Again, relevant to my work is the impulse to reinvent traditions in a rapidly changing world and the lingering zone where tradition and modernity, and continuity and innovation, meet, contest, and dialogue. As we shall see, in the case of Mexico,

significant processes of tradition-inventing took place at two different historical moments when rapid social changes were taking place: during and after post-revolutionary nationalism (1920–1950), and from the 1980s onwards. Though the invented traditions resulting from each period were different in nature, they all fit into the first of three overlapping types of invention of tradition argued by Hobsbawm: the establishment of social cohesion or membership of groups, real or artificial communities (ibid., 9). As we shall see in chapter 3, under post-revolutionary nationalism in Mexico, invented traditions such as a particular type of mariachi and Jarocho groups and repertoire were imposed top-down. After the 1980s, as a response to the rapid social and economic transformations that took place in Mexican society in previous decades, musicians, among others, felt the need to find a link to their own Mexican regional heritages. The traditions being revitalized and re-contextualized at the time were, for the most part, not state-inspired but built from the bottom up by the people.

In both cases, continuity with a past was key. “Quite new, or old but dramatically transformed social groups, environments and social contexts” —Hobsbawm says— “called for new devices to ensure or express social cohesion and identity and to structure social relations” (1983b:263). The current re-contextualization of *son* tradition shares the same determination, the same conscious and deliberate efforts at the hands of *son* practitioners and activists. In this case, the traditions are cultural, do have a continuity with a past, and the purpose is to bring cohesiveness to social groups that identify with a culture, a community, a region. It is the (re)creation of traditions, newly expressed, with symbolic elements, ceremonies, important dates, emblematic or iconic musicians, and the construction of a media network to support and sustain the new ways of mobilizing

people to be part of the social and cultural invention. Rather than an institution—the state, in this case—the impetus emanates from various centers of power (i.e. cultural promoters and non-profit educative cultural projects).

If there is something we may conclude from the contributions of Hobsbawm and of the other contributors to Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, it is that the book proposed the concept of tradition as cultural practices that are always in flux, in a permanent state of negotiation and redefinition. For these and many other authors, traditions are inventions, "selective re-workings of the past. They are attempts [...] to provide continuity with the past, whether real or invented" (Schnell 2003:9).

Throughout my work, I consider tradition as Hobsbawm and Ranger, and Handler and Linnekin do, as "an ongoing interpretation of the past" (1984:274), which allows me to establish flexible parameters for the understanding of changes over time in both musical and extramusical aspects of the genre under study. This notion of tradition applies to musical styles created, sustained, and developed as a vehicle of expression of culture in particular social contexts. That being said, I argue that at *son* festivals, there is a dual take on tradition and innovation as organizers, musicians, and attendees grapple with notions of continuity and preservation as well as innovation and transformation of the musical genre, its contexts, and musical experience in general. Since the 1980s, *son* has been reclaimed by many middle-aged and young practitioners as an expression of regional, cultural, and Mexican identity. The conversation on tradition is pervasive, as the notion of tradition works both as a reference for continuity to the past and as a source of innovation. It is at that crossroads where my discussion of the performance of identity takes place, and where *son* appears as a malleable musical form used, performed, and

signified by musicians, intellectuals, and listeners from multiple angles: as a social tool to claim belonging and identification, as a tool to create community, as a bridge to the past and what it is becoming, as a way to experience the present and to challenge globalization. *Son* musicians take part in discourses of music-making and social practices of music performance and consumption in which, as Lucas argues for gaucho music, notions of tradition and innovation have been employed by musicians, participants, and intellectuals as strategies to transcend regional boundaries (2005:57).¹⁰

In his 1999 analysis of the development of two musical regional traditions in Mexico, *son jarocho* and mariachi, ethnomusicologist Daniel Sheehy asked:

What happens to rural folk music in a late twentieth-century society marked by rampant population growth, migration from rural regions to urban centers (such as Mexico City) [...], the commercialization of culture, and government-backed canonization and dissemination of folklore? *Is a pan-national 'folk' music performed by professional musicians merely a style of music, or is it still a musical tradition connected to a distinct cultural community such as that of a region? What constitutes the musical culture of professionalized latter-day regional music?* (1999:44, my emphasis).

After studying the development and migration of such musical traditions from rural to urban settings and focusing on the lives of two professional musicians in order to answer these questions, Sheehy acknowledges the connection that exists for traditional musics performed by professional musicians in urban settings to their regions of origin, as well as to other regional musics in Mexico. Moreover, he shows how professional musicians in urban settings feel they are part of regional traditions while, at the same time, belonging to new cultural communities defined by common goals, needs, and “standards

¹⁰ Going beyond regional borders is fundamental to the experience of regional *sones* in urban contexts as well as in transnational scenarios as *son* is performed and consumed at festivals and *encuentros* in many parts of the world.

of the professional world in which they work” (ibid., 78). These musicians are linked to tradition, Sheehy argues, through other musicians who perform the same styles of music from their region of origin and through others from elsewhere. I extend this argument. At the turn of the 21st century, professional and amateur musicians in the regions I examine have been performing and reclaiming traditional music as a way to signify their own belonging (to a collective, a community, a region) in both urban and rural scenarios. While physical borders and barriers between the regions have diminished in significance since the turn of the 21st century, the sense of connection to regions of origin and to local cultures has gained momentum.

Sheehy also argues that for such professional musicians,

the subject matter of their profession—the musical repertoire—is influenced strongly by a commercial music industry driven by the quest for profit. In the minds of both, there is a give-and-take in this process; an important and beautiful part of the older tradition is sacrificed at the same time as the remnants of the tradition in their evolved forms persevere, bolstered by the same economic incentive that ushered in change (ibid., 79).

While I do not argue against this idea, I contest that within the frame of the festivals I discuss in my dissertation, the repertoire chosen by professional musicians is not solely determined by the quest for profit, but—more so—by the performance experience itself, the occasion, and the audience’s response. While many of my subjects are concerned with economic matters, their passion for the music prevails, and thus, in attending festivals and organizing musical projects, they are moved more by altruism rather than economic reward.

During my fieldwork in the different Mexican regions, I have witnessed an ambiguity in the use of the notion of tradition among my subjects. A dual discourse presents tradition as both a collection of cultural expressions and customs passed down from generation to generation and an all-encompassing practice that allows for continuity with the past as well as production of the new. That is, on one hand tradition is viewed as a static legacy of the past, transmitted from older to younger generations, and ideally learned with the fewest possible deviations from an imagined “authentic” past. On the other hand, tradition is not seen as a given. It functions as a reference for contemporary practices and is “a product of modernity” (Graburn 2001:68). In either case, cultural heritage is considered a bridge between past and present whereby the past informs the present and validates present-day musical practices. Thus, inter-generational exchange and the transmission and production of cultural heritage are fundamental to the festivals and projects I discuss in my dissertation. As Graburn states, heritage not only gives “a concrete sense of shared identity or belonging, but it also demands responsibility (for preservation, respect, safety) in the use or enhancement of [...] heritage-identity forms” (ibid., 71).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett analyzes the concept of heritage as “the transvaluation of the obsolete” through which value is created “through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display)” (1995:369). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett builds her argument around five propositions: heritage (1) as mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past; (2) as a “value added” industry; (3) as producer of the local for export; (4) as creating a problematic relationship

of its objects to its instruments; and (5) as a producer of virtuality, whether in the presence or the absence of actualities (ibid.).

The production of heritage in festivals of *son* particularly resonates with the idea of heritage as a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past in connection with the notion of tradition linking past and present and bringing to the fore notions of continuity. As in re-contextualization processes, the past informs cultural products generated in the present. In the same way that the notion of tradition validates the present, heritage adds value to existing assets. In the course of festivals and educative projects, heritage produces something new, claimed as heritage as it establishes a connection with the past, even though, as in the re-contextualization example we shall see in chapter 6, context, among other elements, has changed. In such example, the new cultural product that is created, a *fandango* (popular fiesta) in Huetamo, establishes a continuity with the past as those who are creating it, do so following available information they have on how a *fandango* took place around a wooden platform on top of which dancers dance, and how such woodend platform was placed over a hole to offer a deeper resonance to the dancing. All elements taking place in the event are new (context, musicians, audience, musical instruments, dancing, and rendition of *sones*) but it is heritage what informs and adds meaning to the product as a whole. Moreover, the living transmission of cultural values is key to heritage production (ibid., 378). In this frame of the production of heritage, it is important to note how the discourse of disappearing traditions adds value to both festivals and educative projects. In the case of the festivals I discuss, such discourse conditions organizers', audiences', and musicians' agency and plays a role in the production of heritage, traditions, and culture.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's statement of "the foreignness of the 'tradition' to its context of presentation" as a hallmark of heritage productions (*ibid.*, 374), applies to the re-contextualization processes that are taking place in Mexico as one of the main reasons for the production of such processes is precisely to bring more "realness" to the musical traditions and to avoid the foreignness of traditional music and contexts.

Present-day popular culture and the media influence repertoires, aesthetics, and performances. The drive to respond to demands of audiences (regionally, nationally, and internationally) account for these as well. Thus, we need to study musical traditions from within our own modernity. As García Canclini says, modernity relocates folklore, forcing it to be redefined by the "logic of the market" (2005:5). In this process, globalization too plays a central role in the discussion of identity as performed in festivals since interactions through global processes have diminished geographical borders and the isolation of local musical traditions.¹¹

How are power and meaning negotiated within the festival scene? Musicians and festival organizers address globalizing and modern influences by both embracing and resisting such forces, which are already part of present-day societies. Efforts for reviving musical practices and bringing back traditional contexts for these coexist with the need to make use of modern technology and devices such as sound systems, electricity, and the contemporary musical instruments associated with these, assumed as necessary for reaching wider audiences and adapting to contemporary ways of listening and

¹¹ See for example Guilbault 2006 and Sans 2008.

experiencing music.¹² Subjects are aware that globalizing media forces enable and constrain, allow and forbid, and expose an ambiguity whereby they assume external forces as constitutive of cultural and social processes.

In Mexico, conversations, reflections, and an awareness of the relationship between finance, media, and culture accelerated with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the United States, and Canada, which, when it came into force in 1994, created the world's largest free-trade area at the time. Cultural conversations tapped into ideas about the global economy, cultural flows, and the effect of the media in the production and transformation of culture. Looking near and far while trying to make sense of homogeneous and heterogeneous¹³ forces within the global and the local in everyday life was the name of the game. Rather than accepting the determinism of government initiatives and market and music industry structures, social actors¹⁴ implicated themselves in the production and consumption of traditional music as a way of countering global forces. Within the changing superstructures and with the "production of locality" (Appadurai 1996:41) at stake, festivals of traditional music seemed an appropriate vehicle for the (re)interpretation of a "past" through which to make sense of an elusive present.

Important for the purposes of this study is Anthony Giddens' take on agency, which views individuals as having certain freedom to make decisions within specific cultural and social contexts. Although Giddens does not concede total freedom of action

¹² A good example of this is violinist Natividad Leandro, "El Palillo," who was 81 years old when I interviewed him in October 2010. He commented how he likes to play Terracalenteño *sones* on his electric violin so he can easily hear his playing over the dancers when they onto the wooden platform to dance.

¹³ See Appadurai 1990:5 and 1996:32.

¹⁴ These include musicians, cultural promoters, and intellectuals who played a decisive role in the development of the festival scene and cultural projects I deal with in this study.

to social actors, as “no agent engaged in interaction is ever completely autonomous” (Giddens in Cohen 1987:280), Giddens’ respect for social agents to reproduce and transform their own historical circumstances elucidates the role some of my subjects have in the organizing of festivals such as Son Raíz and the Festival de la Huasteca, which are funded by state institutions. Bourdieu’s notion of habitus reinforces this idea. As “an acquired system of generative schemes, the habitus makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production” (1990:55). Thus, the habitus produces individual and collective practices shaped by past events and structures, which in turn shape current practices and structures as well as our perception of these, which are the result of an interplay of free will and structures (ibid., 54). Moreover, Appadurai’s notion of the interplay between globalizing and localizing processes, whereby these processes reinforce each other rather than functioning as exclusive categories, may help us to understand some of the uncertainties the new order of things brought into our modernity and into the festival scenes and the cultural projects I examine.

Finally, in this study, the re-contextualization of musical practices informs processes of identity, tradition, modernity, and agency within the sociopolitical and cultural dynamics embedded in both festivals and cultural projects. Through the relocation of musical practice in time and space, new life is being infused into the *son* experience. Linell’s “transfer and transformation from one interaction to another” (1998:145) is happening at both musical and contextual levels, opening new spaces for experiencing the music and for creating musical scenes in which identities are performed, constructed, and negotiated.

Re-contextualizing does not mean repeating the same action; rather, it implies change. Dora A. Hanninen reinforces this idea, arguing that re-contextualizing indicates “a phenomenal transformation of repetition (of some thing, a musical idea...) induced by a change in musical context” (2003:61). Thus, re-contextualizing musical traditions both transfers and transforms the meaning of the various elements involved in the “act,” such as music, dance, and repertoire choices, for actors such as musicians and audiences, causing each musical experience to be perceived as a new one.

The musical event is like a crossroads where performers and audiences meet to negotiate a past, a present, and an indeterminate future that may be influenced by the very musical event in question, in the same way a performance “reinforces commonalities, illuminates difference, and alters boundaries of identity” (Kuppers 2007:36). Like other performances, the musical one implies a negotiation of meaning between performer(s) and community, which is decisive in the negotiation of identity and in the cultural outcomes. I view festivals and cultural projects as sites where the ever-evolving aspects of culture provide a space for social transactions or, in Johnson’s words, “social reflection, transformation, and critique” (2003:7). I believe that performance-based and educative cultural projects are embedded in a historical process that helps to contextualize the past, speaks to the present, and opens a window to the future. They connect with other cultural expressions and performances that are part of that same process and in which cultural memory is pivotal in the formation of cultural identities.

Festivals and cultural projects born in the 1980s posed an alternative to centralized state cultural politics. They sought fair representation of social, ethnic, and cultural diversity. In my opinion, private non-profit initiatives as well as some

governmental cultural agencies—along with an elite of intellectuals whose work was particularly influential—filled the gap in organizing cultural projects that functioned as platforms to remember, gather, learn, and re-create musical traditions.

While exploring the idea of “ownership” and “(re)appropriation” of culture, I also explore questions around the development of a self-conscious attachment to the local, the traditional; the symbolism behind the claiming of public spaces for traditional music and culture; the reasons behind the decisions for constructing more inclusive musical—and social—“scapes”; and how important people think such decisions may be for their present and future cultural and social practices.

Fieldwork: Various Times and Places / Methodology

While logistically and conceptually challenging, researching musical traditions in three cultural regions was essential to my work since each region holds particular idiosyncrasies in its ethnic and cultural make-up. Although the various genres of *son* share common roots, their historical developments, both regional and local, make the task a daunting one. However, rather than the breadth of information being overwhelming, it proved enriching for my analysis of various perspectives and approaches to the articulation of cultural projects and festivals.

My work embraces various sites and timelines. Since 1998, I have been travelling back and forth to Mexico, spending anywhere between a week and two months to work with musicians and learn about different musical traditions. Decisive to this study was the fieldwork research I conducted for my Master’s thesis (summer 2003) to study Terracalenteño music in the states of Guerrero and Michoacán. While in the region, I

befriended a number of musicians, researchers, scholars, and promoters with whom I have kept in contact over the years. Further short visits to this and other Mexican regions have allowed me to nurture my relationship with them, which has been vital to my present research.

Although I conducted most of my fieldwork research in the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011, I have returned to Mexico to attend specific festivals such as the XVI and XVII annual Festival de la Huasteca (October 2011 and October 2012 in Querétaro and Veracruz States, respectively). While multiple fieldwork periods have given me the opportunity to develop a broad-based point of view, multi-sited research has allowed me to contrast approaches to the development of cultural projects. Examining the various festivals and musical projects over time has allowed me to better get to know participants (e.g., musicians, promoters, bureaucrats, researchers), which in turn has helped me trace the musical networks behind the events and gain “insider” opinions.¹⁵

One of the benefits of having known (at least part of) the field for several years is that it has allowed me to observe some of the socioeconomic and political challenges *son* musicians have faced over time. For example, I learned a great deal from David Durán, Jorge Amos Martínez, and Alejandro de la Rosa, who worked on Terracalenteño cultural projects and were founders of El Huerto Cultural Center in Morelia, Michoacán, and who for several years attempted, unsuccessfully, to get government funding for Terracalenteño music festivals and education and research projects. Attending festivals and getting to know cultural projects from within (e.g., El Tecolote in Arcelia, Guerrero) has led me to

¹⁵ Often times, interviewees will relax and speak more confidentially once they realize they can talk about anything. Some even mentioned their disagreements with institutions behind the organizing of festivals or cultural events.

appreciate the extent to which the passion in *son* and traditional music comes from being part of the very communities that are rethinking music as a social tool to gain social spaces for traditional music and redefine their own identities through the very power of cultural belonging that music embodies.

For my study, I have interviewed musicians, cultural promoters, and music lovers at the sites where I conducted fieldwork as well as in other places in Mexico to understand their views on identity and tradition, as well as the cultural politics behind cultural projects and events. Along with interviews, I have collected articles published in Mexican journals and magazines. I have also studied liner notes accompanying ethnographic recordings and videos. Through books and printed material on *son* I have tried to reconstruct the history of the musical genre to date. I have also kept an eye on Internet sites to access the wealth of information that circulates in cyberspace, from printed material made available online (e.g., *Son del Sur* magazine) to announcements of and information on festivals and cultural events through social networks.

Since I began my research in Mexico in 2010, I felt both an insider and an outsider. I feel very lucky to have met and befriended people who were always willing to help me out with my research, always opening doors for me to meet others who could help me further, recommending that I attend festivals, musical events, and cultural projects. Yet I think the thought of insider/outsider, us/them, or the emic/etic¹⁶ position is a difficult one to ignore and shake off. In my particular case, to be a Spaniard living in the United States and conducting research in Mexico attracted some attention. I was in a

¹⁶ For more on “insider/outsider,” see Romero 2001:6–9; and on “emic/etic,” see Alvarez-Pereyre and Arom 1993:7–31.

situation I had experienced during previous trips through Latin America: I could be befriended or brushed aside depending on preconceived notions of what a person from Spain, the *madre patria* (motherland), could represent. Despite these challenges, my respect and love for Mexican culture and music led me to friendships and opened the door for me to be considered, most of the time, as a person, a musician, a researcher—and not just a Spaniard.

Chapter Outline

My project focuses on interrelated themes, interweaving the performance of identity and the negotiation of discourses of tradition as expressed by audiences, musicians, and promoters with the *son*'s re-articulation of tradition within larger processes of globalization and within notions of local/global.

In chapter 2, I present a historical overview of the Mexican *son*, focusing on the three *son* subgenres under study. The broad ethnic and cultural make-up of the regions will be crucial in understanding the specific musical and extramusical characteristics of the three subgenres. Although I focus mainly on mestizo¹⁷ *son*—as opposed to indigenous *son*—a broad understanding of issues of ethnicity and *mestizaje*¹⁸ in these regions is key to comprehending the particular characteristics and historical developments of the *son* subgenres.

¹⁷ Generally speaking, “mestizo” refers to a mixed-blood person, particularly a person of European and Indigenous descent. In Latin America, it was used as racial category in colonial times, then later to refer to hybrid cultural practices. “Indigenous people” refers to descendants of precolonial peoples in the Americas.

¹⁸ From the Latin word *mixtura*, “mestizaje” referred originally to miscegenation, later expanding to include hybrid cultural practices as well.

Chapter 3 focuses on festivals, *encuentros* (musical gatherings), and *fandangos* or *huapangos* (popular fiestas)¹⁹ in general. In order to understand both festivals and cultural projects in the 1980s, I examine the broad cultural trends of the 20th century in Mexico. I discuss the cultural politics of the Mexican government's sponsorship of festivals in the 1950s, and the main sociological conditions in Mexico during the second half of the century. I try to establish a general framework in which to locate—historically and sociologically—the festivals and cultural projects I analyze in subsequent chapters.

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I describe and explore ideas of identity, tradition, festivals, musical gatherings, and *fandangos* in several music festivals that each feature a specific *son* subgenre. In Mexico, issues of regional identity are ever-present. A strong sense of belonging to places of origin appears in conversations, clothing, food consumption, media programming, and art forms. In chapter 4 I present the Huasteca region through the XVI and XVII editions of the Festival de la Huasteca (Sierra Gorda, Querétaro, and Sierra de Otontepec, Veracruz, respectively). Chapter 5 discusses two contrasting festivals of *son jarocho* in Veracruz, the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan and the Encuentro Jardín Kojima in Otatitlán, as well as the Jardín Kojima cultural project. In chapter 6, I visit the re-contextualizing of traditions in Tierra Caliente through a *fandango* in Huetamo (Michoacán), the VI Festival de Tierra Caliente in Arcelia (Guerrero), and the cultural center El Tecolote. Cultural projects are representative of private initiatives that have received on-and-off sponsorship from state institutions.

¹⁹ “*Huapango*” is synonymous with *son huasteco*. The term is also used interchangeably with “*huapangueada*,” the popular fiesta at which *huapangos* are performed in the Huasteca region. In central and southern Veracruz, these popular fiestas are known as *fandangos*. See the discussion in chapter 3.

To contrast and complement, chapter 7 focuses on two festivals that feature several *son* subgenres, Son Raíz and Son para Milo. My study of these two festivals serves as a medium to study the use of music as a tool for social change. I also explore the idea of community behind festivals featuring several musical traditions, mobile communities made up of musicians and music lovers travel long distances to attend festivals and musical events.

CHAPTER 2. THE MEXICAN *SON*

Introduction

“Music is a social resource that can communicate statements of identity and attitudes. Musical performance has been shown to be a resource for expressing identity of and differences of gender, age, kinship, social class, ethnicity, religion, political persuasion and nationality. The examination of almost any performance reveals how the practitioners and audiences are using these criteria to create meaningful events.” (Seeger 1998:61)

Folk, rock ‘n’ roll, *norteña*, *romántica*, salsa, *danzón*, reggaeton, lounge, chill-out, traditional music... The list of genres created, performed, and consumed in a country where musical expressions are as varied and diverse as its population (about 114 million in 2011) is nothing short of amazing. Mexico, *México*: modernity and tradition mingling, the surreal as a backdrop connecting past, present, and future, ceremonies of corn and *copal* side by side street with vendors selling the latest DVDs of a film just premiered at a theater in Los Angeles; on the same stage, candles, *cempazuchitl* flowers and beauty contests to choose the Princess of Corn to represent the indigenous Huastecan queen of culture as keenly scrutinized as a Hollywood red carpet; “timeless” symbolic ritual musical expressions alongside the most innovative technology-dependent musical trends. Mexican music is as powerful as the country’s rich ethnic heritage and cultural expressions, a fantastic journey of varied and intense expressions of cultural diversity, reinvention, tradition, and modernity. If many people grew up listening to boleros, *corridos* or *norteña* music, many others did so listening to Mexican *sones* in various formats, from the most traditional contexts—such as a *velorio* (vigil) for a particular saint—to more contemporary settings where *sones* are reinterpreted to fit in with new aesthetic tastes as well as new social, political, and economic conditions. In either case,

the Mexican *son* is one of the richest and most prolific musical expressions of Mexican culture.

Embedded in the *son* are the musical heritage of the regions where it is lived and performed, a social history, a worldview, and a way of living. *Sones* speak of food, medicine, beliefs, and crafts particular to those regions and communities. They sing of nostalgia, past and present. They are a means of communicating with others, of building community, of understanding the world. They establish a link between past and present and provoke a sense of belonging to a time and place and to a group of people that for many is fundamental to their existence. Whether maintaining traditional forms or re-interpreting them, the *son* continues to be a driving force in the Mexican array of musical expressions.

This chapter provides an overview of the *son*, which is usually associated with several cultural traditions and represents a genuine expression of Mexican regional musics, cultures, and social identities. Although *sones* are an expression of both indigenous²⁰ and mestizo cultures, I focus on the *son* as lived, experienced, performed, and recreated by various *mestizo* groups.

The *son* is a result of the hybridization process between European, indigenous, African, and Afro-Caribbean musical elements and contexts initiated at the beginning of the 16th century, and the cultural identities and experiences embedded in both colonial and postcolonial times. Since the beginning of the 1500s, the Mexican *mestizaje*, in a

²⁰ The indigenous *son* is mostly performed by indigenous groups for leisure and in ritualized occasions where they link to celebratory life-cycle events and the agricultural cycle. Along with praying, fasting, and food offerings, music is instrumental on such occasions.

diversity of geographic and economic conditions, forged these specific regional musical prototypes into a mosaic of unique musical cultures.

Mestizo music took shape in association with the racial intermixing that took place in the colonial era. In the case of the *son*, historical records indicate that its origins lie in the corpus of secular music imported from Spain during the Mexican colonial period (1521–1810). *Sones*, as we know them today, emerged towards the end of the 18th century as a musical style to reflect a “new consciousness of regional cultures,” and as a “meaningful expression of cultural values, identities, and needs” (Sheehy 1999:39).

Son can be described as a style that contains specific musical components (rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic structures) as well as lyrical and choreographic ones. Although each regional *son* has its own specific characteristics—particular instrumental ensembles, dance styles, performance practice nuances, and texts—they bear striking similarities in overall musical form, harmonic structure, and rhythmic features, as well as the social occasions on which the music is performed. Most Mexicans understand *son* as a generic term used to describe any of the various regional mestizo *son* traditions that are organized around the singing of *coplas* (a kind of poetic verse in strophic form) and whose instrumental ensembles differ. The dance, generally *zapateado* (footwork), is central to the ensemble. Researcher Arturo Warman defines the genre as:

uno de los legados más preciosos con el que se ha fraguado la cultura nuestra, una cultura de culturas; pues en el son se resumen alegrías, leyendas y sabidurías ancestrales y perfiladas en el tañido de vihuelas, laúdes, arpas y guitarras, tambores y chirimías, acompañado con la trama de trovas y danzas (2002c:3)

(one of the most precious legacies from which our [Mexican] culture, a culture of cultures, has been forged; thus happiness, legends and ancestral wisdom are combined in the *son*, and shaped through the

sound of the *vihuelas*, *laúdes*, harps and guitars, drums and *chirimías*, accompanied by songs and dances).

Most scholars and researchers agree that the word *son* derives, etymologically, from the Latin *sonus*: “ruido concertado, que percibimos con el sentido del oído, especialmente el que se hace con arte, ó música” (Real Academia Española de la Lengua 1739:150) (arranged noise which we perceive with the sense of hearing, especially that which is produced through art, or music) (Sheehy 1979:18; Stanford 1972:66; Villanueva 1998:17). The term *son* appears in early Spanish sources with specific nuances in meaning, referring to either sound, song, vocal music accompanied by string instruments, or dance.²¹ In time, the word *son* was used to describe the singing, the playing of instruments, the dancing, and the instrumental performance. After the second half of the 18th century, the term was used to refer to popular music, lyrics, and dance that have specific rhythmic features (Saldívar [1934] 1987:252).

Historical Overview

In tracing the origins of the Mexican *son*, Gabriel Saldívar considers prior sung verse forms from Spain (*letrillas*, *coplas*, *seguidillas*, and *coplillas*) as direct predecessors of the genre, establishing a similarity between the form, literary content, and metric structure of the former and the *coplas* used in *sones* (Saldívar [1934] 1987:249–250). During the colonial era, *sones*—known then by different names—were associated with

²¹ In his study of *son jarocho*, Sheehy (1979:18–23) specifically mentions the different shades of meaning given to the term *son* in works by 1) Aztecist Bernardino de Sahagún in 1547, 2) Luis Brizeño’s guitar method from 1626, 3) Gaspar Sanz’s introduction to his work on Spanish guitar music from 1674, and 4) Pablo Minguet e Irol’s instrument playing method from 1754. In those works, the term *son* referred to 1) playing and singing, 2) dancing and instrumental performance, 3) pitch, dancing, and the playing of stringed instruments, and 4) dancing, respectively.

secular singing, dancing, and instrumental performance, which often involved chordophones (Sheehy 1979:23).

Through the written denunciations to the Inquisition that survive from the end of the 17th century and the 18th century of the performances of *sones* in popular festivities, we know that this musical genre had a significant presence—along with other musical forms such as *seguidillas*, *jarabes*, and *fandangos*—in popular musical expressions. Aside from secular fiestas, religious festivities such as *oratorios* and *escapularios*²² served as a cover for profane musical practices, incorporating singing, dance, and the playing of instruments such as the harp and the guitar. Moreover, *oratorios* served as a means of ridiculing Spanish religion, power, and domination. They were strongly condemned by the Inquisition,²³ as were *escapularios*.

The word *son* as such, referring to both lyrical and musical aspects, appeared for the first time in 1766 in a denunciation made to the Inquisition of “El chuchumbé,” a *son* that was sung and danced in the port of Veracruz.²⁴ At the end of that year, a European fleet arrived at the port of Veracruz after having stopped in Havana “long enough to take

²² *Escapulario* is a type of fiesta that appeared around 1680 and combined religious and secular elements. The term *escapulario* refers to the scapular, a sacramental worn by some religious friars consisting of a ribbon attached to pictures of a saint worn on the chest and over the back. As a festive celebration the *escapulario* ridiculed saints by making a theatrical parody of the offering of a scapular to a person, followed by music and dances (Saldívar [1934] 1987:222).

²³ Aguirre Beltrán and Saldívar mention prohibitions against *oratorios* in Oaxaca in 1643 and 1689, in Guatemala in 1704 (Aguirre Beltrán 1971:7), and in Puebla in 1669 (Saldívar [1934] 1987:222). Condemnation of *oratorios* appeared again in 1746 in response to new *oratorios*, which were even more scandalous and contained more irreverent content than those of the previous century (Saldívar [1934] 1987:223).

²⁴ The denunciation of “El chuchumbé” has been repeatedly cited in works on Mexican *son* as the first written use of the term. See for example Aguirre Beltrán 1971:8; Muzquiz 1988:25; Pérez Fernández 1996 and 1997; Rivera Ayala 1994; Saldívar [1934] 1987: 224–226, 277; and Sheehy 1979:23–27). Gilberto Gutiérrez, Jarocho musician with the group Mono Blanco and an instrumental figure in the revival of *son Jarocho* (see discussion on the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan, chapter 5), set the denounced verses to music in Mono Blanco’s 1997 recording “La vida se va a acabar” (URTEX UL3004). His version of “El chuchumbé” has been incorporated into the contemporary repertoire of *sones jarocho*s and it is widely

aboard passengers and seamen from Cuba's predominantly Negro and mulatto population" (Sheehy 1979:23). According to Saldívar, these

individuos [...] se estacionaron en el citado Puerto de Veracruz, en donde [...] trabaron conocimiento con el pueblo bajo [...] dándose a cantar y bailar unas coplas, que bien pronto fueron comprendidas y asimiladas por aquellas gentes ([1934] 1987:225)

(individuals [...] established themselves in that same port of Veracruz, where [...] they established contact with low-class people [...], and sang and dance some *coplas*, which very soon were learned and assimilated by those people).

Soon after the blacks and mulattos from Cuba brought with them "El chuchumbé," this *son* was prohibited by the Inquisition as it was considered obscene in both the lyrical content and the dance movements. Some of the lyrics openly ridiculed friars and had double meanings and sexual connotations, which was not in accord with the puritanical mores of the Catholic Church.

During the 18th century, the *son* appeared to be hybridizing with the *seguidilla*,²⁵ the *jarabe*, and the *fandango* (a song form danced to by couples).²⁶ Jas Reuter stresses the common origin of both *sones* and *jarabes*. At the beginning of the 19th century, the *jarabe* was defined as a musical composition with five distinctive sections: introduction, sung *copla*, *zapateado*, *descanso* or *paseo* (rest or walk), and ending. According to the author, these "airs" or musical sections were expanded in the *sones* through the introduction of *coplas*, refrains, counterpoint accompaniment, and instrumental

²⁵ *Seguidilla* is both a Spanish dance with ternary meter whose origin dates to the 15th century and a strophic form that combines lines of five and seven syllables. It is one of the poetic forms used in Jarocho and Huasteco *sones*. For more on *seguidilla*, see González 2006.

²⁶ Even today, the *son* appears to be undifferentiated from the *jarabe* in some Mexican regions—particularly in the Tierra Caliente of Michoacán and Guerrero—as certain *jarabe* melodies are used in specific *sones* (Serafín Ibarra, personal communication, Morelia, June 2011). In other regions, the *jarabe* appears as a distinctive genre consisting of a suite of old *sones* (Warman 2002b:11).

interludes, while the *jarabes* largely maintained the original structure. At present, the sequence of specific *sones* or “airs” in the *jarabes* is determined by region and by the ethnic group interpreting them (Reuter 1981:146–147).

The first Mexican *jarabes*, originally derived from the Spanish *seguidillas*,²⁷ appeared in the middle of the 18th century (Saldívar 1987:257). By the end of the century, the *jarabe*

tomó la forma y caracteres de la música vernácula nuestra, dándose la nominación de jarabe a gran variedad de sonos, que tenían de común algunos elementos, sobre todo en la parteailable y adquiriendo esplendor desde esa época y durante el primer tercio del siglo XIX, especialmente en la región de Jalisco y Michoacán (ibid., 257)

(took on the form and characteristics of our vernacular music, with the name *jarabe* applied to the great variety of *sones*, which had some elements in common, above all in being danceable and gaining in glory from that time and during the first third of the 19th century, especially in the region of Jalisco and Michoacán).

According to Reuter, the content of the music and the lyrics, as well as the similarities in rhyming systems between the *jarabe* and the *son*, suggest that the genres had a shared origin background (1981:146).

In the last third of the 18th century, the theater became the most important means for the transmission of *sones* and dances. Theatrical productions began to include genres of local character, known then as *sonecitos del país* (little *sones* of the country) or *sonecitos de la tierra* (little *sones* of the homeland), together with other compositions of European origin (Saldívar 1987:256; Villanueva 1998:18; Warman 2002c:12).²⁸

²⁷ In Mexico, the *seguidilla* of la Mancha (Spain) was referred to as *jarabe gitano* (Gypsy *jarabe*) because of its “licentious” lyrics.

²⁸ *Sonecitos del país* were arranged by musicians employed by the theater. Saldívar mentions specifically Aldana and Galup as arrangers of such *sones* for the Gran Teatro Coliseo de la Metrópoli in

Sonecitos del país were performed as part of *tonadillas escénicas*,²⁹ short theatrical numbers that incorporated music and were used in *zarzuelas*.³⁰ Just as the characters featured in *zarzuelas* were of clear Spanish influence, *tonadillas escénicas* portrayed characters that would have been interpreted as Mexican and plots appealing to the lower (popular) classes. This combination was decisive in the success of these performances with the popular theater's mixed audiences. Some of the *sones* (or *sonecitos*) performed in that period—such as “La bamba,” “El bejuquito,” “La indita,” and “El gusto”—are still performed today as part of the repertoires of specific regional *sones*. By 1790, the performance of *sonecitos del país* between theatrical acts was well established (Mayer-Serra 1996:103).

Thus, the performances of *sonecitos del país* within the *tonadillas escénicas* was a crucial step in the development and growing popularity of the former. It can be argued that towards the end of the 18th century, *sonecitos del país*—or Mexican *sones*—emerged as a musical genre embodying signs of a nascent Mexican musical identity, which would be consolidated by the time of Independence in 1810. During the Independence movement in the first half of the 19th century, the *son*—along with the *jarabe*—became explicitly associated with this new Mexican identity and acceded to the status of national symbol.

Mexico City. These were orchestral arrangements that might be performed only a few times before being dropped from the repertoire. He lists “Churrimpampli,” “El casamiento de los indios,” “El fiscalito,” “La rarana,” “La india,” “La india valedora,” “La chupicuaraca,” “Los indios,” “Los negritos,” and others as examples of such arrangements (Saldívar [1934] 1987:256).

²⁹ *Tonadillas escénicas* were extensively used in the second half of the 18th century. For a detailed discussion of these see Baqueiro Foster (1964:45–114) and Mendoza (1956:58–60).

³⁰ *Zarzuela* was Spanish genre of musical theatre that incorporated sung and spoken dialogue, popular songs, and dances.

As part of the drive to incorporate folkloric music—which represented “the spirit of the people” or *der Volksgeist*—into Western classical traditions during the 19th century, several composers arranged *sones* for use in classical repertoires. The name *soncitos del país* was changed to *aires nacionales* or national songs when they entered the salons and were incorporated in the piano repertoire.³¹ *Sones* such as “Los enanos,” “Las mañanitas,” “El palomo,” and “El zapateado” were performed in salons (Mayer-Serra 1996:127–129) and the scores for these arrangements began to be published in 1834 (Warman 2002c:12). Carlos Curti arranged several *sones* to be performed by the Orquesta Típica Mexicana at the World’s Fair in New Orleans in 1884 (Jaúregui 2007:52). *Sones* had become well and truly entrenched as a national symbol.

Under the Porfirio Díaz regime (1876–1910), the *son* lost the favor of the upper classes as the late 19th century salons turned their gaze back to Europe. At the same time, the *son* spread in popularity in rural areas and flourished as a regional style that synthesized imported formative elements into original forms. These *sones* (vocal and instrumental pieces common to several regional repertoires) crystallized over time into a tapestry of regional musical cultures, each more strongly identified with its particular region than with the nation as a whole.

³¹ The first *aires nacionales* arranged for piano appeared during the first decades of Independence with a *jarabe* arrangement by composer José de Jesús González Rubio (see facsimile in Saldívar [1934] 1987:283–89). Other piano compositions, such as “Variaciones sobre el tema del jarabe mexicano” (1841) by J.A. Gómez, “Jarabe nacional” by Tomás León, and “Vals-jarabe” by Aniceto Ortega, borrowed melodies and musical characteristics from the *jarabe*. Julio Ituarte’s *Ecos de Mexico* combined and recreated several *sones*, such as “El palomo,” “Los enanos,” “El butaquito,” “El perico,” “El guajito,” and “Las mañanitas” (Mayer-Serra 1996:127–129).

At the beginning of the 20th century, *sones* reached their peak, serving as a means of musical and political expression for the masses³² and conveying the nationalistic feelings inspired by the Mexican Revolution. A great number of popular musicians bestowed the genre with specific regional stylistic nuances and some of the regional subgenres expanded into the national realm.

In several rural areas, the *son* remained as a musical expression of popular culture. It was performed not only at festive occasions, but also on ritual and religious occasions such as infant burials and *velorios* (vigils) for saints. The *son*, originally performed at the *haciendas* (estates) and ranches under the patronage of *hacendados* (landowners), remained as a popular expression to accompany any festive occasion. It was at the center of the fiesta—called *fandango*, *huapango*, or *topada* depending on the region—in several Mexican regions. Musicians gathered around a *tarima* (wooden platform) to play, sing, improvise verses and instrumental melodies, and dance all night. As I discuss in chapter 3, the fiesta was a social space where courtships, fights, and friendships were negotiated.

During the Mexican Revolution, an intense mobilization of personnel, troops, and other human resources took place. Musicians travelled constantly and regional repertoires were exchanged, consumed, (re)appropriated, and (re)created in a constant flow. Once more, popular Mexican genres migrated through commercial routes and the activities of

³² A very well-known piece in the Terracalienteño repertoire, “El gusto federal,” is the perfect example of a *son* (*gusto* in this case) charged with political content. This composition—considered an anthem of Tierra Caliente—celebrates the defeat of French domination under Mexican emperor Maximilian. It was premiered in 1867 in Huetamo, Michoacán, as part of the celebrations for the re-establishment of the Republic by Benito Juárez.

performing groups in urban and rural contexts. Regional repertoires were consolidated at this time.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the period of 1920–1950 was decisive for Mexican culture in general and for the development of the Mexican *son* in particular. Politics and the rise of the film and recording industries gave new life to certain types of *sones* while pushing others into oblivion.³³ Cultural politics and media created selective processes that affected local styles. Firstly, post-revolutionary nationalism resulted in the consolidation of musical stereotypes, which obscure the diversity of Mexican regional music cultures. Secondly, radio, television, and cinema promoted particular *son* subgenres while neglecting others, and the repackaged version of *sones* broadcast and popularized by media transformed and influenced the genre as a whole. Lastly, urban musical practices along with the rise of folkloric ballets contributed to the de-contextualization of musical expression. Moreover, industry-friendly forms of regional styles appeared in Mexico City, which affected performers of regional local styles.³⁴

What can be called the “Golden Age” of the *son* lasted from the 1890s until the middle of the 20th century. By the 1960s, several *son* subgenres were dying out: rural forms of Jarocho, Terracalenteño, and Huasteco *sones* as well as *sones* from Tixtla and the Costa Chica went out of favor as old performers passed away and new generations did not engage with the genres. With fewer performance occasions and poor support from

³³ Mariachi groups performing their own arrangements of *sones* appeared in Mexico City sponsored by general Lázaro Cárdenas during his presidency (1934–1940) (Ochoa Serrano 2000:108); president Miguel Alemán (1946–1952) used the Jarocho *son* “La bamba” as a slogan for his electoral campaign; Jarocho musicians in Mexico City popularized versions of *sones jarochos* that they transformed for commercial purposes and to suit urban tastes.

³⁴ Regional musicians imitated musical styles popularized by the movie industry (see chapter 3) and local styles were influenced by musicians returning from urban centers to their regions of origin (see chapter 5).

the government and private patrons, several regional *sones* subgenres became thin and isolated, with a minimum projection outside their regions.

In the 1980s, however, some of these *son* subgenres underwent a renaissance owing to various private and official initiatives that infused them with new life. These included the organizing of music festivals and cultural projects by researchers, musicians, and cultural promoters, among others. As we shall see, at present, although the popularity levels of the different *son* subgenres vary, there is a renewed interest in the genre as a whole. Old and new generations gather to play, sing, and dance at the various occasions for music sharing that festivals and *encuentros* (musical gatherings) bring to *son* music lovers.

The *Son*'s Main Musical Characteristics and Geographical Distribution

The generic term *son* refers to a musical complex with specific elements in common: 1) *sones* are performed by small ensembles consisting mainly of stringed instruments, sometimes with percussion added, and subject to regional variation; 2) their formal structure alternates instrumental sections with the singing of *coplas* or rhyming stanzas of four to six or ten lines that are generally octosyllabic; or, if there are no vocals, instrumental sections alternate according to structures specific to the sub-genres; 3) *sones* are usually danced by one or more couples whose *zapateado* or footwork complements the *son*'s vigorous rhythmic character. In addition, *sones* typically are performed at festive occasions, important life-cycle events, and entertainment-oriented venues such as restaurants, bars, and theaters. Although historically the instruments were played by men

and the women sang and danced, women's presence as instrumentalists has been notable in the last fifteen years.

Music, poetry, and dance are tied together in this lyrical-choreographic musical genre that is danced on a *tarima* and that features a repertoire of stock *coplas* that musicians can dip into as they please. Thus, dance, *copla* choice, and improvisation in both instrumental sections and lyrics in some of the genres makes each *son* performance unique and a vital expression of regional culture.

Regional Sones and Ensembles

The Mexican *son* occurs throughout central and southern Mexico (see figure 2). Notwithstanding changes in instrumentation over time, each *son* subgenre, in its folkloric form, is associated with a specific instrumental ensemble (see table 1), as well as specific playing, singing, and dancing characteristics. Because of these differences, *sones* are an expression of the idiosyncrasies of the various Mexican cultures and traditions.

The main regional *sones* include *sones huastecos* (or *huapangos huastecos*) from the states of Veracruz, San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo, Querétaro, Tamaulipas, and Puebla; *sones jarochos* from Veracruz; *sones jaliscienses* from the states of Jalisco and Colima; *sones terracalenteños del Balsas* from the valley of the Balsas River in Guerrero and Michoacán; *sones terracalenteños del Tepalcatepec* or *sones planecos* from Michoacán; *sones abajeños* from Michoacán; *sones de Tixtla* in Guerrero; *sones de artesa* from the Costa Chica in Oaxaca and Guerrero; *sones istmeños* from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca; and *sones arribeños* (*huapangos arribeños*) from the Sierra de Xichú in the states of San Luis Potosí,

Figure 2. Map of regional sones



Table 1. Mexican Regional Sones

Genre	Region	Ensemble (Instruments)	Notes
<i>Sones abajeños</i>	North-central regions of Michoacán State: sierra and lowlands of Uruapan, Patzcuaro, Zacapu, and Zamora (main urban centers)	- Two or more violins - <i>Vihuela</i> (small round-backed lute) - Guitar - Double bass	Violins carry the melodies in parallel thirds or sixths. Part of the musical practice of P'urhépecha culture. It is very common to find it performed by brass bands.
<i>Sones terracalenteños del Balsas</i> (from the Balsas River) Also known as: <i>Sones calentanos</i>	Tierra Caliente: the basin of the Balsas River, which includes parts of the states of Guerrero, Michoacán, and Mexico	Current: - One or two violins - One or more six-stringed Spanish guitars - <i>Tamborita</i> (drum) The 19 th and early 20 th centuries also included: - <i>guitarra panzona</i> - <i>guitarra séptima</i>	They share some stylistic similarities with <i>sones de arpa grande</i> . They are called <i>sones</i> when they are instrumental and <i>gustos</i> when they are sung.
<i>Sones terracalenteños del Tepalcatepec</i> (from Tepalcatepec river) Also known as: <i>Sones de arpa grande</i> (“big harp”) or <i>Sones planecos</i>	The basin of the Tepalcatepec River (the southwestern part of the Balsas) in the state of Michoacán, also known as Tierra Caliente. Urban centers: Apatzingán, Nueva Italia, Coalcomán, Arriaga, and Zicuirán	- One or two violins - <i>Guitarra de golpe</i> (deep-bodied lute with five strings, also known as <i>jarana</i>) - <i>Vihuela</i> - 36-string diatonic harp, used melodically, but also percussively by tapping on the top of its resonating chamber (<i>cacheteado</i> or <i>tamboreo</i>)	The harp provides rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment. Violins and singers trade melodies. It is possible that this ensemble coincided with the old <i>mariachi</i> ensemble before the addition of trumpets. The name <i>planeco</i> (<i>plano</i> =flat) refers to the flat lands of the Tepalcatepec River valley.
<i>Sones de Tixtla</i> Also known as: <i>Sones de tarima</i>	Main center: Tixtla (Guerrero State)	- Harp - One or two <i>vihuelas</i> or one or more guitars - <i>Cajón</i> (wooden box, approx. 88 x 22 x 45 cm)	<i>Vihuelas</i> may be used as substitutes for the guitar. The <i>cajón</i> , either tapped with hands or with a little wooden block, drives the rhythm. Common characteristics with <i>sones</i> from the Costa Chica, partly due to geographical proximity.

<p><i>Sones de la Costa Chica</i> (Sones from the Costa Chica)</p> <p>Also known as: <i>Sones de artesa</i></p>	<p>Southwestern coastal region of Guerrero and Oaxaca (from Acapulco to Puerto Ángel) States. Main centers: San Nicolás Tolentino and El Ciruelo (Guerrero State)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Violin - <i>Cajón</i> (wooden box 88 x 22 x 45 cm) - <i>Guacharasca</i> (Approx. 60 cm. wooden tube filled with banana seeds, similar to a rain stick) 	<p>In San Nicolás Tolentino, <i>artesa</i>, <i>cajón</i>, violin, and <i>guacharasca</i> accompany one or two singing voices.</p> <p>The <i>artesa</i> is a wooden platform, placed over a hole in the ground, for <i>zapateado</i>-style dancing (length 3–4 m, width 1 m, thickness 50 cm).</p>
<p><i>Sones huastecos</i> or <i>Huapangos</i></p>	<p>Huasteca region in northeastern Veracruz, San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo, Querétaro, Tamaulipas, and Puebla</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Violin - <i>Jarana huasteca</i> (small five-stringed lute) - <i>Huapanguera</i> or <i>quinta</i> (large five-course lute with eight or ten strings) 	<p>Vocal production is a high-pitched falsetto. Violin improvisation is central to the musical style. Poetic stanzas use <i>quintillas</i> (five-line verses), <i>sexteto</i> (six-line verses), and <i>seguidilla</i> (seven-line verses).</p>
<p><i>Sones istmeños</i></p>	<p>Tehuantepec isthmus in southern Oaxaca</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One or more six-stringed guitars - A small <i>requinto</i> lute 	<p>Can also be performed by brass bands, which are very popular in the area</p>
<p><i>Sones jaliscienses</i> or <i>Sones de mariachi</i></p>	<p>States of Jalisco and Colima</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two or three violins - One <i>vihuela</i> - One or more six-stringed guitars - Harp or <i>guitarrón</i> (a large lute for bass sounds) or both - The addition of trumpets probably dates from the early 19th century 	<p>Nowadays this <i>son</i> is interpreted in almost all Mexican states and many people consider it the quintessential Mexican music: the music of the <i>mariachis</i>. The harp has been gradually replaced by the <i>guitarrón</i>. Koetting (1977) includes a <i>guitarra de golpe</i> as part of the ensemble.</p>
<p><i>Sones jarochos</i></p>	<p>Southern Veracruz</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diatonic harp, 32 to 36 strings - <i>Requinto jarocho</i> (four- or five- stringed lute plucked with a plectrum) - One to five <i>Jarana jarocho</i> (shallow-bodied lutes with eight strings in five courses) - <i>leona</i> (four-stringed bass <i>requinto</i>) 	<p>In some parts of Veracruz, the tambourine was introduced in the 1960s and a lamellaophone called the <i>marimbol</i> in the 1980s. The harp has disappeared around the Tuxtlas area, replaced by a variety of small <i>jaranas</i>. Violins have disappeared in most of the regions except in the Tuxtlas area. Varies in instrumentation and performing styles according to region.</p>

<i>Sones de marimba</i>	Chiapas and Tehuantepec Isthmus (Oaxaca)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marimba (four players) - <i>Requinto</i> marimba (three players) 	<p>The marimba is considered a strong marker of identity in Chiapas.</p> <p>The buzzing sound of the marimba is characteristic of this instrument of African origin.</p> <p>If performed commercially in markets and public places, a double bass and drum set is added to the ensemble.</p>
<i>Sones arribeños</i> or <i>Huapangos arribeños</i>	Río Verde region: San Luís Potosí and Xichú, Guanajuato, and Querétaro State (Sierra Gorda region)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two violins - <i>Huapanguera</i> (large lute with five courses of double or single strings), - <i>Jarana huasteca</i> (small five-stringed lute) 	<p>Poetic stanzas use <i>décimas</i> or ten-line verses, which are improvised during the <i>topadas</i> or musical and poetic competitions that showcase the <i>son arribeño</i>.</p>
<i>Zapateo</i> or <i>Sones de Tabasco</i>	Tabasco State	<p>Different instrumentation and ensembles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alto saxophone, trombone or trumpet, snare drum, cymbal, side drum - Violin, six-stringed guitar, <i>requinto</i> - Brass band - Four small drums played with sticks 	

Guanajuato, and Querétaro. Other *sones* include *sones de marimba* from Chiapas and *sones de Tabasco* from Tabasco State.

Performing ensembles include melodic instruments, such as violins and harps, and instruments that provide harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment (especially guitars and other lutes), in accordance with specific regional styles. Percussion instruments are present in several ensembles, along with the *zapateado* on the *tarima*, which functions musically as another instrument within the ensemble. Many of the *son* subgenres also include singing, while others are exclusively instrumental. Some combine both sung and instrumental *sones*.

Within each *son* subgenre, local variants occur in the overall musical form, instrumental ensemble, treatment of melodies, harmony, formal structure, and repertoire. The local character of some *son* subgenres translates into different names for the musical styles. Thus, in the Tierra Caliente region of the Balsas River, the instrumental version is called *son*, while if vocals are added, the name changes to *gustos*. Another example is *huapango*, the term applied to regional *sones* in the Sierra de Xichú and Huasteca region.

The fact that some *son* traditions share common repertoires and bear resemblances in regards to instrumental ensembles (e.g., *sones planecos* are considered by some scholars³⁵ as predecessors of the *sones de mariachi*) underscores their local and regional character and points to the evolution of the genre as a vital popular musical expression of cultural areas. In the past, these cultural areas took shape according to commercial routes and communication infrastructure. For instance, historians Alejandro Martínez de la Rosa (2014) and Jorge Amós Martínez Ayala (2014) have shown how colonial-era commercial routes kept the coastal regions of Guerrero and Michoacán

³⁵ See Warman 2002a:3–11.

connected to the interior or the country, the Balsas River being the main communication route through which not only goods, but also musical traditions were exchanged.

According to the aforementioned, similarities in repertoires and instrumental ensembles between Terracalenteño *sones* from the Balsas and from the Tepalcatepec index a common root in a musical tradition that was regionalized after the Balsas River ceased to be the main communication route.³⁶

Moreover, some specific *sones* are common to various regions, sharing features such as themes in the lyrics, *copla* repertoires, and harmonic structures. To mention a few, “La malagueña” and “La petenera” are common to the Huasteco, Terracalenteño, and Costa Chica regions; “El cielito lindo” from the Huasteca region is known as “El butaquito” in the Jarocho tradition; “La india” is common to the Jarocho, Terracalenteño, and Costa Chica regions; “El gusto” is performed in the Tierra Caliente in Michoacán as well as in the Huasteca region; “Los panaderos” is performed in the Tierra Caliente in Michoacán and Guerrero as well as in the Huasteca region; and “El aguanieve” and “El sacamandú” or “El toro zacamandú” are part of both the Huasteco and Jarocho repertoires. Interpretations vary according to regional playing and singing style, instrumentation, overall musical form, harmonic progressions, and the metrical

³⁶ According to Martínez de la Rosa (2014:220–225), there was no “Royal Road” between Tierra Caliente and the Pacific coastal region through the mountain range of the Sierra Madre del Sur. One of the main roads connected Mexico City with Acapulco and the other one connected Mexico City with Morelia. The Balsas River was the cultural avenue connecting the main centers from the coast to Tierra Caliente and from there to Morelia, Mexico, and Puebla. As can be imagined, commercial markets attracted musicians and other popular cultural actors. The Balsas River remained as the main communication route in the area until the Presa del Infiernillo (the Infiernillo dam) was built in the mid 20th century, which caused the river cease to be navigable and resulted in the differentiation of the cultural regions of Tierra Caliente del Balsas—where the harp gradually disappeared—and Tierra Caliente de Michoacán.

organization of the *coplas*. Continuity in textual content suggests a common repertoire of secular popular music adapted and transformed into regional *sones* over time.³⁷

Within each *son* subgenre, there are regional variants in instrumentation, repertoire, and interpretation style. Certain *son* subgenres cross state boundaries (e.g. *sones de marimba* performed in Chiapas State and in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca State); regional areas share closely related musical traditions (e.g., Terracalenteño *sones* from the Balsas River area in Guerrero and *sones* from the Tepalcatepec River area in Michoacán); and different names are given to the same subgenres (e.g., *sones* from Tepalcatepec are also known as *sones de arpa grande* or *sones planecos*, and *sones jaliscienses* are also known as *sones de mariachi*).

The main differences in regional *sones* are dictated by the overall musical design of each subgenre, which emerges from the harmonic and rhythmic accompaniments of the stringed instruments in the ensemble and the specific melodic treatment of the musical material. Thus, singing styles are very different in *sones huastecos*—often interpreted by one singer who includes brief ornamental falsetto sections in the five- or six-line *coplas*—and Terracalenteño *gustos*, which use four-, six-, or eight-line *coplas* sung by two singers in parallel thirds or sixths. In *sones* that use the violin as the main melodic instrument, playing styles can greatly differ as well. For example, due to the improvisatory nature of Huasteco *sones*, this subgenre only uses one violin, while the set melodies in Abajeño or Jalisciense *sones* allow for two violins to play in thirds and sixths.

³⁷ A large amount of popular poetry was brought from Spain during the colonial era. It can be supposed that it was amply added to with works of local authorship.

Musical Aspects: Formal, Rhythmic, Harmonic, and Melodic Structure

Sones usually start with an instrumental introduction, performed by the main melodic instrument in each particular ensemble (e.g., the *requinto* or the harp in Jarocho *sones*, the violin in Huasteco and Terracalenteño *sones* from the Balsas region, two violins in the Abajeño and Sierra Gorda traditions, the harp in Terracalenteño *sones* from the Tepalcatepec in Michoacán, the harp in Tixtla, and the guitar in the Costa Chica. This instrumental introduction is followed by sung *coplas* alternating with an instrumental section, which can be vocal or instrumental. That is, the *son* is strophic. Musically, the stanza is usually in a binary form (e.g., in two sections A and B set in an AABB structure) that is repeated with each turn of music.

Rhythmically speaking, descriptions such as varied, complex, vigorous, and fast tempo can and have been used to describe the *son*'s rhythmic structure and characteristics. *Son* generally uses ternary rhythms, the most common being 3/4, 6/8, or a combination of both. Central to the genre is the use of the sesquialtera,³⁸ literally *seis que altera* (six that alternate or alter), a combination of groupings in duple or triple subdivision played consecutively by a single instrument or simultaneously by different instruments within an ensemble. The rhythmic complexity varies according to the region of origin of each *son*, and may include syncopation both in the melodies and in the rhythmic accompaniments, counter-rhythms, and other unexpected rhythmic accents.

Harmonically, *sones* use both major and minor modes, with major often favored. Harmonic vocabulary is mostly limited to progressions drawing from I, IV, II⁷, V, and

³⁸ For more on the sesquialtera see Hiley et al. 2013, Stanford 1972:77–78, and the specific musical examples given by Pérez Fernández in his study of African rhythmic elements retained in Mexican *sones* (1990:171–233). According to Pérez Fernández, the sesquialtera is a binarization of some African ternary rhythmic patterns. The sesquialtera was also present in the *zarabandas*, old Spanish dances introduced into Spain by the Moors (Chamorro 1999:21; Stanford 1972:79; Villanueva 1998:18).

V⁷. However, subtle harmonic variations emphasize certain musical passages, and unexpected harmonic progressions, such as inverted chords, occur.

Melodic themes are never simple or obvious. A well-versed singer or instrumental soloist has his/her own melodic variation and singing style. Musicians create a flow of melodic variations within the harmonic structure of the particular *son*. Moreover, each *son* subgenre holds to a particular instrumental and singing style. Melodies (usually in parallel thirds or sixths) are carried by male voices and stringed instruments—often violin(s) or harp—and accompanied by various lutes and percussion instruments. Vocals are usually in a high range. As mentioned earlier, although men predominate as singers in the public performance of *sones*, women have become a force to be reckoned with, particularly in *son jarocho* and *son huasteco*.

Literary Aspects: Form and Content

Most scholars agree that *sones* are structured around *coplas* or short poetic rhyming stanzas of four, five, six or ten lines that are generally octosyllabic (e.g., Lieberman et al. 1985:5; Reuter 1981:158; Sheehy 1998:607; Warman 2002c:9). Usually, the even-numbered lines rhyme and the odd-numbered lines may end in consonance or assonance. *Coplas* are standalone entities and do not need to be part of a long narrative to have significance. Musicians improvise or choose *coplas* from the popular repertoire and tie them together in a *son* performance. Even if *coplas* are not linked narratively, they have to agree in content, strophic form, and overall poetic, aesthetic, and musical character. This is particularly important in the Jarocho, Huasteco, and Terracalenteño traditions. The repertoire of *coplas* is vast and varied and musicians combine them according to the inspiration of the moment, which partly explains why it is difficult to

find the same two versions of a particular *son*. Nonetheless, certain *coplas* are meant for specific *sones* (e.g., those for “La petenera” with topics related to the sea, or those for “La indita” or “La malagueña” in which women are praised).

The number of *coplas* in a given *son* is not fixed and may number between three and six depending on the performance occasion. Particularly when improvisation takes place, a *son* may contain up to fifteen (or more) *coplas*. Sánchez García notes that 143 *coplas* were found for the Huasteco *son* “El cielito lindo” (2009:XV).

The vast repertoire of *coplas* includes verses based upon 16th-century Spanish poetry, which has also been a source for various other traditional Latin American repertoires, particularly in Argentina and Venezuela.³⁹ It also includes local created *coplas*. Themes include love, description of regional myths and legends, people and animals, and political and religious events. Lines or stanzas concerning a particular event or person may be improvised at any moment, the troubadour thereby revealing his poetic and ingenious spirit. It is common to find the use of double meanings in the texts.

Most Mexican *sones* do not have a fixed text. There is a repertoire of melodies and a repertoire of *coplas*, and musicians choose and combine them as they please. The independent character of the *coplas* allow for a shared lyric repertoire within different *son* subgenres. That is the case of several *coplas* shared by the Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalenteño *sones*.

³⁹ See for example Magis (1969) and Garza Cuarón and Jiménez de Báez (2009).

Choreographic Aspects: the Dance

As mentioned earlier, *sones* are danced by one or more couples whose *zapateado* emphasizes the beat during the instrumental sections. Dancers switch to *descansos* or *paseos*—a slower pace and less vigorous steps—during sung sections so that lyrics can be better appreciated. Improvisation during the *zapateado* sections usually takes place in the form of embellishments that the individual chooses to incorporate into a basic fixed pattern, and how different steps are combined.

As I have mentioned before, the *tarima* or wooden platform where the dance takes place takes on the role of percussion instrument within the instrumental ensemble. Even though *sones* underwent a de-contextualization in the past (see the discussion on Mexican social and cultural conditions during the 20th century in chapter 3) and dance was not always present in *son* performances, the genre is intimately connected to dance, which is not performed for ritual purposes—as is often the case in indigenous practice—but for social ones.

Choreographically speaking, *son* dancing often represents love and courtship. Some *son* subgenres include particular gestures and movements in connection with the thematic content of the *son*. This is particularly important in *sones* that symbolize animals or certain human features that the performers want to emphasize. This is the case for *sones* from Tierra Caliente such as “La chachalaca” (The Chacalaca Bird); *sones jarochos* such as “La iguana” (The Iguana), “El torito” (The Little Bull), and “La

morena,” (The Dark-Skinned Girl); or *sones chuscos*⁴⁰ from Tixtla such as “El patito” (The Little Duck), “La iguana” (The Iguana), and “El zopilote” (The Black Vulture), among others.

In general, the dance is rhythmically vigorous and powerful. While in many *son* subgenres couples take turns dancing on the *tarima* (see the dancing of *sones terracalenteño* in chapter 6), in *sones huastecos* many couples can dance on it at once. *Sones jarochos*, on the other hand, differentiate between *sones* meant for one couple (*sones de pareja* or *sones de hombre*), various couples (*sones de parejas*), and women alone (*sones de a montón*).⁴¹

Review of Literature

Although the Mexican *son* is widely performed, literature on the subject is spotty and far from being comprehensive. The first comprehensive work published in English was *The Mexican Son* (1972) by ethnomusicologist Thomas Stanford. A decade later, Lieberman, Llerenas, and Ramírez de Arellano (1985 [1983]) produced *Anthology of Mexican Sones*, a collection of field recordings accompanied by descriptive notes on the main musical characteristics of the genre. In 1998, Daniel E. Sheehy devoted a section to Mexican *son* in his article, “Mexico,” in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Volume 2: South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean*. Sheehy drew on some of the historical data from the work of Mexican musicologist Gabriel Saldívar, who in 1934 wrote a chapter on the history of Mexican *son* in his *Historia de la música en*

⁴⁰ *Sones chuscos* are a type of *son* that imitate movements or features of particular animals in the dance, for example the wiggling of a duck’s tail, an iguana walking or staring at something, or a bull charging.

⁴¹ See Oseguera Rueda and García Ranz (2011) for further classification.

México. Saldívar was one of the first scholars to investigate Africans' and Afro-Mexicans' contributions to Mexican musical expressions in general and to *son* in particular. Soon after, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1908–1996) was able to bring the African presence in Mexico to the scholarly forefront, with his 1946 work *La población negra de México, Estudio etnohistórico*. He opened the path for anthropological and cultural studies of the African population in Mexico and its contributions to Mexican culture and history in general. Prior to that publication, scholarly narratives had neglected and excluded blackness from national histories and ideologies.⁴²

While the hybrid nature of the *son* has been often portrayed as a *mestizo* construct and a marker of “Mexican identity” (made up mostly of European and indigenous heritage), Mexico’s African heritage has recently attained a visibility that for centuries was denied. In some cases (e.g., *sones de artesa* in the Costa Chica of Guerrero and Oaxaca), the “African factor” has been used to reinvent traditions; in others, reinterpretations of certain *sones* (e.g., some *sones jarochos* arranged by contemporary groups such as Son de Madera, Mono Blanco, or Afrojarocho, to mention but a few) are depicting “an imagined past.” At any rate, in the same way that scholars are rethinking African heritage in musical traditions throughout Latin America, new musical interpretations are placing African elements (such as rhythmic and timbral characteristics) in Mexican *son* at the center of the stage. As with other musical traditions, it is not a question of arguing the mix of influences in the Mexican *son*, but to understand how different scholars and performers approach it, nuance different aspects of that complexity, and racialize the origins and developments of the musical tradition.

⁴² For more about Africans in Mexico, see Aguirre Beltrán [1946] 1981, Bennett 2003, Carroll 2001 Lewis 2000, and Velazquez and Iturralde Nieto 2012, among others.

The main academic contributions to the subject have been those of Moedano Navarro (1980), Pérez Fernández (1990), Chamorro Escalante (1995), and Ruiz Rodríguez (2007). The late Moedano Navarro is considered the ethnologist who continued Aguirre Beltrán's work in bringing raising awareness of the African population in Mexico and their contributions to national culture. Although most of his work was devoted to afro-mestizo musical expressions in the Costa Chica of Oaxaca and Guerrero, such as *sones de artesa* and *corridos* (see Moedano Navarro 2002), in his piece from 1980, "El estudio de las tradiciones orales y musicales de los afro-mestizos de México," he summarizes the studies of the musical and oral traditions of the afro-mestizos and argues that African influence be seen not as peripheral but as core in the formation and development of the cultural expressions in the area.

In *La música afro-mestiza mexicana* (1990), Cuban musicologist Rolando Pérez Fernández reconstructs the African influences in Latin American music at large and in Mexican *son* in particular. As I see it, although he strays into dangerous generalizations about African music, he provides extensive examples to support his argument on the binarization of African ternary rhythms, a process that, according to the author, took place in Latin America as Africans came into contact with indigenous and European populations. At any rate, Pérez Fernández's arguments brought attention to particular rhythmic intricacies and contextual features that could be thought of as African in origin.⁴³ In further articles (1996, 1997, and 2003), he analyzes particular rhythmic features to

⁴³ Some of the main rhythmic characteristics emphasized by Pérez Fernández are (1) the presence of a number of rhythmic and metric patterns which are divisive and additive; (2) the use of several patterns of ternary subdivision that, when superimposed between themselves or onto additive metrical patterns, create counter-rhythms; (3) the extensive use of African resources in rhythmic variations; (4) the binarization of ternary rhythms; and (5) the African practice of improvisatory variations in the drumming, especially on the *tamborita* drum and the resonance box of the harp (1990:229).

support his arguments concerning rhythmic binarization within particular Jarocho *sones* as well as the African presence in Mexican cultural life during colonial times.

Ethnomusicologist Arturo Chamorro Escalante (1995) writes on different retentions from West Africa inherent in *sones* and musics from coastal Mexican regions such as Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Tabasco, as well as the Tierra Caliente of Michoacán and Guerrero. He covers not only the rhythmic aspects of cross-rhythms and improvisation, but also timbral aspects in some ensembles that choose to render harmonic accompaniment with various sizes of the same chordophone (e.g., various *jaranas* in *sones jarochos*), or the use of the marimba, particularly in Chiapas and Oaxaca.⁴⁴ Lastly, Ruiz Rodríguez (2007) sums up the most significant studies published to date on the African influence in Mexican traditional music, including the Mexican *son*.

⁴⁴ According to Chamorro Escalante, musicological theories identify three main aspects of the West African rhythmic conception which may apply to the Mexican *son*: (1) the deep layer or the antiphonal structure, consisting of call-and-response featuring repetitive patterns; (2) the middle layer, consisting of rhythmic motifs and standard patterns; and (3) the higher layer, consisting of decorative motifs such as those a master drummer will use for ornamenting his performance (1995:3). In the Mexican *son*, this rhythmic structure appears in the percussion itself, in the decorative motifs of the improvisations, and in the complementary idiophones that are used in some *son* subgenres. In the case of the *sones terracalenteños* from the Balsas, for example, we can hear these layers in the percussion of both the small drum called *tamborita* and the *zapateado* dance, in the rhythmic and harmonic layer provided by the guitar(s), and in the improvisations of the violin. Other rhythmic characteristics to note in several *sones* are a vertical and horizontal hemiola or sesquialtera in the ensemble, additive rhythms, syncopations, and the presence of a standard pattern—similar to the West African timeline often played on a bell—around which the improvisations take place (ibid., 4–6). Along with syncopations, cross-rhythms, and certain types of strumming on the guitar, combinations of ostinatos and melodic variations appear in *bajeos* or bass lines on the guitars accompanying *sones terracalenteños* from the Balsas and *sones jarochos*. Cross-rhythms and improvisation in the drumming or *tamboreo* on the resonance box of the harp in *sones de arpa cacheteada* and in the percussive rhythms in *sones de Tabasco* are characteristic as well (ibid., 14). African retentions can be noted in an appreciation of specific sound qualities. Chamorro Escalante argues that a style of playing guitar, *golpeando* or hitting the strings is a substitute for drums, the sound quality attained being more percussive than melodic. Equally, certain African musical traditions favor “ornamented” instrumental sound, which is achieved by modifying the sound quality of certain instruments, as noted in the marimba resonators. In México, this appears in the marimba—an instrument of African origin itself—in the traditions of Michoacán, Oaxaca, and Chiapas states, which are sometimes accompanied by idiophones (*güiros* or rasps made of calabash or turtle shells) (1996:12–13). The buzzing sound of the instrument is achieved by covering the small sound hole in each resonator with a thin piece of artificial skin.

Son jarocho is one of the subgenres of *son* that has received the most attention. The most comprehensive historical and ethnomusicological study is that of Daniel Sheehy. In his 1979 PhD dissertation, “The Son Jarocho: Style and Repertory of a Changing Mexican Musical Tradition,” Sheehy provides a general description of the musical tradition (origin, instrumentation, and context), performers, musical styles, repertoire, and contemporary trends. He includes scores and song texts based on his fieldwork research at the port of Veracruz. In 2007, Randall Kohl published his dissertation on *son jarocho*, *Ecos de “La Bamba”*: *Una historia etnomusicológica sobre el son jarocho de Veracruz, 1946–1959*. While Sheehy’s dissertation examined the *son jarocho* from 1968 to 1977, Kohl’s work covered 1946 to 1956, a time period in which president Miguel Alemán’s cultural politics favored this *son* subgenre.

In recent years, *son jarocho*’s history has been revisited masterfully by historian and Jarocho musician Antonio García de León. In his work from 2006, *Fandango: El ritual del mundo jarocho a través de los siglos*, he studies the *fandango* and the Jarocho *son* as the musical genre of the people, a musical tradition, and a festive context that also connects Veracruz with *El Caribe afroandaluz* (the Afro-Andalusian Caribbean), a cultural area in which the exchange of music, poetry, dance, and other expressive cultural forms was the norm during colonial times. In this area, regional cultures were discernible by the 19th century, after three hundred years of colonization, acculturation, mestizaje (16th and 17th centuries), and identity processes along with popularization of music and dance (18th century).

Other seminal works contributing to the literature on *son jarocho* are those of historian Ricardo Pérez Montfort (2003 and 2011). In his 2003 article, this author

analyses the development of *sones jarocho* coinciding with commercial factors as well as the revival of such *sones* in the 1980s. In his 2011 essay, he studies *sones jarocho* in one of the areas in Veracruz where this subgenre has maintained particular regional characteristics. Covering the same region, Gottfried Hesketh analyses the *son jarocho* as well as the *fandango* in Santiago Tuxtla (2006 and 2009) and in other parts of Veracruz and Puebla (2011).

Regarding short articles, a publication to be noted is the magazine *Son del Sur*, edited by Ricardo Perry. The collection covers several aspects of *son jarocho* such as poetry, dance, and profiles of musicians. Some academic articles (e.g., Pérez Fernández 1996 and 1997) are included.

Sones de artesa from the Costa Chica (Guerrero and Oaxaca) have mostly been studied by Ruiz Rodríguez. In his earlier works (2002 and 2004), he analyses the *sones* from San Nicolás Tolentino and El Ciruelo, villages in Guerrero's coastal region in which African heritage has been particularly dominant. He studies *sones de artesa* describing musical instruments, repertoire, themes in *coplas*, and choreographic and musical characteristics in general. In later works (2005, 2009, and 2010), he covers the Costa Chica area more broadly, without focusing on particular locations.

My own Master's thesis on Terracalenteño *sones* from the Balsas River (2004), is the most complete study on *sones* from this region. It includes transcriptions of *sones* as well as short pieces performed by ensembles in the region. Regarding *sones* from the Tierra Caliente of Michoacán, historians Martínez Ayala (2001a and 2002) and Martínez de la Rosa (2012) have studied local variants in the region through field recordings and

notes. Their work is historical in scope, which leaves a gap in terms of the study of *sones de arpa grande* from an ethnomusicological approach.

One of the first academic publications on *son huasteco* was that of Saunders, “The son huasteco: a historical, social, and analytical study of a Mexican regional folk genre” (1976). In a short and concise manner, Saunders analyses the main musicological characteristics of *son huasteco*. The most comprehensive study is Hernández Azuara’s *Huapango: El son huasteco y sus instrumentos en los siglos XIX y XX* (2003). Azuara studies the Huasteco *son* as a cultural regional expression, noting particular stylistic differences. He analyses ensembles, instrumentation, and repertoire. More recently, Sánchez García’s poetic anthology of Huasteco *sones*, *Antología Poética del Son Huasteco Tradicional* (2009), collects and catalogs an impressive amount of *coplas* used in *sones huastecos*. In her introduction to the anthology, she sums up the main musical and lyrical characteristics of *sones huastecos*.

The *son abajeño* tradition from Michoacán has been subject to detailed study by Arturo Chamorro Escalante (1994 and 1999). He studies this *son* subgenre as an expression of the P’urhépecha people in Michoacán. He also examined *son jalisciense* from Jalisco as part of his study of the traditional *mariachi* ensemble in the region and as a symbol of regional identity (2006). Very recently, Alex E. Chávez (2012) has published one of the few works on *huapango arribeño*, focusing on lyrical content and performance practice as a means of place-making within the political-economic conditions between 1968 and 1982.

Field recordings have been a source of information for some particular *son* subgenres. In this regard, the collection published by the National Institute of

Anthropology and History (INAH)⁴⁵ is precious. Of particular interest for my work are the notes and field recordings of Arturo Warman (2002a, 2002b, 2002c, and 2002d) on *sones* from Tierra Caliente of Michoacán and Guerrero, Veracruz, and Mexican *sones* in general.

Lacking in this literature are studies in which the music informs the occasion and the (festive) occasion informs processes in the construction of identity and notions of tradition. In my opinion, only three works closely examine such issues. In his work on the Jarocho *fandango* (2006), García de León masterfully studies the history of the *fandango*, the festive context for the performance of *sones jarochos*, and *sones jarochos* as relevant for the *fandango*. Chamorro Escalante's work from 1994, *Sones de la guerra: rivalidad y emoción en la práctica de la música p'urhepecha*, rigorously analyses P'urhépecha music (*sones abajeños* included) in performances and musical competitions in which regional conflicts and social prestige are expressed through musical rivalry. His later work (2006) on *sones jaliscienses* studies this subgenre in its local variants and in connection with both traditional and modern *mariachi* ensembles, musical occasions, and contexts. Chamorro Escalante's semiotic and symbolic approaches contribute greatly to the understanding of these *son* subgenres within the cultural region.

My own hypothesis, the re-contextualization of traditions, and my examination of how the concept of identity is performed and renewed through music festivals and other cultural projects of Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalienteño *sones* builds another layer in the existing literature as it responds to the need to look at the Mexican *son* in transregional scenarios. I connect the musical and the extra-musical within larger social, cultural, and political processes, and explore the role of meanings and social behavior in

⁴⁵ Recordings from this collection appear as part of my bibliography.

social settings organized around the musical event constructed and experienced by different groups in multi-ethnic and multi-regional scenarios, which is new in the literature.

Lastly

Mexican *son* is a vibrant musical tradition considered by many to be an integral and vital part of their regional cultures. It is a way of understanding life, a means to connect past and present, and an invaluable legacy for future generations. Musicians and music lovers repeatedly comment on the centrality of music in their lives. Huasteco singer Esperanza Zumaya told me: “Para mí el huapango es alimento. Cuando no vengo a las huapangueadas me siento de mal humor. [Cuando] Vengo, canto, veo a mis amigos huastecos, para mí es alimento” (For me, the *huapango* is soul food. I feel upset if I don’t attend the *huapangueadas*.⁴⁶ [When] I come [to them], sing, and see my Huasteco friends... that is my soul food) (Personal communication, November 14, 2010).

For many others, *son* is a vital expression of their own identity. There is no mistaking when a Huasteco violin fills the air with the first notes of “La pasión” (“The passion”), when a Jarocho *requinto* begins an “Aguanieve” (“The mist”), when the violins, *jarana*, and *huapanguera* strike the rhythmic and harmonic cadence for the *huapango arribeño* poets to being weaving their improvised *décimas*;⁴⁷ no mistaking the sound of the harp accompanied by the *vihuela* and the *cajón* to set the mood for the

⁴⁶ Popular fiestas or gatherings in which *huapangos* are performed.

⁴⁷ The *décima* (plural *décimas*) is a ten-line poetic stanza with octosyllabic lines and with the rhyme structure ABBAACCDDC. Also called *décima espinela* after its creator, writer and musician Vicente Espinel (1550–1624), it is found throughout Latin America in written, spoken, sung, and improvised forms. *Décimas* deal with a wide range of subject matter and *décima* duels are a display of the poets’ witty, satirical, lyrical, or philosophical take on various matters. This sung poetry was very popular in Spain during the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. It spread in Latin America through troubadours.

dancers from Tixtla to come out to dance a *son chusco* with their indispensable *rebozo* (shawl) and with *paliacate* (bandana) in hand; nothing like listening to the intricacies of the violin and the *tamborita* in a Terracalenteño *son*, the “ay, ay, ays” cried out in falsetto voices, the melancholy of “La petenera”; nothing like dance with many others and breath in rhythm with other dancers. Dance, participate, listen to musicians, live the fiesta as the dancing and conversations fill the air and wave a fan of life. Until dawn. Until dawn.

Son is part of the cultural heritage. It is tradition, knowledge, a way of life, past, present, and future. It is making tortillas in the clay *comal* (grilling plate); it is the taste of tequila and mezcal. *Son* is the planting of the *tabla* over a hole dug in the ground where dancers will dance; it is a courtship, a dispute, a peace offering. It is the clothing, the language, the smell, the soundscape of a locale, the geography, and the historical and social struggle of the people. It is in the *son*—the musical genre rooted in the soul—where many feel their strongest sign of identity is entrenched.

After the next chapter, in which I offer an overview of the socio-cultural Mexican milieu during the 20th century in connection to the performance and experience of *sones*, I look into festivals and cultural projects aiming at bringing new awareness of the potential for people to redefine and negotiate their identities. In particular, I look at Festival de la Huasteca as a scenario in which ethnic and cultural identity is performed through choices of clothing, symbolic elements such as incense for opening ceremonies, and music. The inclusion of indigenous musics in Festival de la Huasteca is significant as it reinforces the performance of ethnic differences among indigenous Huasteco groups. Thus, music, “the cultural stuff” chosen to represent ethnicity, is central to the festival as it reinforces the construction of ethnic boundaries within the group as well as from

outside it. Since culture is, as Barth argues, “a way to describe human behaviour,” there are distinct groups of people to correspond to each culture (1969:9). In this particular case, an all-inclusive Huasteca identity composite of ethnic, cultural, and regional identity is constructed through music for the outsider.

The indigenous population is not as marked in the Jarocho and Terracalenteño regions. Thus, Jarocho and Terracalenteño *sones* take on a different marked character on festivals and cultural projects in which the construction of cultural and regional identity taps into redefinitions of cultural pasts and intersections between tradition and modernity. Reinterpretations of *sones jarochos* in particular are performed in musical gatherings such as the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan (see chapter 5), a landmark in the history of *son jarocho* in the last thirty years.

While others have written on the construction of identity for particular *son* subgenres or other musics of Mexico,⁴⁸ my work is inclusive as I look at various *son* subgenres in festivals, which is something that has not been studied before. Thus, festivals that showcase various *sones* such as Son para Milo and Son Raíz are prime occasions for discussions of pan-regional collective identity and community building to address the presence of young generations in the performance and experience of the *son* and how the musical genre is being renovating and revitalized. The renewed interest and the re-contextualization that *sones* are experiencing speak to the vitality of the genre and how, once again, it is connected to the people. Although the revival has incorporated elements of professionalization, the genre is felt by many practitioners and followers as

⁴⁸ See García de León (2006) and González (2004) for *sones jarochos*, Chamorro (1994) for P’urhépecha music and *sones abajeños*, Chamorro (2006) for *sones jaliscienses*, Hellier-Tinoco (2011) for *danza de viejitos* (dance of the old men) from Michoacán, Simonett (2001) for *banda* music, and Hutchinson (2009a) for *pasito* from Durango, among others.

part of a communal experience: the *son* experience is felt as a way to establish a connection with others, thus fulfilling inner affective and aesthetic needs.

CHAPTER 3. MEXICAN SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND CONTEXT DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

Top-down articulations of Mexican culture from colonial times to well into the second half of the 20th century were deployed to represent the nation from the point of view of those who were in power. These colonialist and nationalist discourses of culture exemplify those centers of power that Hobsbawm and Ranger locate within (political and intellectual) elites and that limit the subjects' agency and ability to contest the power structure.

In this chapter, I present an overview of the Mexican social conditions during the 20th century that were decisive in both the decline and the revival of the Mexican *son* and the festive occasions on which it was performed and experienced. I cover the broad historical periods of 1920–1950 and 1950–2000, situating the Mexican nationalism of the first half of the century within theories of nationalism in a broader world context. Then I broadly discuss the concepts of festivals, *encuentros*, and *fandangos* or *huapangos* as I use them throughout this study. Lastly, I discuss the organizing of festivals and cultural projects during the 1980s as a way of countering the abandonment of traditional culture.

Nations and ethnicities

Theorists have classically emphasized the ethnic and political components of nationalism. Rather than seeing these components separate, contemporary perspectives view them as overlapping, nationalism being understood as a set of processes.⁴⁹ Among others, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm emphasize the idea that

⁴⁹ See more in Thorpe 2010:1.

nations and nationalisms are ideological constructs in the same way that ethnic and national identities are. As we have seen in chapter 1, ethnicity is produced and reproduced by the group as well as by outsiders, and is a matter of shared meaning and cultural differentiation in which boundaries are essential to its construction. The connection between ethnic ideology and nationalism can be understood by looking at how each stresses the cultural similarity of its adherents and “draw(s) boundaries vis-à-vis others, who thereby become outsiders” (Eriksen 2009:98). The distinguishing mark of nationalism is, then, its relationship to the state (ibid).

Although these three scholars do acknowledge the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, for them, rather than ethnicity, it is various social, industrial, and political processes that are key in the modern nation-state construct, an ideological means for the incorporation of elites and masses into the shared political space of the nation-state (Jenkins 2008:149). Gellner, for example, focuses on the political aspects of nationalism, the nation being an expression of high urban culture (in the social and political spheres) and national identity the identification of the citizens with such culture (Smith 1998:38). Nationalism could be conceived, then, “as the aspiration to obtain and retain such a high culture and make it congruent with a state” (ibid.).

Taking a very different position, Smith (1998) and Jenkins (2008) opt for broader definitions of nationalism, which for them is bound up with ethnicity. For Smith, modern nations are based on much older cultural groups which he calls *ethnies* (ethnic communities) that define the boundaries within which modern nations can be formed and that are constructed of more permanent cultural attributes such as memory, value, myth

and symbolism (1998:62). For his part, Jenkins argues that nationalisms are “ideologies of ethnic identification”:

The ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’ or ‘nationality’ are, respectively, varieties of ethnic collectivity and ethnicity, and are likely to be historically contingent, context-derived, and defined and redefined in negotiation and transaction. This proposition applies as much to symbolic or ideological content (nationalism) as it does to group boundaries and membership (national identity, nationality, citizenship) (2008:148).

As stated by Smith and Eriksen, among others, theories that sweep out ethnicity from the equation of nationalism are problematic. Some of the problems they see are the relationship of high cultures—which are embodiments of power—with states, and more generally politics; the fundamental task given to a mass public system of education to instill loyalty to the nation and sustain the high cultures necessary for industrial societies; the omission of the role of nationalism—which looks mostly to the past to establish a continuity with the present—in relating the different generations (Smith 1998:38–43), or Gellner’s and other contemporary theorists’ notion of nationalism as a nation-state dominated by an ethnic group whose markers of identity (such as language and religion) are frequently embedded in its official symbolism and legislation with a driven tendency towards the integration and assimilation of citizens (Eriksen 2002:98). In other words, the nation-state “draws an important aspect of its political legitimacy from convincing the popular masses that it really does represent them as a cultural unit” (ibid., 100).

The focus on processes of homogenization in the theoretical grounding of the notion of nation-state finds resonance in Mexico in the construction of regions towards the end of the 19th century and in nation-building from the 1920s onwards, where in spite of the presence of many ethnic groups, political agendas ignored diversity, instead

promoting a homogenous view of the population to build the nation.

Around the 1920s, nationalisms burgeoned in various countries in Latin America and around the world. Nation-building was established as an essential need and set in motion through massive programs of urbanization, education, and political participation based on inclusive, culturally based conceptions of the nation.⁵⁰ In most of these nationalisms, continuity with the past was established as a powerful tool for legitimizing power. Smith states:

The nationalist appeal to the past is therefore not only an exaltation of and summons to the people, but a rediscovery by alienated intelligentsias of an entire ethnic heritage and of a living community of presumed ancestry and history. The rediscovery of the ethnic past furnishes vital memories, values, symbols and myths, without which nationalism would be powerless. But these myths, symbols, values and memories have popular resonance because they are founded on living traditions of the people (or segments thereof) which serve both to unite and to differentiate them from their neighbours (1998:45–46).

In Mexico, nationalism was, to use Turino's terms, "state-generated and elite-associated" (2003:170). Notions of invented traditions and continuity were relevant to the concepts of nation, national identity, and symbols. As Turino argues for Mexico and other countries in Latin America, the main premises of the contemporary form of nationalism owes greatly to the Wilsonian principle of articulating nations (thought of as culture groups) with states and national self-determination (*ibid.*, 172). Such premises are: (1) the concept of a nation as a somehow unified socio-cultural entity; (2) the right of every nation to govern itself; and (3) political legitimacy being based on, at least the guise of, popular sovereignty (*ibid.*, 174).

⁵⁰ See Smith 1998:2–3 and Turino 2003:169–70.

Nicola Miller has noted that a key element in Latin American nationalisms of the 20th century was the inclusion of masses (Miller in Turino 2003:181). The integration of the people into modern nation-states stressed similarities rather than differences of practices and representation. Eriksen notes that when such processes take place, an increasing part of the people's "learnt capabilities for communication, their taken-for-granted structures of relevance—simply put, their *culture*—became shared" (2002:85).

As shall see in this chapter, during the first half of the 20th century, regionalism in Mexico was diminished as cultural policies, mass media, and commercialization appropriated regional styles as representations of the nation. Only in the last two decades of the century, with festivals, cultural projects, and the massive access of the population to the internet, local musical styles are gaining momentum, bringing diversity to and nuancing the regional and the local.

Nationalism in Mexico, the Music Industry, and Folkloric Ballets in the First Half of the 20th Century

Cultural policies through the history of colonialism, nationalism, and liberalization have determined cultural processes and the deployment of particular cultural expressions to represent a nation, a region, a locality, a people. Such representations are constructs, imaginings created by official discourses to fit particular agendas.

The history of Mexican traditional music is intertwined with the social and political history of the country. The *son* is a clear example. As we have seen, the genre was associated with a nascent Mexican identity and was considered a national symbol during the Independence movement in the early 19th century. Towards the end of that

century, the *son* was thriving in different regions and its regional variants were consolidated. Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, the *son* peaked in terms of both reach and popularity, coinciding with a significant reconfiguration of the country's mindset: the nationalist and revolutionary fervor that culminated in the start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 and that would give the country a sense of pride in “lo mexicano” (that which is Mexican), a reassessment of its own culture (Gradante 1982:43; Jáquez 2002:168).

As many scholars have aptly demonstrated,⁵¹ the nationalist movement in post-revolutionary Mexico set out to construct a nation, emphasize a common past that could help agglutinate a heterogeneous group of people into an articulated nation. Mexican nationalist discourse appeared as a fundamental resource for the political, economic, and cultural elites as well as for the urban and rural popular classes. Its ideology justified political agendas as well as cultural projects that, in many instances, could even serve conflicting interests (Pérez Montfort 1994:344). Politically and culturally, it attempted to define the particular racial and historically “core” characteristics of Mexicanness.⁵² A common mechanism for homogenization under the post-revolutionary nationalism was the creation of schools (cultural missions), spectacles celebrating Mexican culture, and a selection of musical styles, forms, and performers mobilized by mass media.

The decades after the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) witnessed the consolidation of state power. The post-revolutionary government set up an educational

⁵¹ See for example Nájera-Ramírez (2009), Pérez Montfort (1998), and Hellier-Tinoco (2011).

⁵² For many authors, the exaltation of a glorious indigenous past was one of the central ideas within the nationalistic construct. David Brading (1980:15) further argues that early Mexican nationalism inherited much of the vocabulary of Creole patriotism, which included not only the exaltation of the Aztec past, but the denigration of the Conquest, xenophobic resentment towards the Spaniards, and devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Creoles, the descendants of the conquistadors and later the children of Spanish immigrants, developed over time a characteristically Mexican consciousness, based largely on the repudiation of Mexico's Spanish origins and fueled by the identification with an indigenous past.

project, directed by José Vasconcelos (1882–1959), central to which was a nationalist discourse (Estrada 1982:191–192; vom Hau 2009:133; Itzigsohn and vom Hau 2006:201; Jaúregui 2007:68; Pérez Monfort 1994:305). The nationalist ideology allowed the state to increase its power at both the cultural and educational levels. During the 1920s, one of the top priorities for the Mexican government was the expansion of a rural school network (called *misiones culturales* or cultural missions), which was carried out through the newly formed Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) (Ministry of Public Education).⁵³ Beginning in 1922, Vasconcelos sent “cultural missionaries” to rural regions throughout Mexico to establish schools. The SEP introduced a curriculum in which populist ideas of socialist education would forge a common nation where mestizo (mostly considered as racial mixing between Spanish and indigenous people) and indigenous populations could revel in / celebrate a common past and build a unified future. According to Lewis, the program attempted “to incorporate Indians into the national (read: mestizo) mainstream” (1997:841). The new curriculum foresaw schools as a means for controlled popular mobilization and the shaping of ideological positions (Vaughan 1997).

Central to the Mexican government’s educational and cultural programs were both the teaching and collecting of folkloric music, dance, arts, and crafts from throughout Mexico. The teaching of music and dance was key in the nationalization process. It was a means of reaching a significant sector of the general population to instill national sentiments and promote a version of history laced with symbols of Mexicanness,

⁵³ The SEP was founded in 1921 by José Vasconcelos, a philosopher who championed the mestizo—the “cosmic race.” Vasconcelos was Minister of Education from 1921 to 1923, played a key role in developing the Mexican schooling and education system, and was a very influential intellectual figure in Mexico and Latin America. See more on Vasconcelos’ work in Alonso (2004), Jiménez and Florescano (2008), and Lewis (1997).

a romanticized indigenous past, and a cultural heritage fitted to the needs of the socialist agenda. Teachers, musicologists, scholars, anthropologists, and folklorists carried out the gathering of songs and dances throughout the country, a selective and uneven endeavor in terms of amount of material collected, quality, and regional representation.⁵⁴ Stereotypes of songs, dances, and musical practices were molded to fit representations of “lo mexicano.”

Though the program aimed to acknowledge the country’s cultural diversity, the “cataloguing” of this diversity proved difficult.⁵⁵ National stereotypes, such as the figures of the *china poblana* and the *charro*,⁵⁶ were useful in reducing that diversity into a more manageable means of representing Mexico and Mexican identity (Pérez Montfort in Itzigsohn and vom Hau 2006:203; Pérez Montfort 2007:271).⁵⁷ In the process of fostering sentiments of belonging to a national project, these stereotypes created the profile of a Mexican mestizo with a dual racial heritage—indigenous and Spanish—at the expense of an African ancestry. Such stereotypes were reaffirmed through musical expressions that became the most representative of Mexican popular music, the *jarabe tapatío*⁵⁸ (from

⁵⁴ For example, folkloric music from the Bajío region—an area that covers the states of Querétaro, Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, and northern Jalisco—received more attention than other Mexican regions (Pérez Montfort 2007:261).

⁵⁵ For example, Leopoldo Valiñas identified 62 languages spoken in Mexico in the late 1990s (Valiñas in Alonso Bolaños 2004:235).

⁵⁶ The *china poblana* refers to women in 19th-century Puebla, frozen in the 20th century into an iconic folk costume instantly recognizable throughout Mexico and beyond. The *china*’s or woman’s dress consists of a white blouse with puffed sleeves worn with a beaded and embroidered skirt over a white slip. Often a shawl is also worn over the shoulders. *Charro* is the term used to refer to a Mexican horseman. The traditional *charro* is known for his colorful clothing: a tight-fitting jacket with matching trousers garnished with rows of silver buttons, a white shirt, and a bowtie in the red, white, and green colors of the Mexican flag. This outfit might also include a wide sombrero. These two figures, along with the *indio* (an indigenous man) and the *tehuana* (a woman from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec dressed in a colorful hand-embroidered blouse and skirt), were the stereotyped figures most utilized in popular magazines, theatre, and cinema.

⁵⁷ See more on the construction of stereotypes in connection with traditional fiestas during this period in Pérez Montfort (1998).

⁵⁸ *Tapatío* refers to something or someone from Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco State. According to Saldívar, at the time, the *jarabe tapatío* was a chain of folk tunes from all over central Mexico that does not seem to have any particular connection with Guadalajara (1987:14). Pérez Montfort states that although the

Jalisco)—the vernacular Mexican dance per excellence—and the mariachi, which became a symbol of Mexican identity.

Cultural politics were decisive in both the *jarabe* and the mariachi becoming representatives of national culture. The *jarabe*, a musical genre that strung together instrumental and sung popular tunes (with an introduction and an ending), was very popular during the 19th century. Different *jarabes* appeared at the time, identified with particular regions, such as the *abajeño* (from Michoacán), the *mixteco* (from Oaxaca), and the *tapatío* (from Jalisco), and by type of dance, such as *ranchero* (cowboy), *favorito* (favorite), and *corriente* (regular). The *jarabe tapatío* was one the most popular *jarabes* and by the 1920s was extensively performed on both popular and official occasions, as it was chosen by the newly established SEP as the musical genre representative of mestizo identities and appropriate to close the “typical and popular Mexican fiesta”—replete with *chinas*, *charros*, *jaripeos* (rodeos), parades, typical costumes, food, and drinks—promoted as an attraction for tourists, mainly from the United States (Pérez Montfort 2007:20).⁵⁹

In the case of the mariachi, government officials showcased this ensemble as a representation of regional and national culture as of the early 20th century.⁶⁰ By 1925, politicians frequently supported and hired mariachis in the two main mariachi urban

term makes obvious reference to the western state of Jalisco, it may refer to the various tunes the genre links together (2007:19–20), denoting a connection to the Arabic word *xarab* (mixture of herbs), from which the word *jarabe* may derive (Mendoza 1956:72).

⁵⁹ Other factors contributed to the *jarabe tapatío*'s popularity. Dancer Anna Pavlova popularized this dance through her choreographed version of it, which she performed internationally for thousands of people (Pérez Montfort 2007:268–269).

⁶⁰ In 1905, the Mariachi Cocolense, a four-member mariachi led by Justo Villa from the Jalisco town of Cocula, traveled to Mexico City to perform for President Porfirio Díaz for Independence Day celebrations. In 1907, a mariachi *jalisciense* from Guadalajara performed to mark the visit of United States Secretary of State Elihu Root to meet with Porfirio Díaz. For this occasion, the group was dressed in *charro* attire, which was not the typical dress of mariachi groups in Western Mexico (Jaúregui 2007:51–52; Sheehy 2006:17).

centers, Mexico City (where many rural musicians had travelled looking for performance opportunities) and Guadalajara, to celebrate special occasions and boost their popularity.⁶¹ According to Jáuregui (2007:99–100), the great transformation of the mariachi began during the Lázaro Cárdenas presidency (1934–1940) when a particular mariachi from Cocula (Jalisco)⁶² was established as representative of the mariachi musical tradition that was widespread in Western Mexico, from Nayarit to Guerrero States. The writings of an intellectual elite⁶³ working for the SEP were crucial in the choice of the mariachi from Cocula as representative of all mariachi ensembles. This elite deliberately chose this group from Jalisco to represent national identity while simultaneously showcasing regional identity as many of these intellectuals were born in that part of the country and were very proud of it.⁶⁴

Following the mechanisms developed by the nationalist movement in selecting various regional artistic styles to create a national canon as a key process to incorporating regional distinctiveness into a unified icon of the nation (Turino 2000:194), the selective approach to collecting and cataloging of folkloric music carried out by the SEP was biased. Regions such as the Bajío—in Central and West Mexico—were favored; in the

⁶¹ See more in Jáuregui (2007:71–75).

⁶² This mariachi gradually incorporated more than the typical four or five musicians and combined musical styles and instruments from micro-regions (e.g., the *guitarrón* from the Arribeño mariachi tradition and the harp from the Abajeño mariachi tradition, both in Michoacán), synthesizing them into a Jaliscian style.

⁶³ Higinio Vázquez Santana wrote the chapter “Los mariachis” in his book on the history of Mexican song; Fernando Ramírez de Aguilar also wrote articles on the *mariachi* from Cocula, and José Ignacio Garibi’s essay on the Coca language was decisive in establishing the *mariachi* from Cocula as representative of all *mariachi* groups. According to Jáuregui (2007:99), the influence of this Garibi’s essay had to do less with the strength and credibility of his arguments than the image this author built of himself as a wise historian and the fact that the essay was published in a scientific magazine (*Investigaciones lingüísticas*).

⁶⁴ Among these intellectuals contributing to the construction of this “national culture” during Porfirian and post-Revolutionary times, Jáuregui mentions writer and journalist Ireneo Paz, lawyer and politician José López Portillo y Rojas, medical doctor, lawyer, and politician Salvador Quevedo y Zubieta, writer Victoriano Salado Álvarez, poet Marcelino Dávalos, writer Juan José Arreola, and writer and politician Agustín Yáñez, among others (2007:100).

Bajío case, this is partly due to the fact that several intellectuals working for the nationalist project were from that region.⁶⁵ Manuel M. Ponce and Rubén M. Campos, for example, collected and cataloged songs, making them fit into the three regions they established as representative of Mexican folkloric traditions: the North, the Bajío, and the Coast.⁶⁶ When it came to choosing what to regard and promote as “authentically Mexican,” they turned their eyes to their own past and their own region, the Bajío (Pérez Montfort 2007:262).

Blancarte reminds us that all nationalism is an artificial creation that speculates and builds upon what it constructs as belonging to the majority and the popular (1994:19). Monsiváis harshly criticized this process of creation of stereotypes, arguing that what is called “popular culture” is the result of the will of the ruling classes and the development of film and radio, and is largely responsible for the recreation and creation of “lo mexicano” (1978:112). Thus, post-revolutionary nationalism built stereotypes and identities that film industries, radio, and record companies capitalized upon. Folkloric ballets also contributed to creating and consolidating stereotypes of regional folkloric expressions. Musically and contextually speaking, *sones* were transformed on those stages and musical regionalism was reduced to musical styles that once were tied to a particular region being defined as representations of the nation, avoiding localisms and

⁶⁵ Among these were composer Manuel M. Ponce, poet Ramón López Velarde, painter and writer Gerardo Murillo, painters and muralists Diego Rivera and Roberto Montenegro, lawyer Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, writer and researcher Enrique Fernández Ledesma, and musicologist Rubén M. Campos (Pérez Montfort 2007:262).

⁶⁶ Their classification was reduced to fit song’s characteristics to features they established for the three regions aforementioned, the North, the Bajío, and the Coast: the North corresponded with audacity (e.g., songs such as “La Adelita” and “La Valentina”), the Bajío with the melancholy (e.g., “Marchita el alma”) and to the Coast with voluptuousness (e.g., “A la orilla de un palmar”) (Pérez Montfort 2007: 262–263).

indexing regional style with national style, and connecting regions to each other under the banner of a common nation.⁶⁷

Mexico's entry in the late 1920s into the era of mass media (radio, phonograph, and cinema), the intense migration of rural people to urban areas, and a strong post-revolutionary nationalist sentiment rapidly transformed the cultural and social fabric of the country. The 1930s saw the triumph of *ranchera* songs, evoking love and the rural life that was quickly disappearing. The *ranchera*'s success coincided with the flowering of radio and the film industry. In the same way the popular *tonadilla escénica* of the 19th century incorporated popular characters and music into its theatrical acts, the *comedia ranchera* was a genre that became very successful in the film industry. It consisted of sketches containing songs and regional numbers, with plots that the popular classes could relate to such as sentimental disputes, witty misunderstandings, and double entendre. It was a very successful genre that the industry exploited heavily in its pursuit of success.⁶⁸ Films such as *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936) and *Rayando el sol* (1946) stereotyped images of rural life, and part of the strategy was to feature *canciones rancheras*, always accompanied by mariachi music (Gradante 1982:43–44; Nájera-Ramírez 1994; Sheehy 2006:32). *Ranchera* singers Lucha Reyes, Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, Lola Beltrán, Vicente Fernández, José Alfredo Jiménez, and many others articulated the sensibilities and experiences of an audience that, in turn, idolized and identified with the songs and singers they loved (Broyles-González 2002:184). Music and singing style were part of the marketing in this new commercial process. Moreover, the film industry created

⁶⁷ See more in Turino (2000:194–196).

⁶⁸ See more in Henriques (2012).

identities and reproduced stereotypes designed to be commercialized.⁶⁹ From the very beginning of the Mexican cinema, films were filled with nationalistic images. By the 1940s, the industry—under government control—had conquered the national market as well as the Central and South American markets (Alegre González 2006:227).

If the Golden Age of Mexican cinema shaped the sound and visual image of the modern mariachi and consolidated the ensemble as a symbol of Mexican identity (Jaúregui 2007:105–137), radio broadcasts of the powerful XEW (Mexico's first nationwide radio broadcasting system, which went on air in 1930) and record companies were responsible for creating stereotypes not only of *ranchera* songs, but of other musical styles including *sones*. Length, number, and content of stanzas were standardized, and playing techniques were adjusted to recording and broadcasting needs and structures.

Moreover, musicians who moved to Mexico City during the 1930s and 1940s looking for performance opportunities introduced changes into their performances to fit in with urban scenarios and audience expectations. A well-known case is that of Huasteco musicians Nicandro Castillo (1914–1990) and Elpidio Ramírez (1882–1960). They created and introduced the *cuarteta* (four-line verse stanza), which was added to the traditional *coplas* (*quintillas*, *sextillas*, and *seguidillas*) used in the *son jarocho*. They also played an important role in creating the *neohuapango* or *canción huapango* (*huapango* song) (Hernández Azuara 2003:135). These compositions, with fixed music and lyrics, are in *cuarteta*, and occasionally *quintilla*, form; lyrics often praise the beauty of the Huasteca region and the people, and features such as long falsetto sections are used as a catchy performance element. The *neohuapango* genre was extremely popular in that period and remained a favorite as it was later popularized by *ranchera* singers such as

⁶⁹ For more on this topic, see Rubenstein (2000).

Vicente Fernández, David Záizar, and Linda Ronstadt, as well as mariachi groups.⁷⁰

Another well-known case is that of Jarocho musicians Lorenzo Barcelata, Andrés Huesca, and Lino Chávez, who transformed their renditions of *son jarocho* by playing faster, reducing the number of stanzas, and using a larger harp that allowed the musician to play standing. They also came up with musical arrangements appropriate for the stage and created stereotyped images and interpretations of both the musicians and the music.⁷¹ Like other musicians, when they returned to their places of origin, they brought with them these transformations.

Another important element affecting the process of delineation and transformation of traditional music during the first half of the 20th century was the folkloric ballet. Under the nationalist banner, the government sponsored festivals that featured regional folkloric dances. Choreographers in dance companies begin to experiment with incorporating indigenous and folkloric dances into their ballet presentations (Nájera-Ramírez 2009:279). They sought to promote Mexican culture by creating staged performances of dance and music, informed by anthropological as well as historical research and by the customs of ancient and contemporary Mexico.

Although the creators of such performances were concerned with notions of authenticity, in reality they needed to subject folkloric musical and dance forms to considerable manipulation and transformation in order to make them suitable for the stage, as well as remove them from the folkloric contexts that gave them substance and meaning for their rural exponents. They selected specific characteristics to distinguish

⁷⁰ Many of Nicandro Castillo's compositions (e.g., "El hidalguense," "Las tres Huastecas," "El cantador," "El alegre," "El Huasteco," and "Fiesta huasteca") have been incorporated into the *son jarocho* repertoire and are widely performed by Jarocho groups as well as by mariachis.

⁷¹ See more in Figueroa Hernández (2007:87–90).

one ethnic group and one region from another, creating strong symbols of identification to be discerned from within and outside the group (Royce 2002:164). Folkloric ballets worked a process of selection across the broad spectrum of Mexican traditional dances and created stereotypes and representations of cultural expressions that, in the long run, affected the development of folkloric traditions in their regions of origin.⁷²

In some ways, the staged spectacles created by folkloric ballets or state-sponsored festivals of earlier years can be compared with the great festivals of colonial-era Mexico, festivals aimed at displaying power and authority of the Catholic church and Spanish officials, and promoting specific religious, political, and social ideas.⁷³ Both government and church authorities sponsored these festivals, in which music, theater, dance, processions, and fireworks orchestrated a display of power and control over the national subjects:

The propaganda of good governance posited the concept of hierarchical unity, that an effective, caring government, motivated by religious zeal and Christian virtue, sought to serve the people in an effort to forge a better society and that the creation of such a society included a role, both in theory and in actual ritual participation, for every citizen, whether Native, African, or Spaniard, always in their appropriate place according to a hierarchical system that gave preference to wealthy Spaniards (Curcio-Nagy 2004:148).

Social Conditions During the Second Half of the 20th Century

If the Revolution and the nationalist movement transformed Mexican society during the first half of the 20th century, a high rate of population growth and a dramatic increase in the proportion of the population in urban centers were the two main social

⁷² See Nájera-Ramírez (2009) and Hutchinson (2009b) for specifics on the Ballet Folklórico de México.

⁷³ Curcio-Nagy (2004) is a comprehensive study of the main festivals in colonial Mexico City: the entry of a new viceroy, the oath ceremony to a new monarch, the celebration of Corpus Christi (the Holy Eucharist), the feast of the Virgin of Remedies (divine patroness of the city), and the Royal Banner festival.

conditions transforming Mexican society during its second half. In fifty years, Mexico tripled its population from 25 million to 97.5 million inhabitants (Rodríguez Kuri 2011:493).

From 1940 to 1970, migration towards urban areas was partly due to the rapid growth of the industrial sector. Mexico's urbanization occurred hand-in-hand with industrialization (starting in 1940 and continuing into the present) and the opening up of its economy to foreign investment and trade. Migration to urban centers transformed ways of living, kinship structures, and social processes. The family's function as the main source of personal and economic support largely disappeared, along with traditional ideas of community and solidarity (Rodríguez Kuri 2004:52), with enormous consequences for musical aesthetics and practices.

Along with this growth of population and urbanization, the economic crisis of the 1980s—resulting from falling oil prices, an overvalued peso, increasing global interest rates, foreign debt, and migration to the United States—and changes in the general conditions of the people (gains in education and health, growth of income per capita, and access to media) contributed to the rapid transformations in Mexican society. By early 1996, however, the economy had begun to recover and the country began to emerge from its economic recession (Goodman 1996). Between 1960 and 2000, the continuing increase in the influence of the mass media (radio, television, film, the press, and more recently, the Internet) contributed in fundamental ways to the increasing complexity of Mexican society.

In the 1950s, there was a new cultural “turn” as artists and intellectuals, influenced by French existentialists (particularly Sartre and Camus), challenged the

construction of the Mexican nation and the “glorious past” Mexico had created for the itself in focusing on, among other elements, stereotyped images of indigenous people (mostly Aztecs), so uncompromisingly portrayed in murals and films.⁷⁴ Such portrayals were far from the reality of actual indigenous peoples. Other philosophical currents also influenced Mexican intellectuals, especially the decolonization of Africa, the Cuban Revolution, and the New Song movement (Rubenstein 2000:666).

The earlier forms of media (radio, recording, and film) had already exerted considerable strength in transforming Mexican musical and cultural life in the 1930s and 1940s (Moreno Rivas 1989:88; Rubenstein 2000:658–659; Sheehy 1998:619). Beginning in the 1950s, musical programming on television shaped musical tastes as well, informing new ways of listening to and experiencing music as well as changing the face of festive occasions in both urban and rural areas. Television facilitated the penetration of foreign musics such as rock ‘n’ roll and ballads into Mexican repertoires and markets.

As had happened before with other danceable genres that were imported and adapted to local tastes (e.g., mambo, cha-cha-chá, and rumba during the 1940s and 1950s), the first Mexican rock ‘n’ roll bands reproduced hits from the United States with Spanish-language lyrics. Mexican television quickly picked up the rock ‘n’ roll craze and made sure it was incorporated into its programming. Shows such as *Premier Orfeón*, which began in 1961 and featured both music and dance aspects of the genre, brought rock ‘n’ roll to great heights of popularity among Mexican youth (Paredes Pachó and Blanc 2009:401).

⁷⁴ For the most part, “Indianness” was depicted in the film industry through particular ways of walking, talking, and dressing, as well as skin color, which was manipulated through make-up to darken the fair skin of actors and actresses chosen for the roles of indigenous characters. See more on this topic in Pérez Montfort (1994).

Partly due to the popularity of rock ‘n’ roll, in the early 1960s a number of Mexican local regional music genres decreased in popularity. Other genres were influenced by television. *Canción ranchera* singers, for example, adapted their singing styles to the new media. According to Moreno Rivas, fierce and passionate singing styles such as Lola Beltrán’s were favored to capture viewers’ attention (1989:266). Moreover, the *canción romántica* (romantic ballad) achieved great popularity. Singers imitated singing and performing styles such as those of Spaniards Raphael and Camilo Sexto, and boleros—extremely popular from the mid 1930s to the 1950s—gave way to bolero-ballads, which Yucatecan composer Armando Manzanero helped popularize. In the 1970s, ballads were influenced by jazz idioms and later by local musics such as *ranchera* (e.g., Ana Gabriel’s performances) and other traditional musics. The ballad’s craze lasted until the end of the 1980s.

Away from television, the folkloric movement (*folklorismo*) that took place in Latin America starting in the late 1950s reached maturity in Mexico by 1962. The *folklorismo* movement coincided with countercultural movements that were taking place throughout the world, and that in Mexico culminated in the 1968 Student Movement in which students challenged state power and made claims for better living conditions for the great number of disenfranchised and low-income people throughout the country.⁷⁵

Young Mexican musicians wanting to align themselves with the struggle and advocate social changes through their performances chose to do so using folkloric musical styles from around Latin America. They also preferred these styles as a way of rescuing vernacular musics rooted in the popular. As I will later discuss, in the 180s

⁷⁵ The conflict climaxed on October 2, 1968 with the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City. On that day, Mexican government forces fired upon a large crowd gathered in Tlatelolco plaza, killing hundreds of people.

musicians began to look more explicitly at their own Mexican regional heritages for inspiration. Mexico's neoliberal economy and politics in the 1990s as well as the rise of the Internet facilitated greater cultural mobility in Mexican society. Moreover, warnings that globalization threatened cultural values and customs were behind a few of the cultural projects that were established at the time, and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) was a reminder of the influence of new international enterprises on national economies. As Simonett comments,

Globalizing processes have far-reaching social consequences. Viewed positively, they dismantle old forms of marginalization and domination and make new forms of democratization and cultural multiplicity imaginable. Mexico's political opening and neo-liberal tendencies of the past two decades have caused a gradual democratization of the media, which was before largely monopolized by the Mexican government and a few media moguls (2008:125).

Though the media conglomerates continued to control the national television stations (Televisa and TV Azteca), privatization and deregulation under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) opened up the cable business, allowing programs to be imported from other parts of the world, particularly the United States, Latin America, and Spain. The Internet also opened another channel for underrepresented sectors of the population, which gradually found a means to be heard (e.g. the Zapatista movement).⁷⁶

Notions and Meanings: Festivals, *Encuentros*, and *Fandangos* or *Huapangos*

As mentioned above and as shall be seen in the next chapters, music festivals and *encuentros* (musical gatherings) in the three regions I cover in my work have been

⁷⁶ The Zapatistas went public in 1994 to protest against the Mexican government, which had been controlled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) for 65 years. The Zapatistas called attention to the underrepresented indigenous population of Chiapas, where the movement began. They also protested against NAFTA, which they argued accentuated the gap between social classes in Mexico, and called for greater democratization of the country.

organized since the 1980s as venues to reinforce notions of identity and community formation. They have also served as a means to explore notions of culture, that is, the system of meanings by which groups recognize each other (Kershaw 2007:92), and tradition as cultural elements from the past such as symbols, values, and beliefs. For Pérez Gómez, “no hay mejor vía para el reconocimiento mutuo y el reforzamiento de la identidad que el del encuentro y confluencia con un propósito festivo” (there is no better way to achieve mutual recognition and the reinforcement of identities than [people] gathering to celebrate) (2009:54).

During the 1990s, in the wake of pioneer *encuentros* such as those of Tlacotalpan and Amatlán, there was a boom of festivals and other musical gatherings in both the Jarocho and Huasteca regions. They functioned as venues for sharing, exchanging, and learning about diverse musical practices and *son* repertoires from different parts of the regions. Moreover, they were “a prime device for promoting social cohesion, for integrating individuals in a society or group and maintaining them as members through shared, recurrent, positively reinforcing performance” (Smith 1972:167). Several of these events were called *encuentros*—“encounters”—to emphasize the idea of sharing and connecting through musical and personal experiences.

Generally speaking, the term (music) festival in Mexico designates a presentational event in which various groups deliver rehearsed and prepared renditions of music for an audience that, for the most part, is “quiet.” A presentational performance counts on one group to perform for an audience that is not active in the making of the music and the dancing (Turino 2008:16). The audience only takes an active role through verbal interaction and emotional connection with performers (if these occur). Moreover,

the term festival may imply a competition among performing groups and, in some instances, a display of sponsors' power through verbal (e.g., speeches) and physical display of symbols (e.g., graphic logos) and space (e.g., stages arranged to mark a performers/audience separation).

The festivals I cover in this study do not involve competitions. Nor are they designed as purely presentational events, closer in structure to the *encuentro* or gathering of musicians and audiences around a musical event in which performances take place among, rather than separated from other musicians and people. Particular to these “*encuentro*-festivals” an inclusive, participatory approach to the music in which collective participation and social interaction is key for the experience to have a positive outcome. According to Turino, participatory performance is “a particular field of activity in which stylized sound and motion are conceptualized most importantly as heightened social interaction” (2008:28). In *son* festivals, the emphasis is on the “doing” rather than on an end product as result of such activity (ibid.). Audiences actively participate by dancing—an integral part of the performance.

In discussing the meanings of the various processes of interaction between performers and audiences, Béhague's understanding of “performance” sums up the idea of music festivals as spaces for the display and construction of culture. Performance, he argues,

must be viewed as the occasion and event that fosters through social interaction and participation the collective consciousness and affirmation of group identity or ethnicity [...]. It functions as a driving, crystallizing force in the enacting display of a given social group's aesthetics, that is, the value systems that validate the group's ethos. In addition music performance partakes of the system of symbols that is at the basis of cultural expression (Béhague 1992:177).

Thus, in my work, I understand festivals and *encuentros* as shared experiences that can allow us to understand changing processes in the formation of culture, that is, the “continually changing relational constitution of cultural forms” (Desmond 1997:57). Broadly speaking, festivals are annual events organized around a specific activity or type(s) of music. In my own experience, *son* festivals and *encuentros* gather performers and audiences in a cultural space in which tradition and innovation are represented, experienced, contested, talked about, and sometimes experimented with. At these events, notions of cultural boundaries and definitions can be contested and/or consolidated, in a process that may be decisive for the musical tradition itself.

As we shall see, the festivals, musical gatherings, and *fandangos* of the last three decades were organized as a response to both state-sponsored cultural initiatives during the 1950s and the increasing transformation of traditional cultural practices during the 1960s and 1970s. Since the 1980s, actors in the traditional music revival have been reworking the organizing of festivals to bring them closer to the community and the original contexts in which the music was born. A driving force within this action is a new awareness people have attained as owners of their own culture and cultural traditions. We find among them a desire to restore to present-day musical practices as many elements from musical practices in the past as possible, a process of re-contextualization that I further discuss in chapter 6 in connection with festivals in Tierra Caliente.

In her study of the construction of patriotic festivals in Mexico during the first half of the 20th century, Mary Kay Vaughan argues that festivals functioned as a “channel for articulating hegemony.” For Vaughan, hegemony “embraces an ensemble of symbols, images, and visions of the past and the future that take hold among social subjects to

shape identity, memory, loyalty, and meaning, and to energize action” (1994:232).

Although different than those of the mid-20th century, particular ideologies, values, and structures of power are present in present-day festivals that are fully or partially sponsored by state institutions (e.g., Festival de la Huasteca, Son Raíz, Son para Milo).

Notwithstanding political interests, the music festivals I describe in the coming chapters are about social and cultural processes, such as the construction of community and the reinforcement of social cohesion and cultural identity. Active participation in the organization of these festivals engages and mobilizes people. In this sense, we may argue that these festivals elucidate an ideology mobilized around the revival, reconstruction, and transmission of cultural heritages and musical traditions, as well as a consciousness of ownership of culture. Rather than a top-down design, the music festivals in this study convey an idea(l) of “democratization of culture” that emerges from a mostly bottom-up design in which inclusion and community-building are key.

Particularly relevant for my discussion of festivals is Anthony Cohen’s notion of community as a mode of experience construed in terms of belonging rather than locality, an entity that has meaning to people who consider themselves to be part of it (Cohen 2001:15–20). According to Cohen, a community “hinges crucially on consciousness [...] This consciousness of community is [...] encapsulated in perception of its boundaries, boundaries which are themselves largely constituted by people in interaction” (ibid., 13). Since culture is constituted by symbols, communities are based on sharing particular symbols, such as musical performance. Thus, community is a mental construct: “Community exists in the minds of its members” while the reality of its boundaries lies

“in the mind, in the meanings which people attach to them, not in their structural forms” (ibid., 98).

Thus, festivals articulate symbolic values that belong to a particular social group or community and convey particular meanings for the group, bringing forward the connection between community members at festivals and fiestas at both spiritual and physical levels. According to Camacho Díaz, festivals are symbolic configurations that

condensan la información que hace posible la transmisión de la cultura, que dan continuidad y cohesión a una comunidad. En ello radica su valor patrimonial, ya que constituyen un ente vital que, además de mantener la memoria colectiva, se enriquece con las nuevas experiencias de la vida (2009:34)

(condense the information that makes possible the transmission of culture, that provides a community with continuity and a sense of cohesion. Therein lies their inherited value: they are a vital entity that sustains the collective memory while being enriched with new life experiences).

In contrast to the events of everyday life, festivals happen once a year. Consequently, they are special occasions that elicit shared experiences, foster reciprocity, and involve deliberate intention on the part of participants to attend them. They bring together a group whose shared values, as Dowd et al. argue, contribute to the festival’s intensity, one of the elements that make festivals catalyst events that enable creativity and mobilization (2004:150–156).

As previously mentioned, the *fandango* (see figure 3)⁷⁷ is a popular, community-rooted celebration that incorporates music, dance, and poetry. Reclaimed as a space for the sound, no script to follow, no specific group chosen to perform. Throughout this work, when I refer to the *fandango*, I mean this kind of popular fiesta, particularly associated with the festive experience and expression of the Mexican *son*.

⁷⁷ Except where indicated, this and all other photographs are my own.

Figure 3. *Fandango* at Jardín Kojima, Ocotitlán, Veracruz (May 14, 2011)



The use of the term *fandango* to refer to a musical celebration can be traced back to the 18th century.⁷⁸ During the 18th and 19th centuries, it was used throughout Latin America to refer to both the popular festive occasion and the music and dances performed within it (Ruiz 2014:30–31). *Fandangos* took place indoors and outdoors, in private

⁷⁸ According to García de León, the first written mention of the term *fandango* in Mexico dates from 1767. It appeared in a denunciation to the Inquisition in which Joseph Domingo Gaitarro, an itinerant preacher (*pregonero itinerante*) from Córdoba, Veracruz, was accused of bigamy and described as “cantador y tocador, y sabe algunas relaciones que echa en los fandangos y es muy fandanguero” (singer and instrumentalist, and he knows some lyrics that he sings at the *fandangos*, and he is a reveler) (2006:31). Earlier than 1767, the term *fandango* was defined in a Spanish dictionary from 1732 as a dance and a celebration that was introduced into Spain by people who had been in the Americas (Real Academia Española de la Lengua 1732:719). However, according to Roxo de Flores (in Etzion 1993:237), the *fandango*’s indigenous origin is thought to be too recent as it can be traced back to Greek and Roman times as a pagan dance. In yet another theory, an African origin for the *fandango* is postulated in *Danse* (1798) by Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry. Etzion states: “Moreau identifies the fandango with the ‘chica,’ the most ‘voluptuous’ dance of the West Indies, and suggests that both originated in Africa: while the Moors imported it to Spain, where it was subsequently named ‘fandango,’ the black slaves brought it to the West Indies, where it was called ‘chica’ (1803 edition of *Danse*, p. 55)” (1993:237). According to the same author, during the second half of the 18th century, the *fandango*’s conjectured Moorish or Indian origins reinforced in Europe a perception of the dance as an exotic “show” dance expression of “the sensuous and voluptuous Andalusian Gypsy” and was idolized on the Parisian stages and in the French literature of the time (ibid., 240). At the end of the 18th century, *fandango* appeared in the aforementioned Spanish dictionary as a specific playing and dancing style as well as the fiesta itself (Real Academia Española de la Lengua 1791:422). This meaning of *fandango* remained in the dictionaries until 1925 when it was defined as a lively and passionate old Spanish dance that was very common in the *flamenco* musical style, sung and accompanied by the guitar and castanets (Real Academia Española de la Lengua 1925:560, 1992:671).

homes and bars, in plazas and on canoes.⁷⁹ Food and drink were served as part of the fiesta.

In Mexico, although *fandangos* took place throughout the country, the *fandango* in the Jarocho region has received the most academic attention.⁸⁰ According to García de León, the festive celebration, with its associated social and cultural protocols, music, dance, and poetry, was consolidated from the mid 18th century (2006:24), a time when regional cultural identities were taking shape. García de León comments on the proliferation of *fandangos* after 1870 as stable political conditions and economic growth during Porfirio Díaz's presidencies (1876–1880; 1884–1911) facilitated occasions for *fandangos* (e.g., local and regional markets). The *fandango* lost momentum during the second quarter of the 20th century, regaining strength towards the end on the 1980s not only in the Jarocho, Huasteca, and Tierra Caliente regions, but also in other Mexican regions such as the Costa Chica⁸¹ and the Sierra Gorda de Xichú, where the *fandango* or *huapango* is called *topada*.⁸² As we have seen, post-revolutionary nationalism promulgated stereotyped images of folkloric music practices and genres. While music genres and ensembles from Jalisco were established as representative of Mexicanness, various Mexican *son* subgenres went into decline. Moreover, musicians moving from rural to urban areas (particularly to Mexico City) during the 1920s looking for performance opportunities established professional groups that adapted regional musics (e.g., *sones jarochos*) to urban scenarios.⁸³

⁷⁹ Famous are the *fandangos* that took place on canoes on La Viga canal in Mexico City until the beginning of the 20th century, when the lakes and canals in and around the city were drained.

⁸⁰ See García de León (2006), Pérez Montfort (2003, 2007, 2011), Moreno Nájera (2009a, 2009b), Alfredo Delgado Calderón (2011), and Jessica Gottfried Hesketh (2009, 2011), among others.

⁸¹ See more on *fandangos* in the Costa Chica in Ruiz Rodríguez (2009, 2014).

⁸² See more on *topadas* in *son arribeño* in Chávez (2012).

⁸³ See the case of Conjunto Medellín in chapter 5.

At present, the *fandango* is a means for the construction of a collective sense of community, which Shelemay describes as “an outcome of a combination of social and musical processes, rendering those who participate in making or listening to music aware of a connection among themselves” (Shelemay 2011:365). Popular music and poetry reinforce a sense of belonging while expressing and experiencing culture. Juan Carranza, dancer and cultural promoter from Tixtla, Guerrero, comments on the *fandango* as both a communal fiesta and an occasion to celebrate:

Disfrutar del fandango es asistir, disfrutar de los encuentros en Tixtla, en las mayordomías, la Virgen de la Natividad, ir a los barrios donde se celebra a los santos. Para celebrar recurrimos al fandango, que para nosotros es fiesta, algarabía. Para nosotros disfrutar del fandango es compartir, socializar, es buscar la armonía de una familia a otra y los fandangueros con gusto, intercambian sones. En Tixtla piden el permiso para interpretar sones. Por ejemplo, si don Juan compuso La costeñita, otros grupos le piden permiso a la familia de don Juan que les deje tocar la costeñita, piden permiso para interpretarla. Hay un absoluto respeto en el fandango (Personal communication, October 8, 2010)

(To enjoy the *fandango* is to attend it, to enjoy the musical gatherings in Tixtla during patron saint festivities, the Nativity of the Virgin, to go to the neighborhoods where particular saints are celebrated. To celebrate, we turn to *fandango*, which for us is fiesta, rejoicing. For us, to enjoy the *fandango* is to share, socialize, seek harmony among families., *Fandangueros* joyfully exchange *sones*. In Tixtla they ask permission to play *sones*. For example, if don Juan composed “La costeñita,” other groups will ask don Juan’s family for permission to perform “La costeñita.” There is absolute respect in the *fandango*).

As stated earlier, over the last twenty years, festivals and *fandangos* have gained momentum throughout Mexican regions as platforms where the *son* is performed and experienced. As *fandango* practices date back more than three centuries, it is an important vehicle for collective memories and practices.

Fandangos have a ritualistic aspect that is made explicit through conventions

learned by participating in *fandangos*.⁸⁴ In this sense, we can understand *fandangos* as “a product of a habitus” and discern how participants’ roles and behaviors are produced as a result of habitus, which is the “disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions” (Bourdieu 1984:170). Practices, meanings, structures and perceptions are shaped by those of the past, or at least by our perception of them. Within the organizing and perception of practices that habitus presupposes, the perception of the social world, peoples, symbols, and behaviors within the *fandango* are the product of internalization: they are defined by their intrinsic properties and by the relational properties determined by the “structure of the system of conditions”—the habitus (ibid., 72).

Referring to *fandangos* in Tierra Caliente, Romero González defines them as “un complejo celebratorio que conserva la esencia de la fiesta ritual” (2004:92) (a celebratory complex that retains the essence of the ritual fiesta). For Octavio Rebolledo, this ritualistic character situates the *fandangos* in the Jarocho region at the center of social life:

El fandango es mucho más que una fiesta; es un ritual, un acto simbólico, una solemne ceremonia comunitaria que hemos recibido de generaciones pasadas. Está lleno de connotaciones y significados que hacemos nuestras al asumir la fiesta con el respeto y convicción que todo rito demanda. En el fandango se cultivan y renuevan los nexos de amistad, la celebración de la vida, los principios de solidaridad y tolerancia, de espíritu comunitario, de convivencia e integración grupal. Representa el espacio más importante para enriquecer nuestra formación, reforzar nuestra identidad y recrear la tradición (Written communication,⁸⁵ April 6, 2011)

(The *fandango* is much more than a fiesta; it is a ritual, a symbolic act, a solemn communal ceremony that we have received from past generations.

⁸⁴ I expand on the rules and rituals present in *fandangos jarocho*s within my discussion of the Encuentro de Jaraneros de Tlacotalpan in chapter 5.

⁸⁵ Conference “El fandango y la tradición” delivered at the IX Seminario de Son Jarocho in Jáltipan, Veracruz (April 3–10, 2010) and published in the list server “Foro de Son jarocho.”

It is full of connotations and meanings that we make our own when we approach the fiesta with the respect and conviction that any rite commands. Grown and renewed in the *fandango* are ties of friendship, the celebration of life, principles of solidarity and tolerance, of community spirit, of coexistence and group integration. It represents the most important space for enriching our training, strengthening our identity, and recreating the tradition).

At present, *fandangos* are being framed as events where all aspects of the Mexican *son*—dancing, singing, playing, and poetic improvisation—are lived and experienced along with food, attire, language, verbal interactions, and a myriad of other cultural expressions. The festive occasion transcends the notion of a mere celebration to link culture with formative social behaviors. Although *fandangos* vary across regions, common to all of them is the *fandango* as a shared experience that connects past and present through collective memory, which according to Halbwachs is closely related to all kinds of group identity (Halbwachs in Russell 2006:800). For Halbwachs, the way an individual socially interacts with the members of his or her group determines how experiences are remembered and what is remembered: “nos souvenirs demeurent collectifs, et ils nous sont rappelés par les autres, alors même qu’il s’agit d’événements auxquels nous seuls avons été mêlés, et d’objets que nous seuls avons vus” (our memories remain collective, and others remind us of them, even in situations where only we experienced the events or saw the objects in question) (1950:6). It is the particular nature of the group and its collective experience that shapes its collective memory (or memories attributed to more than one person). Groups reconstruct past experiences collectively and the particular nature of these experiences creates a shared memory of the event and identity (Halbwachs in Russell 2006:796).

The Organizing of Festivals and Cultural Projects since the 1980s

The concentration of power in the hands of a central state authority has had a long tradition in Mexican history, establishing conditions that favored cultural dependency on the state. The effects of a strong centralized administration, political dominance by a single party, and a strong sense of nationalism solidly entrenched in the 1940s could still be felt until the 1980s.⁸⁶ State centralization of cultural policies affected institutions (e.g., museums, schools, and libraries) as well as education and research programs. For example, as we have seen, as part of its centralized policies during the 1950s, the Mexican government supported folkloric festivals that featured regional folk dances as a way to promote a pan-Mexican identity. Folkloric ballets not only applied a selection process to the broad spectrum of Mexican traditional dances, but also created stereotypical representations of cultural expressions that, in the long run, would affect the folkloric traditions in their regions of origin.

Jiménez and Florescano harshly criticize Mexican cultural agencies' lack of autonomy from the government during the 20th century (2008:85). This situation of dependence translates into a lack of long-term cultural policies to implement and support cultural programs. Thus, important institutions such as CONACULTA (Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes / National Council for Culture and the Arts)⁸⁷ depend on the government, and therefore, on the cultural policies established by each administration.

⁸⁶ See Alba and Potter (1986); Camp (2000); Goodman (1996); Jiménez and Florescano (2008).

⁸⁷ As in other Latin American countries, the institutional structure around cultural policies in Mexico took shape in the 1960s with the establishment of the Subsecretaría de Cultura (Sub-secretariat of Culture). Following French models, this institution organized cultural activities into three areas: rescue and preservation of cultural heritage, promotion of the arts, and cultural diffusion. CONACULTA was created in 1988 as part of the spirit of "modernization" promoted by president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. CONACULTA encompassed various institutions that had little in common (e.g., autonomous institutions such as Instituto Nacional de Antropología (National Institute of Anthropology) and Instituto Nacional de

Although traditional music was only sparsely represented in the Mexican cultural scene and mass media during the 1970s, the attention it did receive can be attributed to several factors. First, within the Latin American *folklorismo* and New Song movements, musicians included in their performances folkloric musics from different parts of Mexico (e.g. *pirekuas* from Michoacán, *sones jarochos*, and *chilenas*). Second, researchers such as José Raúl Hellmer, Irene Vázquez, Arturo Warman, Eduardo Llerenas, Enrique Ramírez de Arellano, and Beno Lieberman, among others, were pioneers in conducting fieldwork and investigating traditional musics.⁸⁸ Third, two radio stations, Radio Universidad and Radio Educación, aired Latin American folkloric music and, occasionally, some regional Mexican music (Pérez Montfort 2003:84–85). In time, Radio Educación widened its programming of Mexican traditional music. According to Pérez Montfort, the program “Panorama Folclórico,” which played traditional music and offered background information on it, contributed to both generating an awareness of the importance of contemporary cultural values among Mexican youth and promoting Mexican culture (ibid., 85). Eventually, Radio Educación would broadcast live from festival sites, which was significant in the promotion of particular *son* subgenres in

Bellas Artes (National Institute of Fine Arts), as well as organizations such as Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (Center for Training in Cinematography), the Canal 22 television station, and Radio Educación. It also included administrative units such as Dirección General de Culturas Populares (Popular Cultures Directorate), Dirección General de Publicaciones (Publications Directorate), Centro Cultural Helénico (Center for Hellenic Studies), Red Nacional de Bibliotecas (National Network of Libraries), Festival Internacional Cervantino (Cervantino International Festival), Sistema Nacional de Fomento Musical (National System of Musical Promotion), Centro Nacional de las Artes (National Center for the Arts), and Coordinación Nacional de Descentralización (National Coordination of Decentralization) (Jiménez and Florescano 2008:87). The goal was to review the work these institutions were doing in order to strengthen the promotion of culture. Results have been uneven, always at the mercy of the actions and agendas of specific individual staff members working in the many divisions of the institution.

⁸⁸ Significant field recordings and monographs by Hellmer, Vázquez, and Warman were published by the INAH (National Institute of Anthropology). Lieberman, Llerenas, and Ramírez de Arellano published the first comprehensive anthology of Mexican *sones* in 1983 (see Lieberman et al. 1985 and Warman [1970] 2000a, [1971] 2000b, [1974] 2000c, and [1969] 2000d). The collections of field recordings at the INAH and at the INI (Indigenist Institute) were essential to the process of defining musical traditions in Mexico during the 1970s.

festivals and musical gatherings such as Festival de la Huasteca (see chapter 4), Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan (see chapter 5), and Son Raíz (see chapter 7).

As nationalist discourses from past decades had worn out, this renewed interest in traditional and folkloric music could be interpreted as a convenient strategy for populist president Luis Echevarría (1970–1976) to fill the need for a new nationalist discourse. According to Pérez Montfort, Echevarría’s cultural policies were built around “lo folklórico” (the folkloric) and “lo popular” (the popular), that is, the revitalization of crafts, typical clothing, and musical folkloric tradition (2003:95).

By the mid 1980s, in response to the scarcity of traditional culture and the deterioration of social spaces for traditional music in both urban and rural areas, researchers, musicians, and cultural promoters, among others, began to organize music festivals as vehicles for the sharing and revitalization of traditional music cultures and the gathering of scattered musical traditions and musicians throughout Mexican rural areas. Some young musicians turned to traditional musics, such as *son*, as a way of exploring their own identities, realizing that such musics represented the values and aesthetics of their forebears and could also help them to discover what they valued most as well as create their own means of expression.

Festivals were designed to share and reclaim the aesthetics and traditional contexts of the music. In some cases, musical traditions were reinvented.⁸⁹ In others, they were remembered and brought to new heights of popularity.⁹⁰ For this community of musicians, cultural promoters, and music lovers, music functioned as “a means to provide

⁸⁹ Well known is the case of *sones de artesa* from the Costa Chica (Guerrero and Oaxaca), a style forgotten in the middle of the 20th century and reconstructed in the 1990s as a symbol of black identity (Lewis 2000:899; Moedano 2002; Ruiz Rodríguez 2004 and 2009).

⁹⁰ This is particularly true of the *son jarocho*.

a sense of belonging” (Duffy 2005:677), creating a space for interaction and connection. Among others, López (1997:312) and Mendoza (1998:165) argue that festivals can serve as vehicles for processes of identity formation, construction, maintenance, and contestation. This is the case for festivals in Mexico, which, in both the past and present, have created a space for interconnection and have served as sites to create and reinforce identity as well as represent and share traditional music and culture within and across regions. The festivals I analyze in the following chapters exemplify these motivations and outcomes.

At present, in the drive throughout Mexico to revive regional musical traditions, there is an attempt to move away from stereotyping (playing, singing, and dancing styles) and de-contextualization processes. Although different regions have undergone different trajectories, they have certain factors in common: the rescue of old *sones* and performance practices, the revival of dance styles, the fashioning of musical instruments using older techniques and the reintroduction of instruments that had “disappeared” (such as the *guitarra panzona* from Tierra Caliente), the reinstatement of improvised poetry, and the re-appropriation of the tradition as a community expression with the *fiesta* or *fandango* at its core. As I will further explore in chapters 5 and 6, the *fandango* is considered the social and communitarian platform where regional *sones* are lived and performed. It represents shared knowledge. It brings together music, poetry, and dance into a creative space in which these three elements are symbiotically meaningful, the *tarima* positioned at the center of the stage. Dancers dialog with musicians and poets, musicians bring their energy into the performance, and poets recite or improvise verses (in stanzas of 4, 5, 6, 7, or 10 lines). If any one of those elements is not present, the

social, cultural, and symbolic impact of the event as an enactment of the traditional is viewed by the *son* community as compromised. This *son* community came to exist alongside the creation of festivals, *encuentros*, and cultural projects. Membership is determined by voluntary participation in such events.

Both the notion of transmission of cultural heritage and the need to reconnect with a past that informs the present are key in the revival process that the Mexican *son* has been experimenting with over the past thirty years. As described above, some of the main actors in this revival have been musicians, intellectuals, and educators who became aware of a personal need to reconnect with their cultural roots in the face of rapid changes in social contexts over their own lifetimes. For example, cultural promoters and Jarocho musicians Arturo Barradas and Margarita Saldaña Santos initiated their project, Los Soneros del Tesechoacán,⁹¹ when they became aware that few Jarocho musicians were left in the region:

Lo que pasaba es que ya nos estábamos quedando sin músicos en la zona de nosotros y como que lo primero fue hacer una especie de censo de qué había, qué nos quedaba. Y a partir de ahí, empezar a registrar los modos, las formas, los usos de tocar de cada quién y a sobre eso comenzar a caminar, un poco mostrárselo a los muchachos para que cada quién fuera también creando su manera [de tocar] (Arturo Barradas, Personal communication, May 19, 2011)

⁹¹ This cultural project has been key in the recovery of *son jarocho* in the area around the Tesechoacán River in southern Veracruz. Barradas and Saldaña Santos initiated the project in 2001. Their first step was to locate older musicians who lived in rural communities in the area. Then, they started to organize different activities for them to get together and also connect with young people. Older musicians such Elías Meléndez, Lorenzo Sánchez, Quintiliano, Iginio Tadeo, Dino Azamar, Polo Azamar, and Arcadio Alfonso gave workshops in Jarocho music, participated in newly organized *fandangos* and *encuentros* in the area, and were featured, along with young musicians, in two of the recordings that Los Soneros del Tesechoacán produced. Barradas' and Saldaña Santos' idea was to reconnect past and present and old and young musicians, to create community and foster a sense of social cohesion and belonging through Jarocho music and culture, and to reinforce cultural consciousness through the re-signification of cultural practices. The project continues to put on music workshops. They also broadcast weekly radio programs featuring Jarocho music and musicians, build instruments, and organize a yearly festival in July. Their home in Playa Vicente—a city of about 50,000 people—functions as the project's headquarters.

(What was happening was that we were running out of musicians in the area where we live and the first thing to do was to conduct a kind of census of what was there, what was left. From there, we started recording the different individual playing styles, ways, and purposes. We started building up the project from there, to show the young ones so that each person could make music in their own way [of playing]).

Thus, alongside festivals, cultural projects such as Los Soneros del Tesechoacán have been fundamental in the cultural revitalization that is taking place in various Mexican regions. Many of these projects—designed to teach, enrich, and exchange different expressions of the Mexican *son*—involve the inclusion of older musicians as *portadores de la tradición* (tradition-bearers) and the embodiment of the fundamental idea of the transmission of culture. In an oral music culture such as the Mexican *son*, older musicians represent a repository of culture and the link to new generations:

Todavía queda mucho en memoria de la gente y hay que contárselo a estos chamacos para que vean de dónde vienen, qué es lo que están haciendo, qué es lo que se ha perdido (ibid.)

(There is still plenty left stored in people's memories and you have to tell these young ones so they can see where they have come from, what they are doing, what has been lost).

Cultural projects such as schools of music, festivals, workshops, and radio programs in the Huasteca, Jarocho, and Tierra Caliente regions are recreating a past through memories passed on by those who were born during or a few years after the Mexican Revolution (see figure 4). Considering the age of these musicians, it can be said that the *son*'s revival came “just in time”:

Cada anciano tiene una historia que gira en torno al son. Y se están yendo y se están llevando toda esa serie de conocimientos (Andrés Moreno Nájera in Gregorio Regino et al. 2010)

(Each elder has a story that revolves around the *son*. And they are passing on and taking all that knowledge with them).

Figure 4. *Jaranero* don Elías Meléndez (1922-)



Along with the organizing of festivals and cultural projects, the publication of field recordings and academic works by an intellectual elite was fundamental not only in the revitalization process but also in the reinvention of some *son* subgenres. Several publications have appeared, recordings have been issued, and conferences and forums have gathered historians, linguists, anthropologists, and ethnomusicologists to widen the historical and cultural scope of studies on the subject as well as critically reaffirm the importance of the *son* in the Mexican music tapestry.

The wealth of recordings and publications that have appeared since 2000 signals a change in both the approach to musical research in Mexico in general and the conceptualization of musical traditions per se. They have awakened a renewed interest in the study of regional, local, and micro-local expressions of the musical traditions. In

some cases, this interest has come from musicians, musical groups, cultural promoters, and academics—such as anthropologists, historians, and ethnomusicologists—working in state agencies and universities that sponsor research and publications. Nonprofit organizations such as TAMOANCHAN A.C. (see chapter 4) in the Huasteca region have also worked to promote local cultures. Moreover, cultural and educational projects such as El Tecolote in Arcelia, Guerrero (Tierra Caliente), Música y Baile Tradicional A.C. (see chapter 6) in Morelia, Michoacán (Tierra Caliente), Asociación Huitzitzilin⁹² in Tepetzintla, Veracruz (Huasteca), Jardín Kojima (see chapter 5) in Otatitlán, Veracruz (Jarocho region), and Los Soneros del Tesechoacán in Playa Vicente, Veracruz (Jarocho region), among others, have been key in the dissemination of traditional music and culture through music classes, workshops, and radio programs.

In general, approaches to the study and promotion of traditional music and culture in the last decades have been consciously reconsidered to reflect a closer look to music cultures from within rather than from above, within specific social contexts and processes. According to Olmos Aguilera, up until 1970s musical studies in Mexico often lacked social and anthropological perspectives (2003:46).⁹³ Notwithstanding cultural policies and dominant ideologies, new key personnel in research institutions are incorporating points of view conforming more closely to people's needs in present-day conditions in research activities, publications, and the organization of festivals and

⁹² Coordinated by cultural promoter Antonia Vera Baltazar, Huitzitzilin is a nonprofit organization created in 2001 to promote and strengthen Huasteca culture. It holds weekly Huasteca music, oral literature, embroidery, and Nahuatl language workshops for children and adults.

⁹³ For instance, the highly influential musicologist Vicente T. Mendoza classified and analyzed folkloric songs according to geographical origin. Except for Gabriel Saldivar's *Historia de la música en México* ([1934] 1987), seminal works in folkloric music research, such as those of Mendoza (1956) and Thomas Stanford (1984), did not mention, for example, the relevance and cultural legacy of Afro-Mexicans in the formation and development of Mexican folkloric traditions. They even argued that Mexican popular music was the result of the mixing of European and indigenous musical styles and cultures with no mention of Afro-Mexicans at all.

cultural events (e.g., programming in the Festival de la Huasteca).

In many ways, representations of folkloric and traditional musics were constructed during the 20th century through media and staged performances in urban settings. Romantic images of native peoples were displayed by folkloric ballets, and a limited selection of songs and dances was disseminated by being taught in rural schools. Television, radio, and cinema contributed to a stereotypical notion of Mexicanness, which functioned as the unifying motif for Mexican society. Hegemonic processes decided the fate of several cultural traditions. Rock ‘n’ roll and jazz had great impact in the 1960s and 1970s, as did the New Song movement. By then, student protest had been silenced, although the Tlatelolco massacre was neither forgotten nor forgiven. During the 1980s, while dealing with the economic crisis and the devastation caused by the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, young musicians started looking to their own cultural and regional roots rather than to foreign trends as a way to define their cultural identity.

As we have seen in this chapter, socio-political processes from the 1930s to the 1980s contributed to the de-contextualization of the Mexican *son* through stereotyped versions of *sones* staged and broadcast in theatres, radio stations, and film productions. Singing and playing styles were transformed to adjust to urban tastes and conditions. Often, singers imitated the lyrical style of beloved *ranchera* singer-actors such as Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante, improvised sections disappeared, and the number of stanzas was shortened to adjust to new performance requirements (e.g., for radio and recordings). Folkloric contexts for the music changed rapidly after the social mobilization that the Revolution brought to the country. Post-revolutionary nationalism, the music industry,

and folkloric ballets created stereotypes and exercised an ideological control that both affected popular musical expressions and shaped musical tastes. Changes in urbanization and life conditions transformed social relationships and furthered this intense transformation.

As a response to these circumstances and seeking a connection with their own roots, young musicians, researchers, and an intellectual elite contributed to the organizing of festivals and cultural projects. Festivals were aimed at reclaiming the aesthetics and traditional contexts of the music, becoming a tool for empowerment and social cohesion and the construction of community and identity. Along the same lines, since the 1980s, *fandangos*, the community fiestas, have been organized as the core means for the revitalization of the *son* musical tradition.

In the next chapters, I discuss several festivals in the Jarocho, Huasteca, and Tierra Caliente regions. Although each festival has its particular nuances, they all function as expressions of cultural and regional identity, which often overlap. For all of them, notions of tradition and transmission of culture are at their core.

CHAPTER 4. THE HUASTECA REGION: FESTIVAL DE LA HUASTECA

Cultural interaction and diversity are notions often used to describe the Mexican Huasteca region. The important presence of an indigenous population in the region and the constant interaction between indigenous and mestizo populations have historically determined the region's idiosyncracies. James Lockhart has argued that, at the time of the conquest, Nahuas and Spaniards used their own categories to interpret each other's cultural phenomena. In time, foreign cultural, political, and social structures were assimilated by both groups, something that Lockhart (1992:629) calls "doble identidad equivocada" or "double mistaken identity." That is, the transculturation⁹⁴ process that took place in the early years of the colonial period shaped present-day Huasteca culture. Huasteca aesthetics are embedded in the social and cultural make-up of the region.

In this chapter, before delving into the Festival de la Huasteca, I briefly describe the Huasteca region. More than in other Mexican regions, the intermixing of and interaction between indigenous and mestizo populations are reflected in cultural practices. Although mostly showcasing mestizo *son huasteco*, Festival de la Huasteca stands as a festival that bridges indigenous and mestizo cultural expressions. The purpose of this chapter is to show how the Festival de la Huasteca serves as a means of reinforcing Huasteca identity and culture through music, dance, and other cultural expressions. Through the construction of both Huasteca identity and culture, the festival addresses ethnic boundaries, which are "defined, negotiated, and produced through social

⁹⁴ "Transculturation" is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "a process of cultural transformation marked by the influx of new culture elements and the loss or alteration of existing ones." For Kartomi, "musical transculturation" seems the best term to describe the musical processes prompted by culture contact (1981:233).

interaction” (Nagel 1994:52). Central to this negotiation is the function of culture authenticating ethnic boundaries and providing a system of meaning to the group (ibid., 162).

The notion of tradition as an all-encompassing concept is ever-present in this festival’s music scene, in which past and present coexist and give meaning to each other. In this scene the production of heritage is also a pervasive theme, as heritage has recourse to the past and is invoked to counter the sense of estrangement people may feel with respect to mestizo and indigenous *sones*. After presenting the history of the festival and the thematic lines around which it is organized, I take a closer look at the two editions of the Festival de la Huasteca I attended in 2011 and 2012, comparing their similarities and differences as determined by both the festival theme and the specific location of each.

The Huasteca Region

West from the Mexican Gulf and east from the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains, the cultural region known as the Huasteca occupies a territory that crosses over the states of Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, Puebla, Querétaro, and Veracruz (see figure 5 and figure 6, in which the colors serve to highlight state boundaries).

Figure 5. The Huasteca region



(© CONACULTA)

Figure 6. The Huasteca region close-up



(© CONACULTA. Regionalization [2007] by Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de la Huasteca)

Teenek, Otomí, Tepehua, Totonaco, Nahuá, and Chichimeca people have shared this multiethnic area since pre-Hispanic times, which was broader than the present-day Huasteca region, where people from these various indigenous people live alongside a mestizo population.

The territory spanned by the region was in constant flux during pre-Hispanic times (Ochoa Salas 2000). It evolved over time through historical processes in which the various groups in the area coexisted and interrelated at social, political, and economic levels. According to Jurado Barranco and Camacho Jurado (2009:272), the various groups shared a space with a common cultural matrix, which allowed them to interact on various levels, particularly that of ritual.

After the arrival of Spanish settlers and African slaves to the region, the racial intermixing permeated and transformed all aspects of Huasteca society. During colonial

times, the region underwent profound and substantial changes: the *encomienda* system⁹⁵ subsumed pre-Hispanic political and social structures; the population diminished dramatically; African slaves were imported into the region; and agricultural practices were transformed. Along with new introduced crops (e.g., citrus and sugar cane) came changes to diets and domestic practices. Livestock was introduced, and lands that had previously been kept under cultivation by the indigenous people were appropriated for this purpose. Since their beginnings in the 18th century, farming and animal husbandry have remained the most important occupations and sources of income in the area (Pérez Zevallos and Arroyo Mosqueda 2003:44–55). At present, the region is also an oil producer.

Franciscans and Augustinians were the religious orders in charge of evangelization in the area. Christianization was only effective to a certain extent due to the diversity of languages, the geographic dispersion of the population, and the difficulty of access to this vast and lush mountainous area, indigenous people continued to carry out their own religious practices. In time, indigenous deities were camouflaged under Catholic disguises, keeping certain attributes and even certain myths and indigenous ritualistic practices (Güemes Jiménez 2003:10; Jurado Barranco and Camacho Jurado 2009:274–275). Ramírez Castilla et al. comment that

La cosmovisión, [...], la relación del hombre con sus dioses y su espiritualidad, permeó a la nueva sociedad huasteca, reproduciéndose simbióticamente con el catolicismo. La escasa presencia eclesiástica en la región permitió a la población indígena mantener sus prácticas e ideas ancestrales como eje central en torno al cual se articuló la vida diaria en la comunidad (2008:123)

⁹⁵ *Encomiendas* were estates granted to Spanish settlers in Latin America by the Spanish government. The indigenous population living on the land was put into the service of their *encomendero* or made to pay him taxes. For his part, the *encomendero* was expected to look after the interests of the indigenous population in his territory and convert them to Christianity.

(The worldview, [...], the relationship between man and his gods his and spirituality, permeated the new Huasteca society, reproducing itself symbiotically with Catholicism. The limited presence of the Church in the region allowed the indigenous population to maintain its ancestral practices and ideas as the central axis around which daily life in the community was structured).

When referring to the Huasteca, I find useful Díaz-Polanco's view of the region as an ethnic-regional formation built through historical processes in which cultural identity among groups varies (Díaz-Polanco in Jurado Barranco and Camacho Jurado 2011b:30). Unity and diversity coexist in the Huasteca, though according to Jurado Barranco and Camacho Jurado, mestizos use their cultural exchanges with indigenous people to ideologically establish their own position of power and control over them (2011b:29). Cultural practices in general, and musical practices in particular, bring a sense of social cohesion and solidarity. Shared cultural and social traits permeate both indigenous and mestizo practices and lifeways.⁹⁶

Notwithstanding cultural and social complexities at the local level, this multicultural and multiethnic region shares historical and cultural traits with indigenous Mesoamerica.⁹⁷ According to Jurado Barranco, religious and sociocultural characteristics specific to Mesoamerica developed among peoples in what is now known as the Huasteca region (Nahuas, Teenek, Otomí, Tepehua, Pame, and Totonaco) by 700 A.D, and fully developed with the gradual rise of the Mexica (900–1521 A.D.), whose language, Nahuatl, became dominant in the region (2001:25).

⁹⁶ This is particularly noticeable in small urban areas such as Citlaltépetl, Veracruz, where various fiestas and festivals I cover in this study took place.

⁹⁷ "Mesoamerica" is a designation proposed by Paul Kirchhoff in 1943 to acknowledge the common history and cultural traits shared by Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica (Alonso Bolaños 2004:231).

Some of the characteristics common to Mesoamerican groups were polytheism and ceremonialism. Ancestors were considered sacred and were worshipped, a practice that persists today. Most human activity required a particular ritual to establish the connection between humans and gods, often represented by dualities such as day-night, life-death, man-woman, and earth-heaven (Carrasco in Jurado Barranco 2001:65–66; Ramírez Castilla et al. 2008:84).

As mentioned in chapter 1, present-day Nahuas, Teenek, Otomí, Tepehua, Pame, and Totonaco people living in the Huasteca consider themselves (and are considered by others to be) Huasteco people as they have a real or putative common ancestry and share a historical past as well as cultural and symbolic elements such as kinship patterns, religious affiliation, and language or dialect forms, among others (see Schermerhorn and Smith in Isiksal 2002:2). They share, for example, common religious practices in a syncretism of Mesoamerican beliefs and Christianity. For example, during the *Xantolo* (All Saints' Day), one of the most important celebrations in the Huasteca fiesta calendar, people in the region erect altars that represent their tripartite conception of the universe. The altar consists of a table over which an arch made of *cempazuchitl* flowers is placed. The surface of the table represents the earthly level; the space between the four legs of the table represents the underworld; the arch of flowers represents the celestial level; and the four legs represent trees or men carrying the weight. Altars are set up during *Xantolo* because it is considered a time when channels of communication between the three levels of the universe are open, allowing those who inhabit the underworld (the dead) and heaven (the saints) to manifest on the earthly level (Ramírez Castilla et al. 2008:79–81).

Huasteca people observe a complex ceremonial calendar and maintain specific rituals around the exchange of goods (particularly those related to corn). Both Alonso Bolaños (2004: 234) and Jurado Barranco and Camacho Jurado (2011b:31) agree that fiestas and celebrations are one of the main venues for symbolic exchange. Music is not only integral to the sacred and secular aspects of life, but also transformative: it mediates communication between humans and supernatural beings.

Ritual ceremonies and festive occasions are built around the agricultural cycle—particularly around the cultivation and harvesting of corn (e.g., altar settings and Teenek ceremonies to awake the god of corn)⁹⁸, which sits at the center of a magic-religious world—and deities related to nature (mountains, caves, fire, water, earth, wind, etc.) and patron saints, all of which speak to the multiple ways in which Huasteca people understand life (Güemes Jiménez 2003:13). The indigenous groups’ sense of history and cultural survival is anchored in the practice of such celebrations, which respond to a set of norms based on reciprocity or, as Fredrik Barth put it, on the “complementarity of the groups with respect to some of their characteristic cultural features” (1969:18).

Although the different ethnic groups speak distinct languages (Teenek, Nahuatl, Otomí, Chichimeco, and Tepehua),⁹⁹ Huasteca aesthetics embrace a fundamental cultural matrix that manifests as rites, myths, oral tradition, daily activities, communal work, and the transmission of collective memories. Indigenous and mestizo populations coexist in

⁹⁸ See Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de la Huasteca (2000) for several examples of celebrations and rituals in connection with the planting and harvesting of corn in the Huasteca.

⁹⁹ Nahuatl and Teenek (or Huastec) are the dominant languages spoken. According to the 2010 census, there were about 150,000 Teenek speakers in San Luis Potosí and Veracruz States, and 235,000 Nahuatl speakers in Hidalgo, Veracruz, and San Luis Potosí. Pame, Otomí, and Chichimeca are spoken mostly in Hidalgo and Querétaro.

this region in which ethnic identities are downplayed under a broader Huasteca cultural identity.

Festivals in the Region

Music in the Huasteca region is conceived as an essential part of agricultural, religious, and life-cycle ceremonies and celebrations. It is central to indigenous people's traditional ceremonies, generally referred to by the generic term *el costumbre*, a term that indexes a ritual cycle associated with magical-religious ceremonies in which offerings are made to both Catholic and "old" deities (Hernández Azuara 2003, Jurado Barranco and Camacho Jurado 2011c:164–166, Sevilla 2000:21). These are rituals through which humans express their gratitude to deities and appeal for a balance between the natural life and cosmic cycles. When performed at festivals or in other de-contextualized occasions, music and dance that usually are part of the rituals of *el costumbre*, known as *sones de costumbre*, lose their ritual functions.

Performed by a variety of types of ensembles,¹⁰⁰ *sones de costumbre* are short compositions, repetitive in character (two phrases that are repeated before the entire *son* is performed at least three times), and with various functions. *Sones de costumbre* performed during the period of Carnival, for example, are considered a game through which the spirits of the elders communicate with humans to share in the celebration.

Music and dance mark the occasion as special.¹⁰¹ Fiestas and festivals in the region are particular occasions to celebrate life and culture. Along with music and dance, food (heavily based on corn, including such foods as *elotes*, *esquites*, *pemoles*, *tamales*,

¹⁰⁰ These include, among others, violin and harp; violin and guitar; violin, guitar, and harp; harp; and brass bands.

¹⁰¹ See more on the topic in Jurado Barranco and Camacho Jurado (2009:277–283; 2011a:41-50) and Sevilla Villalobos (2000).

enchiladas, *tlacoyos*, and *zacahuil*), traditional clothing, and crafts are part of the celebration. Connection with nature, respect for the elders, the cult of the ancestors, a distinct sense of community, a hefty amount of rituals and ceremonies, *copal*¹⁰² to purify the space, and a sense of space in accordance with nature are part of the fiesta as well.

In the Festival de la Huasteca, mestizo and indigenous universes collapse into one. In the two festivals I attended, the inclusion of indigenous music was significant. Even in several performances of mestizo *tríos huastecos*,¹⁰³ the inclusion of *el costumbre* is common. As mentioned before, it is through collective celebrations such as festivals that ethnic identities gathered under the wider umbrella of Huasteca identity are made distinct for those both in and outside Huasteco groups. Ethnic differentiation is constructed through music, clothing, and language as a means for social cohesion, which is particularly obvious among indigenous groups participating in festivals. Mestizo groups performing *son huasteco* perform their micro-regional Huasteca identity through repertoire, language—Spanish or Nahuatl—and/or improvisation of lyrics, which often praise the region and the culture.

Festival de la Huasteca

“En la Huasteca, la gente se hermana por medio de la música, de la gastronomía” (In the Huasteca, people bond through music and food) (Olga Méndez Hernández, Personal communication, November 14, 2010)

“El huapango es lo que más me identifica como huasteca”
(Huapango is what most identifies me as Huasteca) (Soraima Galindo Linares, October 9, 2012)

Along with the Encuentro de las Huastecas in Amatlán, Veracruz, the Festival de la Huasteca is one of the most important festivals featuring *son huasteco* (or *huapango*)

¹⁰² A resin-based incense that is instrumental in indigenous ritual practices.

¹⁰³ Often people refer to the Huasteco ensemble as *trío huasteco* since there are three performers (a.k.a., *trío*) in the group.

in the region. Although this particular musical style is at the center of the celebration, one of the festival's aims is to bring exposure to other Huasteca musical expressions such as those associated with *el costumbre* and various traditional dances from the rich musical repertoire performed by indigenous groups in the region.

In the context of the Festival de la Huasteca, a yearly cultural event anticipated by many, music is experienced as both entertainment and the reinforcement and affirmation of identity. The exploration of identity takes place as Huasteca culture is constructed, displayed, and recreated within the festival scene. Mestizo and indigenous people from the six different states within the Huasteca region display cultural artifacts particular to each state. Masks, musical instruments, and clothing (see figure 7) are some of the objects on show and for sale. For many, this is the only time of the year when they can show their work and see the work of others. For indigenous groups, it is also the occasion to perform traditional dances to the outside world. At both festivals I attended, various indigenous groups performed dances that belong to their repertoire of ceremonial dances usually performed during religious festivities and agricultural rituals in their own communities.

Figure 7. Embroiderer women from Hidalgo



Festival's Origins

The Festival de la Huasteca was an initiative of the Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de la Huasteca (Huasteca Cultural Development Program; PDCH), a project created in 1994 as a shared enterprise by the central Mexican government—through CONACULTA, specifically through the Dirección General de Vinculación Cultural (Directorate of Cultural Linkage) and the Dirección General de Culturas Populares (Directorate of Popular Culture)—and state-level cultural institutions in the Huasteca region.¹⁰⁴ The goal of the program was to promote and reinforce Huasteca cultural expressions, a joint effort to respond to and support the cultural needs of the region. It aimed to acknowledge the key role Huasteca people could play in the planning, development, and diffusion of their own culture, which is, for the most part, understood in its symbolic conception as the expressive dimension of social practices (Giménez 2007:196).

To achieve such goals, program organizers made a call for cultural projects showcasing Huasteca culture and offered annual grants for some of the proposals. The initiative was successful: it was decided to establish a new annual Festival de la Huasteca, a space for the performance and display of culture as well as a place to share and stimulate future cultural initiatives. A number of proposals were accepted to be presented at the festival. Thus, the Festival de la Huasteca was launched in 1996. The executive director of Vinculación Cultural at CONACULTA, Eudoro Fonseca Llerena,

¹⁰⁴ The state-level cultural institutions are the Consejo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes de Hidalgo, Consejo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes de Puebla, Secretaría de Cultura de Puebla, Instituto Queretano para la Cultura y las Artes, Secretaría de Cultura de San Luis Potosí, Instituto Tamaulipeco para la Cultura y las Artes, and Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura.

comments on the opening day of the fourth edition of the festival (1999):

En este festival se pretende tener como una gran vitrina, como una gran ventana a través de la cual puedan ser vistos y conocidos todos los recursos y todas las expresiones culturales tan ricas en densidad histórica que tiene la región huasteca: la gastronomía, sus artesanía, la danza tradicional, la aportación de sus creadores e investigadores. Todo es objeto de recreación en una gran fiesta que esta noche inicia (Eudoro Fonseca Llerena, Radio program “Viva la Huasteca y Viva el Huapango,” October 2012)

(The festival is intended to be a great showcase, like a large window through which to see and get to know all the resources and historically rich cultural expressions of the Huasteca region: cuisine, crafts, traditional dance, the contributions of artists and researchers. Everything is subject to recreation as part of a large fiesta that starts tonight).

Fonseca Llerena’s comment is an apt description of the festival. Crafts such as clothing, jewelery, hats, and handmaid hay bags, as well as wooden utensils, food, and cultural artifacts are displayed in stands at plazas or street corridors in the festival grounds: food is consumed, music and dance are performed on and off stages, and “tradition” is on display. In this particular context, “tradition” is understood as both a legacy from the past and a tool to reinterpret the present dynamically (AlSayyad 1989:3): it gives meaning to contemporary culture and practices.

The Festival de la Huasteca is one of the many activities and events organized by the Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de la Huasteca (hereafter PDCH). It is probably the most visible one. The executive director of the Instituto Tamaulipeco de la Cultura in 2010, Olga Aurora Méndez Hernández, thinks the festival is one of the most important vehicles for the promotion of Huasteca culture and traditional music. She comments:

Un festival tiene muchos matices y es como una muestra que en un corto tiempo da la presencia de las actividades que se desarrollan dentro de un Programa —o en este caso dentro del Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de la Huasteca—, lo que son talleres, artesanías, productos editoriales: ediciones de libros, discos, videos (Personal communication, November

14, 2010)

(A festival has many nuances. It is like a showcase which, over a short period of time, presents the activities that take place within a Program—the Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de la Huasteca in this particular case—such as workshops, crafts, and books, recordings and videos produced by the Program).

The PDCH works in three main areas: education, stimulation, and promotion of Huasteca culture. The Program organizes violin, *jarana*, and *huapanguera* lessons for people—particularly the young—to learn to play Huasteco *son*, as well as dance and poetic improvisation¹⁰⁵ workshops. It also coordinates *encuentros* for young players to share their musical experiences in both learning and performing. Promotion of Huasteca culture takes place through exhibits, conferences, book publications, and CD and DVD releases.

All the above-mentioned activities take place at the Festival de la Huasteca, a space where culture is produced and consumed and where musicians, researchers, traditional medicine practitioners, cultural promoters, craftsmen, writers, and storytellers, among others, meet, attend conferences, and share and exchange ideas. Many would agree that the festival is about sharing, exchanging, “rescuing,” and handing over traditional culture. As I will further explore in the next section, the transmission of culture is an important aspect of this “rescuing” process. As Bourdier and Queysanne have pointed out, tradition is “less an act of conservation than of transmission” (Queysanne in Bourdier 1989:41). Thus, “tradition” and “culture” are not unchanging entities, but processual and selective. There is not just “a tradition,” as Raymond Williams argues, but a “selective tradition: an intentionally selective version of a shaping

¹⁰⁵ Improvising with poetic stanzas used in Huasteco *sones* such as *cuartetas*, *quintillas*, *sextillas*, and *décimas* is an aspect of music performance and practice that went in decline towards the 1950s.

past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification” (1977:115). Cultural definitions, then, are signified contextually, and music and dance become powerful tools in the reinforcement of dominant cultural narratives. In that vein, many recognize the importance of rescuing traditional music and dance as vehicles for reworking the past into the present and defining distinctive features of belonging to the group. Many fear music and dance may disappear if it is isolated. To that notion, Olga Aurora Méndez Hernández comments:

Pues sí. [La música] es algo que permanece pero en algunas comunidades muy alejadas. Ya vemos que la gente es muy mayor y que sus hijos y nietos han emigrado a otros lugares y que es una actividad que no se practica, que solamente se escucha, aparte de que está cambiando y ahora ya prefieren otro tipo de música (Personal communication, November 14, 2010)

(Yes. [Traditional music] is something that persists, but only in remote communities. We see that people are already very old and their children and grandchildren have migrated to other places where [traditional music and dance] is an activity that is not practiced, only listened to. Music itself is also changing and now young people prefer other types of music).

Huasteco musician Daniel Jácome Gómez flatly states: “En realidad, los festivales son para eso, para que se pueda transmitir y no se pierda la tradición. Porque se está perdiendo” (Indeed, that’s what festivals are for, so that the tradition can be transmitted and not be lost. Because it is fading away) (Personal communication, November 13, 2010). Thus, the display of material and immaterial culture at the Festival de la Huasteca is central to the handing over of tradition.

Festival de Amatlán and Festival de la Huasteca: Understanding Tradition within the Festival Context

As we saw in chapter 3, social conditions in Mexico drastically changed between the 1950s and 1980s. New living conditions transformed social practices, in particular the ways in which traditional fiestas and celebratory events took place. Musical practices and tastes were transformed under the effects of mass media. In the Huasteca region, *son huasteco* was no longer the only musical style performed at fiestas among the mestizo population, and fiestas were not the only occasion affected: *son huasteco* lost its appeal with the young and became restricted to folkloric spectacles, cantinas, and parties organized by the wealthy. It ceased to be the music able to convene crowds to *huapangueadas*¹⁰⁶ to dance, play, and socialize until way past midnight. *Huapangueadas* that would formerly start up at the drop of a hat in rural and urban areas, at ranches or on patios, after cattle was bought and sold, or after a day of work, were no longer happening. New generations of middle-class mestizos associated the music with indigenous and peasant communities. It wasn't the thing to do.

Historically, the indigenous population in Mexico has suffered marginalization and discrimination on the part of both the state and the mestizo population. Even though ideas about indigeneity have been invoked into the construction of a national discourse for Mexico, that discourse locates indigeness firmly in rural indigenous communities, with little presence in contemporary mainstream society. It was not until 1992 that Mexico was officially recognized as a pluricultural nation, and only in 2001 did

¹⁰⁶ As noted in chapter 1, *huapangueadas* or *huapangos* are popular fiestas where *huapango huasteco* (or *son huasteco*) is performed. There is no sound system, elaborate attire, or any of the other formalities of staged performances.

the Mexican Constitution recognize the rights of Mexico's indigenous population.¹⁰⁷ Gradually, cultural agencies have been implementing more inclusive policies towards indigenous groups. As in other Latin American countries, class stratification and discriminatory discourses and practices concerning indigenous populations have long-lasting effects.

As described in chapter 3, by the mid-1980s, faced with a deterioration of the social space for traditional music and scarce interest on the part of government to invest in traditional culture, researchers, musicians, and cultural promoters, among others, set about organizing festivals, workshops, and other cultural events as a way to share and revitalize traditional musical expressions. In the case of *son huasteco*, a vibrant music scene is in place as a result of the revitalization process that the genre has been experiencing since 1990. Festivals, cultural centers, workshops, book publications, and recording releases are but a few of the projects that have contributed to this renewal of interest.

The list of festivals and music occasions that feature *son huasteco* is long. One can start in San Joaquín¹⁰⁸ (Querétaro) in April and from there, participate once a week, year-round, in a festival or *huapangueada* in and outside the region.¹⁰⁹ These cultural events do not mean a return to the past but a recasting of the festive occasion in a new, more

¹⁰⁷ This was key for the indigenous population as it afforded them autonomy over their education system and their social, economic, and cultural development. They acquired the authority to make decisions regarding their political system (i.e. choosing their own community leaders) and were given the right to operate their own judicial system as well as being able to fully participate in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the nation. See more on the subject in CDI (2012).

¹⁰⁸ Called by many a festival, the Concurso Nacional de Huapango [National Huapango Competition] in San Joaquín has been gathering hundreds of participants since its beginning in the mid-1970s. It has been recognized by CONACULTA as Mexico's most important dance competition at the national level, and by INBA (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes—National Institute of the Arts) as one of the most important festivals after La Guelaguetza (Oaxaca). Hundreds of couples from all over the country participate in this competition.

¹⁰⁹ Particularly in Mexico City.

self-conscious performative and participative context with a different set of motivations and underlying logic, that is, a re-contextualization process that I cover more in detail in my discussion of Tierra Caliente festivals in chapter 6.

The Festival de la Huasteca is one of the most important festivals in the region. The pioneering Festival de Amatlán¹¹⁰ preceded it. For *decimista* and cultural promoter Arturo Castillo Tristán, the Festival de Amatlán set the example for other festivals and *encuentros* that came after¹¹¹ (2009:219). Festivals such as Amatlán and the Festival de la Huasteca create an experience through which the collective that attends these festivals becomes what social constructionists call a “social artifact,” entities “mobilized in accord with reigning cultural scripts and centers of power” (Cerulo 1997:387). Huasteca music and culture is the main script in these festivals that at times may function as a transformative experience. Talking about the Festival de Amatlán, Castillo Tristán comments:

¡Vaya encuentro! Nunca había visto una celebración tan natural, blusas bordadas, enaguas estampadas, paliacates, sombreros, música, taconeos, versos, décimas, alfareros y sobretodo, la calidez de los hombres, mujeres y niños que convivían dentro de esta hermosa tradición. Me envolvió el sentimiento ancestral y escuché el susurro de las voces antiguas. ¡Ya estás aquí huasteco, este es tu espacio, esta es tu familia! Desde entonces me sumergí en el encanto del son y la palabra, la de los músicos y trovadores, que es la tierra misma que florece, habla y canta cotidianamente en cada

¹¹⁰ Amatlán’s festival first started in 1990 as a means of “rescuing” *huapango* and other Huasteca cultural expressions that declined in popularity and nearly fell into oblivion in the second half of the 20th century. The association Patronato Pro Huapango y Cultura Huasteca, A.C. was formed to support the initiative. This association concentrated its efforts on reviving the Huasteca fiesta as it once was: a secular fiesta in which Huasteca culture and traditions were represented, lived, experienced, and reinforced, and a cultural experience people could identify with. The idea of the festival was to revitalize the *son huasteco* through gatherings or *encuentros* of people from the different regions of Huasteca for dance, music, and improvisation of poetry. This aim was achieved. Nonetheless, after more than twenty years, this festival turned into what many Huasteco musicians do consider as a “show” rather than a communal gathering. What started as a small reunion of groups and musicians attending mainly to share the music in a participatory way, playing and listening to others on and off stage and sharing the overall experience, has turned into a spectacle for choreographed performances of folkloric ballets.

¹¹¹ Festivals in Tepetzintla, Tamalín, Ixhuatlán de Madero, Citlaltépetl, Cerro Azul, Tancoco, Chalma, Ozuluama, Tuxpan, Tantoyuca, and many others.

uno de estos personajes. Me encontré, identifiqué, me di cuenta quién soy, cual es mi compromiso en el contexto social donde transito y a mis treinta y tantos años, nazco y me integro a la tradición, precisamente en Amatlán (2009:218–219)

(What an *encuentro*! I had never seen such a celebration, embroidered blouses, embossed petticoats, bandanas, hats, music, footwork, poetry, *décimas*, potters, and above all, the warmth of men, women and children who together were living this beautiful tradition. Ancestral feelings wrapped around me and I listened to the whispering of the voices of old. You are here, Huasteco, this is your space, this is your family! As of then I immersed myself the charm of the *son* and the poetry, of the musicians and singers, who are like the earth itself blooming, speaking and singing each day through each of these people. I found myself, I identified with it all, I realized who I am, what my commitment is to the social context through which I maneuver, and now, at nearly 40 years old, I am born to the tradition and become part of it, right here in Amatlán).

After this initial festival experience, Arturo Castillo Tristán decided to devote his life to promoting Huasteca culture, organizing festivals and *encuentros*, along with other projects seeking to reinforce and revitalize regional culture. This long quote is revealing. During my fieldwork research, I met several people who had similar experiences of finding a goal in life promoting traditional culture and working for the community.

Truly, as Castillo Tristán describes, the Festival de la Huasteca is a display of culture and cultural artifacts, a gathering of many who share a cognitive and affective understanding of Huasteca culture and who link together personal and social identities. Individual belonging to the group is expressed through symbolic elements such as clothing. Women wear colorful embroidered blouses and vests, skirts, bright ribbons, and *huaraches* (sandals) or shoes to dance on the *tarima*. Braids are tied with red, blue, orange, or green ribbons. Earrings are donned. Men wear hats, *morrales* (handbags) across their shoulders, white pants and shirts made of *manta* (a thick cotton fabric) or thinly backstitched *guayaberas*. In the case of the festival, clothing speaks of both

individual and group identity as it touches the individual body and “faces outward toward others” (Hansen 2004:372). The attired body enables one to explore both the individual and social experience, which in this particular context do not contradict one another. Bright colors against spotless white fabric, copper-coloured faces and intense eyes, always a friendly hand and a smile (see figure 8).

Figure 8. Girl in Citlaltépetl



The Festival de Amatlán and the Festival de la Huasteca have played significant roles in bringing back some aspects of *son huasteco* musical practices (e.g., improvisation of poetry). Musician and researcher César Hernández Azuara commented to me on the importance of these festivals in bringing back the fiesta itself, taking the form of the festival: the gathering of musicians, the exchange of music and crafts, the special occasion, the tradition (Personal communication, October 2010). The notion of

“tradition” as an all-encompassing concept is ever-present in this festival’s music scene in which past and present coexist and give meaning to each other.

As previously explained, tradition refers to customs and beliefs that are transmitted and handed down. The notion of tradition becomes a key component in the group’s pool of cultural symbols (Anderson [1983] 2006, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The interpretation of tradition as a process in which old and new(er) are not exclusive of each other gives meaning to both past and present. Thus, when thought of as a process, tradition cannot be defined in essentialist terms since it changes continually as new interpretations are made in the process of transmission. Also, as Handler and Linnekin argue, it is an “interpretative process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity” (1984:274), an argument that lets us grasp some of the ambiguities inherent in a difficult concept like tradition.

During my research at the Festival de la Huasteca, it was noticeable that people’s understanding of tradition is intimately connected to notions of heritage and culture that are crucial in the construction of Huasteco identity. The notion of tradition references the past and inform present practices. The need to “preserve” traditional culture is expressed by many. Gabriel Florentino comments on the danger of losing native cultures, languages, music, and clothing:

Existe un peligro inminente de perder nuestras raíces, nuestra cultura, nuestro lenguaje, nuestra música, nuestra manera de vestir... Se pierden. Existen influencias de otros países y lugares que están dejando de lado todo esto. En Chontla, de donde yo soy, tratamos de rescatar la lengua, el nahuatl. Existe un proyecto por parte del gobierno en el cual ya está instituyendo en mi región, por ejemplo, la lengua nahuatl como una lengua obligatoria aparte del español. Nosotros, por medio de nuestros padres, nuestros hijos, tratamos de que esto no caiga (Personal communication, November 12, 2010)

(We are in imminent danger of losing our roots, our culture, our language, our music, our way of dressing... All that is being lost. There are influences from other countries and places that are forcing all this aside. In Chontla, where I am from, we are trying to rescue the language, Nahuatl. For example, there is a government project now being put into place in my region whereby the teaching of the Nahuatl language alongside Spanish is compulsory. We, through our parents and children, try to keep this alive).

Festivals rearticulate culture and notions of tradition, embodying the importance of rescuing, transmission, and promotion of culture. Interviewees at festivals often mentioned these three elements. Irineo Domínguez Avelino, *huapanguera* player in the young Huasteco trio Los Venaditos, comments:

Aquí se está inculcando mucho la música huasteca en los festivales. Por eso se realizan los festivales: para llamarle la atención a los niños, a los jóvenes, para compartir y aprender a tocar la música. Aquí el huasteco se identifica por su tradición, por su cultura (Personal communication, November 12, 2010)

(A lot of Huasteca music is being instilled at festivals. That's why festivals take place: to call attention to children and young people to share and learn to play the music. Here the Huasteco person identifies with his tradition, his culture).

The Festival de la Huasteca is upheld by musicians and attendees as an event that seeks the rescuing and transmission of Huasteca culture and heritage while encouraging collective and community participation. As mentioned previously, it should be noted that the Festival de Amatlán lost its charm in the eyes of traditional musicians who used to attend the festival when it first started. Massification transformed a space originally meant to promote and share traditional music and dance. It also became an arena for competition and folkloric (academic) dance troupes took over the space. Musician Jacobo Castillo comments:

Deberían delimitar los espacios, la gente que quiera concurso, órale. Eso

se mezcla en Amatlán. Es una revoltura, se mezcla el competir con el convivir. Se le da mucho espacio a los ballets académicos y al músico lo tienen esperando. ¿Como baila un ballet si no hay músicos? (Personal communication, October 6, 2012)

They should separate out the spaces, those who want competition, go ahead. They really should (They should define the spaces. For those who want the contest, there you go. It gets mixed up in Amatlán. It's a jumble. Competition and communal experience get mixed together. They give over lots of space to academic ballets and make the musicians wait. How could a ballet perform if there weren't musicians [playing for them to dance])?

He also criticizes the commercialization, the lack of organization, and the appropriation of the festival by politicians wanting to promote their political campaigns:

Lo veo politizado porque la gente del comité está muy metida en el sistema y lo toman como un foro para promocionar el gobierno del estado y no creo que sea la finalidad del festival. No es el caso estar haciendo promoción frente a otros partidos. No es el espacio para hacer esa promoción. Se supone que es parte del convenio de la cultura del estado apoyar eso, que es su obligación (ibid.)

(I see it as politicized because the organizing committee is really involved in the [political] system and utilize the festival as a forum to promote the government of the state. I don't think that is the purpose of the festival. There is no point in promoting one political party over the others within the festival. This is not the place for that kind of propaganda. This is supposed to fall within the mandate of the state's cultural institutions. It is their obligation to support the festival).

According to Huasteco musician Rodolfo González Martínez, the festival's peak period, in terms of people attending to share, interact, and play music with others, was around 2000 (Personal communication, October 25, 2011). The idea of sharing is key in these festivals. Many musicians, music lovers, and attendees participate in them to share their experiences with others, to see friends, to listen to others, and to play music at the *huapangueadas* after the "official" programmed concerts have finished, at the cantina or

by the stand where they are selling handmade instruments. Like other attendees I interviewed, Rodolfo commented on how he never missed a single Festival de Amatlán in its early years and how he would travel many hours to share “the experience” with many other musicians and music lovers and hear beloved trios such as Los Cantores de Pánuco (ibid.). For *jarana* player and singer Isabel Salinas, sharing with friends is one of the most enriching experiences at festivals:

Lo mejor de los encuentros es que te encuentras con gente que hace lo mismo que tú, o sea, que uno canta o trova o toca. Uno siempre está haciendo algo. Eso es lo padre de los encuentros. Se convive y se aprende también. Se aprenden incluso los versos de los otros. Incluso también cuando trovan otros, tú también te avientas a trovar. Se aprende. Es convivio. (Personal communication, Mexico City, October 15, 2010)

(The best part of *encuentros* is meeting people who do the same things as you, whether that’s singing or improvising or playing. At festivals, there is always something to do and that what’s so great. You bond with others and learn as well. You can even learn others’ verses, and when they improvise, you pluck up the courage to try it too. You learn at festivals. It’s about connecting with others).

Share, learn from others, play music, dance, converse, stay up late, break the routine. That’s what makes the festival experience a special occasion and a powerful tool in the construction of social identity. The festival’s goals are viewed as subverted when it moves the focus onto competition and folkloric ballets and staged presentations; such elements are seen as detracting from the original contexts and the inner spirit of the popular fiesta.

Participation in the Festival

Performing groups are chosen by CONACULTA and by the state’s cultural institutions organizing the festival. Selections are made according to a number of specific

criteria. Preference is given to groups that: (1) are different each year in order to ensure variety and highlight diversity within the region; (2) have extensive knowledge of the regional repertoire, both *huapango* and *son de costumbre*; (3) are tríos who perform *son huasteco* in one of the indigenous languages spoken in the Huasteca region;¹¹² (4) have performed extensively in the region and nationwide; and (5) exhibit a polished performance and strong musicianship (Clara Patricia Olalde Tejo,¹¹³ written communication, July 3, 2013).

Other invited participants, such as artists, artisans, and book presenters, are selected from among those submitting proposals to CONACULTA's call for cultural projects to showcase, promote, and revitalize Huasteca culture. Proposals are submitted by the artists themselves or by cultural promoters and non-profit organizations that help people who do not have access to computers. Since the end of the 1990s, non-profit organizations, such as TAMOANCHAN A.C., have been working in rural communities to locate performers and artists who may live in remote locations. TAMOANCHAN A.C. coordinates cultural events in an effort to connect musicians in the area, nurture the formation of rural brass bands, seek out music and dances performed by different ethnic groups, and motivate children to learn Huasteca music. Moreover, the organization collaborates with the Festival de la Huasteca's organizers by suggesting to them particular musicians and artists and by submitting cultural projects that it itself sponsors (Gilberto Rivas Alvarado, personal communication, October 6, 2012). The goal is to inspire cultural projects not only for the occasion of the festival, but also for long-term endeavors.

¹¹² Teenek, Otomí, Tepehua, Totonaco, Pame, and Nahuatl.

¹¹³ Clara Patricia Olalde Tejo is Vice-Director of Programas Regionales Este (Eastern Regional Programs), Dirección de Culturas Populares, CONACULTA.

Artists performing at the festival do not receive monetary payment. Though some artists—particularly groups that have achieved regional or national recognition—may complain about that, others take the invitation as an honor and see it as a good way to build their profile. Invited performers are reimbursed for travel expenses. Huasteco musician César Hernández Azuara comments on the need to reconsider economic compensation for musicians because of their essential role in the success of the fiesta: “Sin música no hay fiesta” (Without music, there can be no fiesta) (Personal communication, October 2010). Musicians attending the festival without an official invitation pay for their own travel expenses. The festival usually supplies food and lodging for everyone who attends—particularly festivals that take place in small communities and whose organizers seek local people’s involvement in the organizing of the festival (e.g., offering beds).

Funds to cover participants’ travel expenses, food, and lodging are provided by national (CONACULTA) and state cultural institutions, as well as the hosting municipalities. From time to time, budget cuts affect the festival’s funding. Speaking of the XVI Festival de la Huasteca, cultural promoter Gabriel Florentino (from Chontla, Veracruz) complained of funding cuts from the state of Veracruz and the municipality of Chontla. His complaint joined with those of other cultural promoters claiming that state and regional funds for cultural events were not being distributed evenly.¹¹⁴ On September 25, 2012, he circulated a petition by e-mail and through Facebook asking for food and monetary donations in order to cover the basic expenses of putting on the festival in Chontla:

¹¹⁴ Once federal funds are received, state politicians may make arbitrary decisions in terms of how much money to give to any particular community. In this case, Chontla received less funds than originally expected.

... ahora me veo obligado a pedir la ayuda de la ciudadanía y realizar un acopio de alimento, solicitando a las personas que puedan, nos donen aceite, arroz, frijol, café, leche, agua embotellada, etc., y quien tenga la posibilidad y lo deseé, le solicitamos encarecidamente su apoyo de tipo monetario, aceptamos desde un peso hasta lo que su generosidad nos pueda aportar (Gabriel Florentino, cultural promoter, Chontla, Veracruz)

(... Now, I am in the position of having to ask for help from the community and conduct a food collection, seeking cooking oil, rice, beans, coffee, milk, bottled water, etc. from anyone who can offer them. And to all those who are able and willing, we urge you to offer us your financial support. We accept anything from a single peso to whatever you can generously provide).

Among those who attend the festival without an official invitation to participate are musicians, artists, researchers, cultural promoters, music lovers, and traveling vendors. As we have seen, and as several participants have expressed, one the main reasons to attend the festival is to see friends and share in the overall experience. When I asked Jarocho and Huasteco musician Daniel Jácome Gómez what he enjoys most about this kind of festival, he replies:

la fiesta, la huanhuaranga, que es la fiesta, el ajo. Sí, pues es bonito, sobre todo estos festivales en los que se congrega gente de la Huasteca, incluso vienen del Distrito Federal, gente que es amante de la música folclórica. Sí, compartir con la gente es bellissimo (Personal communication, November 13, 2010)

(the party, the *huanhuaranga*, which is the fiesta, the essential ingredient. Yes, it's really nice, particularly all the festivals where people from the Huasteca reunite. People who love folkloric music even come from Mexico City. Yes, it is very beautiful to share with people).

Jacobo Castillo flatly asserts:

No me han invitado pero aquí estoy. Llevo asistiendo a los festivales desde el 2000 para aca. Hay un publico que estamos todo el tiempo, si nos invitan, si no nos invitan. Como quiera nos entregamos del todo. Estamos ahi metidos siempre, pase lo que pase.

(I was not invited to this one, but here I am. I've been attending the festival [de la Huasteca] since 2000. There is a group of people that always comes, whether we are invited or not. Either way, we give it our all. Whatever happens, we are always there).

Although the Festival de la Huasteca has not been conceived as a commercial event or promoted as a tourist attraction—as have the Night of the Dead events in Lake Pazcuaro, Tzintzuntzan, and other villages in Michoacán¹¹⁵ or La Candelaria in Tlacotalpan, Veracruz—it certainly contributes to the local economy and plays a role in promoting the region. Moreover, through participating in the festival, musicians connect with other musicians who live elsewhere, establishing links to the regions of origin and local cultures of the musicians they meet. To answer to Sheehy's question in chapter 1 about whether musical traditions that have been professionalized remain connected or not with a distinct cultural community, I would say it does. Several musicians performing at the festival are professional musicians who live and perform in urban centers, and who keep on feeling a connection with a collective that in this case, is the Huasteco community. Moreover, even though musicians may complain about not receiving economic compensation, they are moved to perform for personal reasons such as sharing the music-making experience with others.

Where and When

The Festival de la Huasteca is itinerant, each year being hosted by one of the six states within the Huasteca region.¹¹⁶ Dates also vary. The festival usually takes place

¹¹⁵ See Hellier-Tinoco (2011) and Brandes (1988).

¹¹⁶ The festival has taken place in Ciudad Valles, San Luis Potosí (May 1996); Huejutla de Reyes and Atlapexco, Hidalgo (1997); Tampico, Tamaulipas (1998); Jalpan de Serra, Querétaro (1999); Tuxpan, Veracruz (2000); Xicoteppec de Juárez, Puebla (2001); Tamazunchale, San Luis Potosí (2002); Atlapexco and the seven municipalities in the Huasteca region of Hidalgo (August 7–10, 2003); González, Tamaulipas

between August and mid-October, avoiding *Xantolo* (All Saints' Day) at the beginning of November.

The yearly change of location and of state organizers means that there is only partial continuity from one festival to the next in the overall planning by CONACULTA, which coordinates with state and local organizers. While this itinerancy can be interpreted as cultural democratization through decentralization, some think it would be best for a set location to be designated for the festival, which would ease local arrangements and avoid politicians' ineptitude and need to politicize the event—as was the case of Tampico, Tamaulipas, in 2010 (Gilberto Rivas Alvarado, personal communication, October 6, 2012).

The festival lasts four or five days and preparations start months in advance. The host city is chosen, among other aspects, for its accessibility and lodging capabilities for at least 700 participants (performers, book authors, workshop instructors, artisans, musicians, attendees, etc.). On a given day, ten to twenty organized musical and dance activities may take place: concerts, book and CD presentations, video showings, roundtables in which to discuss matters related to Huasteco culture, puppet shows, popular theater, crafts market, sampling of local cuisine, workshops, lectures, or homages to individuals who have contributed significantly to Huasteca culture (e.g., researchers, musicians, writers, poets, cultural promoters).

(August 5–8, 2004); Jalpan de Serra, Querétaro (September 22–25, 2005); Pánuco, Veracruz (September 21–24, 2006); Huauchinango, Puebla (July 26–29, 2007); Xilitla, San Luis Potosí (August 28–31, 2008); San Felipe Orizatlán, Hidalgo (August 6–9, 2009); Tampico, Tamaulipas (2010); Ahuacatlán de Guadalupe, Purísima de Arista, and Agua Zarca, Querétaro (October 26–30, 2011), Citlaltépetl, Tantima, and Chontla, Veracruz (October 4–7, 2012), and Xicotepec de Juárez, Puebla (August 29–September 1, 2013).

Each year, the festival's cultural activities are structured around a particular theme, set by CONACULTA. The inclusion of a theme is politically significant as it reflects socio-cultural and political concerns. I attended both the XVI festival in 2011 (October 26–30) in the Sierra Gorda region of Querétaro and the XVII festival in 2012 (October 4–7) in the Sierra de Otontepec region, Veracruz. Themes for the festivals were, respectively, “Sones y sabores” (*sones* and flavors; 2011) and “Música en riesgo” (music at risk; 2012). Such thematic axes cohesively channel cultural initiatives. Through the years, various initiatives, such as the inclusion of the *encuentro* of traditional Huasteca dances that first took place in 1997 in Huejutla de Reyes, have contributed to the enrichment of cultural expressions showcased at the festival.¹¹⁷

Although CONACULTA sets the main thematic lines, cultural promoters and local organizers play a very important role in the final outcome of the festival. They facilitate the link with the community, which is basic in the understanding of the festival as a collective endeavor and a space where tradition and identity are performed dynamically. Cultural promoters seek popular participation, which reinforces one of the main ideas behind the festival: to make the fiesta a popular one.

As in the case of the Festival Son Raíz (see chapter 7), the Festival de la Huasteca openly seeks a direct involvement from the communities in which it takes place, which puts a unique stamp on each festival. In this regard, Eudoro Fonseca Llerena comments:

Cada uno de los festivales ha tenido su propio sabor. La gente de cada lugar ha sabido imprimirle su propia impronta, su sello a esta fiesta. Nos interesa promover la cultura de la Huasteca porque es una cultura hecha de tiempo, de la que nos sentimos muy orgullosos. En la medida en que

¹¹⁷ To date, three *encuentros* of traditional Huasteca dances have been included in the festival. Themes for these *encuentros* were “Danzas de conquista” (Conquest dances), “Danzas agrícolas” (Agricultural dances), and “Danzas de carnaval a xantolo” (dances from Carnival to Xantolo).

sepamos preservarla, sin duda alguna, nos hará más fuertes (Radio program “Viva la Huasteca y Viva el Huapango” October 2012)

(Each festival has its own flavor. People from every place [where the festival had taken place] have managed to leave their own imprint, their mark on this fiesta. We are interested in promoting Huasteca culture because it is a culture built over time, and we are very proud of it. No doubt it will make us stronger, to the extent that we are able to preserve it).

Musician Jacobo Castillo also voices the importance of the communities in the outcome of the festival:

Yo me acuerdo en Atlapexco, Hidalgo. Me gustó mucho porque era un pueblo igual o más chiquito que éste [Citlaltépetl], con menos recursos, y se las ingeniaron para que todo el festival fuera ahí. O sea, como comentábamos, aunque haya pocos recursos en ese festival, como quiera, no nos falta que comer, nos están atendiendo bien. Digamos que es diferente en cada lugar. Para mi experiencia, muy interesante fue la de Atlapexco, Hidalgo (en el 2003) porque con pocos recursos y en un lugar que aparentemente no tiene infraestructura, se puede hacer el festival con bastante dignidad y sobre todo, que eso es lo más importante, con mucho impacto para la gente del pueblo porque desgraciadamente, a veces pasa que a la gente de las comunidades no se la involucra como se debe. A veces se anda tomando en cuenta a la gente que va a llegar—que no es malo y para nosotros que andamos visitando es a todo dar—pero también yo pienso que si lo que se está haciendo es el reforzamiento de la cultura, de la tradición, es para involucrar a la gente de los mismos pueblos (Personal Communication, October 6, 2012)

(I remember Atlapexco, Hidalgo. I loved it because that town was as small or even tinier than this one [Citlaltépetl], with fewer economic resources, but they managed to make the entire festival right there. So, as we were saying, although there is little funding for this festival, at least they give feed us and take good care of us. It is different in each place. In my experience, Atlapexco, Hidalgo (in 2003) was very interesting because with few economic resources and in a place that seems to have no infrastructure, they could put on a good festival and above all, most importantly, with great impact on the townspeople because unfortunately, it sometimes happens that people from the communities are not as involved as they should be. Sometimes they only worry about the people who are coming—which is not bad at all for us visitors—but I think that if what they are doing is reinforcing the culture and the tradition, they have to involve people from the community).

XVI Festival de la Huasteca– Sones y sabores (October 26–30, 2011)

R: What brings you to the festival? [see figure 9] What do you like about it?
 F: Los versadores, los huapangos, los bailadores, las artesanías... Todo. Está muy bonito
 (Improvisers, *huapangos*, dancers, crafts... Everything. It is very beautiful)
 (Filemón Gabriel Lucas, Trío El Maguey de los hermanos Gabriel, November 13, 2010)

Figure 9. XVI Festival de la Huasteca poster



A five-hour road trip from Mexico City through the rough and breathtaking mountains of the Sierra Gorda brings us to Jalpan, Querétaro, in the middle of the afternoon. We have reserved a room in the main hotel where most of the musicians participating in the festival will be staying, an old colonial house with tile floors and high ceilings. Across the street is one of the five beautiful missions built under the direction of Franciscan Fray Junípero de Serra back in mid-18th century. The yellow color of the main façade is a magnet for the senses, the hand of indigenous people immortalized in the sculpted, Baroque-style ornamental elements that speak of a mix of Catholicism and indigenous religious beliefs (see figure 10 and figure 11).

Figure 10. Mission in Jalpan de Serra, Querétaro



Figure 11. Detail in the façade



The festival is headquartered in the city of Jalpan, a gem set amid lush green mountains. This year, 2011, the festival takes place in three nearby communities: Ahuacatlán de Guadalupe, Purísima de Arista, and Agua Zarca. From Jalpan, buses will drive musicians and participants to Ahuacatlán de Guadalupe (October 26 and 27), Purísima de Arista (October 28), and Agua Zarca (October 29 and 30), where workshops, book, CD, and DVD presentations, markets, and other events will take place. Each venue will showcase a specific theme at the evening concerts and *huapangueadas*: Encuentro de versadores y bailadores de la Huasteca (*Encuentro* for Huasteca singers and dancers), Son arribeño y poesía decimal campesina (*Son arribeño* and *décima* rural poetry), and Son de costumbre and danzas indígenas de la Huasteca (*Son de costumbre* and indigenous dances from the Huasteca), respectively. From 10 am to 8 pm, when the evening concerts begin, there is a broad display of various activities. For instance, the first day there is the opening of Teresa Irene Barrera's art exhibition "Xantolo"; a painting workshop for children; a mask exhibit; an homage to the late violinist Fortunato Ramírez Camacho (winner of the National Prize for Sciences and Arts 2005); a dance workshop for children; a music presentation by Secundino Rivera and Perfecto López featuring an old style of *son huasteco* performed without *jarana*; book presentations (*El maíz es nuestra sangre* [Corn Is Our Blood]) by Alan Sandstrom and *Juegos y juguetes totonacos* [Totonaca games and toys] by Alfonso Hernández Olvera); Huasteco music CD and DVD launch (*A mi Huasteca Tamaulipeca* [To My Huasteca from Tamaulipas]) by Porfirio Pacheco Sandoval and *Patria mía* [My Land], by *decimista* Fernando Méndez

Cantú, accompanied by trío Tradición Genuina¹¹⁸; traditional craft, food, and medicine market; the Bayan shadow puppetry theater's production "El violín mágico" [The Magic Violin], telling the story of the violin within the *trío huasteco* ensembles; and a musical performance by Huasteco children conducted by Perfecto López.

The official opening of the Festival de la Huasteca takes place at 8:15 pm. Soon after, the *encuentro* begins. *Tríos* and improvisers come to the stage. Improvisers choose a Huasteco *son* or *huapango* (melody with harmonic accompaniment) upon which to improvise stanzas that refer to Huasteca cuisine and flavors, the main festival's theme. The huge *tarima* next to the stage is filled with people. While the first part of the *encuentro* is dedicated to improvisation, in the second part (10 pm to midnight), several *tríos* perform beloved and well-known *sones* accompanied by the energetic and percussive *zapateado* of the dancers on the *tarima* (see figure 12). Very few newly composed works are added to the traditional repertoire. When groups perform lesser-known *sones*, they briefly introduce them as such. Alborada Huasteca, Cenzontle, Secundino Rivera y su Trío Ruiseños, Los Huastecos, Los Gallitos de Bernal, and Trío Colatlán (see figure 13 and figure 14) keep audiences dancing.

¹¹⁸ Improvised or recited *décimas* in the Huasteca—which declined in the 1950s and 1960s—is one of the musical expressions that has been revitalized.

Figure 12. Dancers



Figure 13. *Trío Colatlán* (don Eraclio Alvarado, “don Laco,” violin, Osiris Caballero León, *jarana*, and Nicasio Domingo Cruz, *huapanguera*)



Figure 14. Don Laco



Interaction between musicians and audience is very important. Musicians will play for audiences to enjoy and like the music, which audiences demonstrate by, among other things, dancing. It is not part of the Huastecan behavioral codes to openly express negative verbal responses to something they dislike. In the case of the music, the *tarima* remains empty when the audience does not like a group's performance. Dancers do not come out to dance and the intensity and transformation of the sonic and emotional space that a loved *trío* can effect is absent. The fact that musicians stress the importance of audiences "liking" their performance points to the emotional connection forged between performers and audiences in live performances. Such a connection has to be understood within the overall context of the music occasion, which it is, as Inglis argues, "not merely the music, but the opportunities for association, identification and resistance that the music permits—and all that is subsequently inferred—between performers and audience, between the musical and the non-musical, between the old and the new" (2006:xv).

There is no doubt that the implicit and explicit reaction of the audience influences the unfolding of a given performance. Performers and audiences engage in a production and exchange of meaning, a negotiation in which the significance of signs is meaningful in the outcome of the performance and the production of culture. Thus, performers, attendees, and festival organizers are actors involved in the production of culture and the reworking of codes and ideological symbols that circulate each year within the festival.

Notwithstanding the central role cultural institutions play in the maintenance of ideologies and the concept of cooperation as a cultural idea, the festival experience reinforces cultural and social affiliation through a particular notion of sharing and community-making within the Huasteca worldview. As mentioned earlier, participants indicate that beyond the appeal of the music itself, they gravitate to the festival for its setting, which allows an intense interaction between performers, audiences, and attendees in general. An inclusive approach is taken to the overall organization of the festival. For instance, lunch is offered from 3 pm to 5 pm (see figure 15), and dinner from 8pm on, for everyone attending the festival.

Figure 15. Communal diner



These meals act as an additional occasion to socialize and to listen to musicians performing. Live music not only occurs in staged performances, but also off stage at various times, day and night, at the park or the cantina (see figures 16 and figure 17) where a few friends just gather, after the scheduled performances. That's why it is called an *encuentro*: it is not only a gathering of musicians performing on a stage, but a reunion of friends and colleagues in a space that facilitates inclusiveness, participation, and interaction.

Figure 16. Musician Rodolfo González greets Soraima Galindo Linares. Soon after, music begins at the cantina



Figure 17. Santiago Fajardo Hernández playing at the cantina



After spending the night in Jalpan, we travel by bus to the small village of Ahuacatlán de Guadalupe for the second day of the festival. All activities take place around the main square, where the stage has been set up. Everything is ready. Activities begin at 10 am: workshops, ceremonies to honor musicians and artists, the sampling of a wide variety of Huasteca dishes (see figure 18): *zacahuil*, *enchiladas rojas*, *adobo de puerco*, *tamales* (see figure 19), *pipian*, *carteras de queso*, *chocolate* (see figure 20), *alfajores* (*dulces de masa seca con pilón*), *rosquitas de piloncillo* (see figure 21), *café de olla*, *atole de tamarindo*, *empanadas*, etc.

Figure 18. Huastec dishes



Figure 19. Tamales



Figure 20. Hot chocolat



Figure 21. Sugar cane cookies



Although workshops and other activities are a continuation from the day before, there are new presentations of books, CDs, and DVDs on Huasteca history and culture, e.g., the book *Historia de la medicina tradicional totonaca* (History of Totonaca Traditional Medicine) by Gabriel Sainos Guzmán, and the book *El carnaval en Hidalgo* (Carnival in Hidalgo) by Artemio Arroyo Mosqueda. There is also an *encuentro* of Huasteca brass bands in which groups from Hidalgo, Puebla, Querétaro, and Veracruz participate. In the afternoon, before the evening concert begins, an impressive *encuentro* of traditional indigenous dances takes place, featuring the dances Cuanegros (Hidalgo),

Los Negritos (Puebla), Tradicional de Tilaco (Querétaro), El Rey Colorado (San Luis Potosí), De a Pie y de a Caballo (Tamaulipas), and Las Varitas (Veracruz), performed by troupes from various communities from the different Huasteca states.¹¹⁹ Then, a group of Teenek and Nahua children from El Coyotito (Veracruz) open the evening concert. The inclusion of indigenous music in the programming is part of the festival's goal of showcasing the various expressions of Huasteca music and culture. Although well attended, it is obvious that a considerable part of the audience is awaiting the *huapangueros* to take the stage. Generally speaking, indigenous music¹²⁰ does not involve audience participation, in contrast to mestizo *son huasteco*. Although performances by both indigenous and mestizo groups could be considered "an aesthetic mode of communication" (Johnson 2003:7), the audience's more enthusiastic response to mestizo performances suggests a broader identification among the population with mestizo musical genres, aesthetics, and meanings. As part of the musical experience, participation from the audience is vital. As mentioned earlier, mestizo groups seek the audience's approval and the liking of their music. As in other music scenes, the musicians and the audience "participate in a nonverbal dialogue about the significance of the music and the construction of their selves" (Shank 2011:125). On the other hand, indigenous groups do not perform for the entertainment of the other. Music and dance are part of the ethnic groups' ritual practices and are performed by the group without making

¹¹⁹ Each of these dances have different meanings and purposes. For example, the dancers' movements in Los Negritos represent the movements of black sugar cane workers and the dance is conceived as a way of guarding against snake bites as well as a petition for a good harvest; El Rey Colorado is a dance dedicated to the beauty of nature (which represents happiness and is the soul of everything that exists in the universe), particularly to flowers and birds; in "De a Pie y de a Caballo," dancers enact horseriders who fight and castrate bulls.

¹²⁰ As I mentioned in chapter 2, although not exclusively, indigenous music (*sones* and dances) is mostly performed by indigenous groups for leisure and on ritualized occasions linked to life-cycle celebratory events and the agriculture cycle. In general, its repetitive character serves the purpose of the music: to transcend reality and connect with spiritual forces.

adjustments to please the audience. Mestizo groups Trío Nacimiento Hidalguense, Hueytlalpan, Los Venaditos, Cazador de la Sierra, and Alba Huasteca provide the music for the night.

The following night in Purísima de Arista, music transforms both the soundscape and the sonic and physical energy of the town. *Son arribeño*, the *son* subgenre in which poets improvise complex *décimas* around topical events, is given prominence. Several groups perform at the concert: Los Cazadores de la Sierra de José Mendoza, Los Huapangueros de Río Verde de Fidel Cruz, Don Pedro Saucedo, and Don Isidro Rodríguez Flores, among others (see figure 22). After the concert, the *topada*—the poetic dueling between two groups—begins. Tobías Hernández y sus Huapangueros (Guanajuato) and Don Isidro Rodríguez Flores (Río Verde, San Luis Potosí) sit on the benches about six feet above the ground (see figure 23), each on opposite sites of the giant *tarima*. A *topada* is to *son arribeño* is what a *huapangueada* is to Huasteco music. Rather than several groups and musicians performing in the *huapangueada*, there are only two groups performing and displaying their abilities in the duel in the *topada*. The competition is fierce. The intensity of the dancing chills the air. Many dance. Many others sit, observe the dancers, and listen to the witty and sharp poetry, admiring the fascinating ability of the *poetas* or poet-singers in the ensemble.

Figure 22. Arribeño poets and musicians



Figure 23. Arribeño musicians in the *topada*



Huapango and traditional dance join forces the very last days in Agua Zarca, where activities were only programmed activities for half of the day. Many have to travel long distances and must get home before nightfall as nighttime travel has become so unsafe due to the threat of drug-related violence. Though everyone knows the reason for having to leave early, no one talks about it openly. It is safer that way.

XVII Festival de la Huasteca (October 4–7, 2012)

The XVII Festival de la Huasteca (see figure 24) took place in northern Veracruz state, in the municipalities and small towns of Citlaltépetl, Tantima, and Chontla. Rather than moving between towns, as occurred in 2011, cultural activities and concerts happened simultaneously in the three towns.

Figure 24. XVII Festival de la Huasteca poster



Knowing how fluid scheduling is at this kind of event, I decided to spend most of my time in Citlaltépetl, where I have already been twice in the past year (for Son Raíz in November 2010 and the V Fiesta Huasteca in May 2011). Arturo Castillo and Blanca Berrones are my contacts in town. Arturo Castillo is the cultural promoter and liaison for the organizing of the Festival de la Huasteca in this part of Veracruz.

As on other occasions, the stage is set in the plaza, where the craft market and the different stands for traditional medicine and goods are also located. I arrive in the middle

of the afternoon and look for Blanca. She welcomes me warmly, gives me my participant's badge, and sends me off to a late lunch: they are open until five. "It is five already," I say. "It does not matter," she replies.

Raquel: I would like to hear the talk on Alejandro Rodríguez Vicencio's book on the minuet in the Sierra Gorda ["A lo divino: El minuete en la Sierra Gorda"]. It is supposed to start at five.

Blanca: You know how things are around here. Go and eat, and then come back to the plaza. You will have time to hear the presentation. I promise.

A new arrival is immediately accepted as part of the social group. Some people are still eating in the communal kitchen and dining hall. I recognize some of my friends and sit with them. I am in. As Blanca predicted, there is plenty of time for me to eat and return to the main square for the presentation on minuets sung to *lo divino*,¹²¹ and there are two more presentations as well: anthropologist María Eugenia Jurado and ethnomusicologist Camilo Camacho present their new book about harps in the Huasteca region (*Arpas de la Huasteca en los rituales del Costumbre: teenek, nahuas y totonacos* [Harps in the Huasteca region in the Costumbre rituals: Teenek, Nahua and Totonaco]) (see figure 25), then Trío Perla Huasteca launch their most recent CD.

¹²¹ Minuets with religious themes.

Figure 25. Harpist



The *encuentro* starts at 8 pm. Several improvisers take the stage accompanied by *tríos*. They improvise on given themes chosen by both the improvisers and the audience. Although scheduled for 10 pm, the “Noche de huapango” (*Huapango* Night) does not begin until much later. Eight groups have been invited to play.¹²² Each group performs four or five *sones*. Right after the violinist plays the beginning of the *son*’s theme, *jarana* and *huapanguera* join in. Often times, four to five stanzas are sung per *son*. If there is “ambiente” (ambiance) or if the occasion suits and demands it, more stanzas are sung for dancers to continue striking their percussive sounds on the *tarima*. Once the programmed groups finish playing, anyone can come up to the stage and play. Dancers will keep *zapateando* until two or three in the morning. Later on, once lights are turned off on the stage, the *huapanguada* begins (see figure 26).

¹²² Trío El Aguacate from Ixhualán de Madero, Veracruz; Trío Cascabel de Yahualica, from Hidalgo; Trío Delirio Huasteco, from Ixtepec, Puebla; Perfecto López y su Tradición Serrana, from Querétaro; Trío Cali y su Alegría Huasteca, from Tampochocho, San Luis Potosí; Trío Los Jilgueros de Altamira, from Tamaulipas; and Trío Juventud Huasteca, from Platón Sánchez, Veracruz.

Figure 26. Huapangueada



The radio station Radio Educación¹²³ airs performances until midnight. The festival's official masters of ceremonies finish their work at that time as well. New ones¹²⁴ take the stage as unofficial performances get underway. Some of the groups are musical *tríos* that are already established. Some musicians who have come on their own join others on the spot to play a repertoire of *sones* that they know by heart and frequently play: “La petenera,” “La rosa,” “El caimán,” “El aguanieve,” “La pasión,” “El cielito lindo,” and many others, beloved *sones* that might be played six to eight times on a given night. Each performance is unique, with each group bringing in its own interpretation, violin improvisations, and lyrics. Performers are admired for their singing, falsetto, violin and poetry improvisation, and nuances in playing technique. Recognizable

¹²³ Radio Educación was one of the first radio stations dedicated to cultural and educational programming. It was created in 1924 as part of the SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública). In the 1960s, Radio Educación supported the work of rural teachers through the production of audiovisual materials and was key in providing a venue for social movements to voice their concerns. As of 1978, Radio Educación receives federal funds but no longer depends on the SEP. For the last three decades it has been airing cultural programs from both Mexico City and rural Mexico as a means of bringing visibility to underrepresented cultural areas and of showcasing the richness of Mexican musical cultures. As seen in chapter 3, Radio Educación is one of the cultural units within CONACULTA.

¹²⁴ Elected by popular vote among the *huapanguero* community.

signs of regional locality are present and very much appreciated in *son* renditions. Audiences are active participants in the performance event (Bauman in Shay 2006:150). Above all, the audience admires the emotion and energy musicians can create through their performance as an ensemble. The dancers' *zapateado* on the *tarima* is one considered part of the ensemble. Dancers change partners. Musicians come down from the stage to dance when they finish performing. Others take their place (See figure 26 and figure 28).

Figure 27. Dancers



Figure 28. Trío huasteco



A Huasteco musician often plays, sings, and dances. These three aspects are part of being a musician. There is no point in asking them how they bring their Huasteco identity to the stage because it is a given: “Soy huasteco desde que nací, me siento huasteco desde que subo al escenario y me siento orgulloso de representar mis tradiciones,” (I have been Huasteco since I was born, I feel Huasteco for the moment I go up on stage, and I feel proud to represent my traditions), musician Daniel Jácome tells me (Personal communication, November 13, 2010). When I ask Huasteco musician Soraima Galindo Linares how different it would be to play at festivals that feature different *son* subgenres rather than only Huasteco *son*, she replies:

Sí, pues me siento totalmente huasteca. A la hora que ejecuto una *jarana*, un *huapango*, un *falsete* y al ponerme mi *cuera tamaulipeca* [see figure 29] me planto como huasteca (Personal communication, October 9, 2012).

(Yes, I feel totally Huasteca. When I play a *jarana* or a *huapango*, when I sing a *falsete* and put on my *cuera tamaulipeca*,¹²⁵ I stand as a Huasteca)

Figure 29. Trio Alba Huasteca wearing *cueras*



¹²⁵ *Cuera tamaulipeca* is traditional Huasteca attire from the state of Tamaulipas made out of leather (*cuero*) and consists of a jacket and skirt for women, and a jacket for men, adorned with *flecos* and *arabescos* (fringes and arabesques) (see figure 29). *Tamaulipeco* is both the demonym and the adjective denoting belonging to Tamaulipas State.

Analysis of these two editions of the festival reveals the importance of both place and guiding theme in the narrative of the fiesta that takes place at the Festival de la Huasteca. Although a set of organized events unifies the overall structure of the festival, the physical location of the festival conditions its outcome at various levels. For example, smaller locations are more conducive to the forging of interpersonal relationships among musicians, attendees, and community in general, which is an aspect of the fiesta sought by participants. As we have seen, “sharing” is very important for many (musicians, dancers, and Huasteca music lovers) attending the festival. Thus, place and space foster the cultural experience within the festival context. Collectively created, the festival feeds from local nuances and recreates the connection between past and present.

In both the 2011 and 2012 festivals, music was significant in the articulation of both notions of community and of cultural and collective identity. Yet the emphasis on musics at risk (2012) and food and flavors from the Huasteca (2011) served as vehicles for the exploration of different aspects of Huasteca culture. In both editions, music functioned as a connective tissue for a collective of people with a shared sense of community.

Final Thoughts

No doubt the Festival de la Huasteca functions as a locus for the construction and reinforcement of social identity, which I understand as multiple and dynamic: social actors see themselves as belonging to a range of social identities depending on the various categories they ascribe themselves to. That is, social identities depend on context

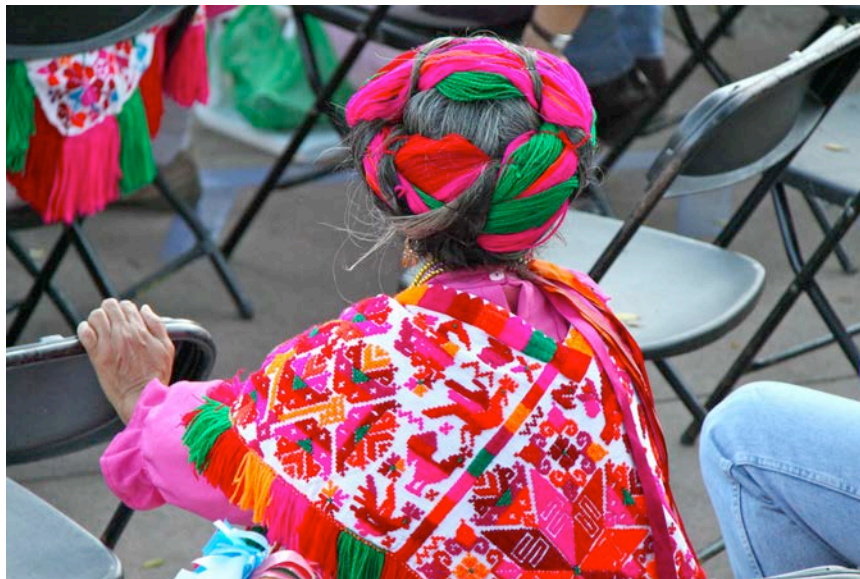
(Reicher et al. 2006:249), and in this particular festival scene, cultural and ethnic identities are salient.

Indigenous groups participating in the festival perform ethnicity through clothing, language, and music. Teenek women, for example, are easily spotted by the colorful *quisquem* or short poncho with mostly red, black, and yellow embroidery on white fabric, and by the *petop* or headdress made of intermingling strands of cherry, green, pink, or orange yarn according to their marital status (see figure 30 and figure 31). The decision to wear Huasteco clothing among mestizo attendees depends on personal taste and signals belonging not to a particular ethnic group, but to the region in general. Moreover, behavioral elements considered part of cultural identity such as respect for the others and hospitality are pervasive.

Figure 30. Teenek women with *petop* and *quisquem*



Figure 31. Teenek women with *petop* and *quisquem*



In general, indigenous groups keep to themselves before, during, and after the performances. If the main difference between ethnic and cultural identity has to do with boundaries, or patterns of social interaction that confirm groups' distinctions, ethnicity is made explicit by the group's decision of establishing such boundaries between them and the other. They choose how to interact socially, what language to use, and what particular repertoire of music and dance(s) to perform to represent and differentiate the group. Such choices are made by and for the group. They do not choose a repertoire for others to like it or to be entertained, but for the group to deliver an image of the groups as they wish to be represented for the insiders and outsiders.¹²⁶ In the context of the festival, indigenous groups emphasize their cultural beliefs and practices, as well as their social

¹²⁶ Researcher Rosa Virginia Sánchez García commented how surprised she was to see the group of Teenek from San Luis Potosí performing the dance of El Rey Colorado in Jalpan. For years, the leader of the group (*el capitán*, the captain) did not want to perform this dance outside his community. Sánchez García, who had studied the dance among the Teenek community ten years ago, was surprised to see the group performing in Jalpan in October 2012. The captain told her how he finally decided to perform the dance at the festival so others could get to know the group (Rosa Virginia Sánchez García, personal communication, October 30, 2012).

origins.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the boundaries of cultural and ethnic identity often get blurred and the regional interplay of local identities is embedded in a wider Huasteca identity. Traditional music and dance are considered and represented as one of the strongest expressions of culture, markers of cultural, regional, and ethnic identity. Each Huasteco group's repertoire, instrumentation, customs, and performance elements—such as the introduction of songs and relationship with the audience—reinforce this embodiment. Within the festival context, groups shape the way in which they choose to represent themselves and their communities, a powerful strategy for the reinforcement of culture.

Within the festival scene, Huasteca culture is produced, shared, and consumed. Regional locality is incorporated into the sonic and physical festival space. The plurality of the Huasteca region is performed through the variety of acts within the event and through the fundamental idea of performing Huasteca culture. Thus, tradition is understood as a dynamic process that links past and present. Indeed, transmission of culture and cultural heritage is key in the overall design of the Festival de la Huasteca.

CHAPTER 5. ENCUESTROS DE JARANEROS IN THE JAROCHO VERACRUZ

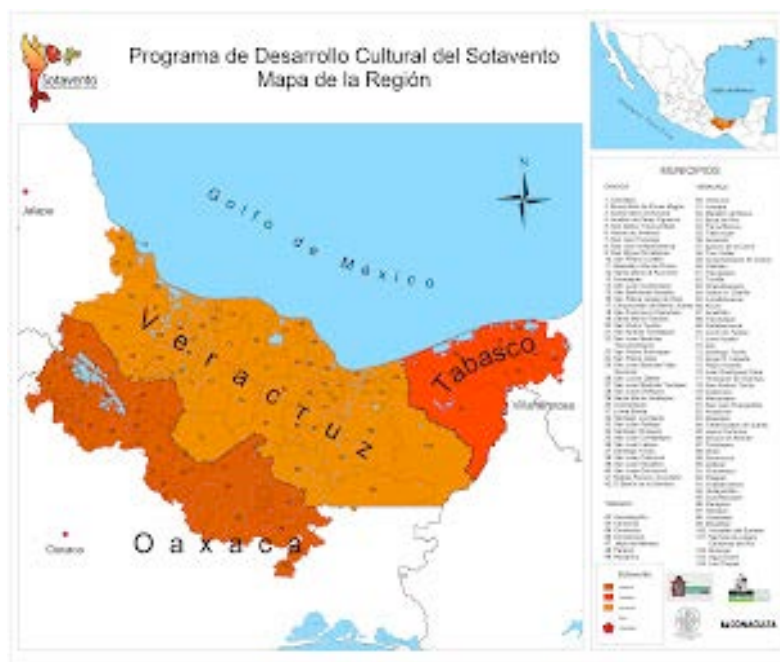
In this chapter I cover two *encuentros* of *son jarocho* in Veracruz State: the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan and the Encuentro Jardín Kojima in Otatitlán. Though both of these musical gatherings are embodiments of Jarocho music and culture, differences between them are significant. While the former makes it into the national news, is utilized by the state of Veracruz government to promote its political campaigns, and is a massive event that attracts 30,000 people to a town of 13,000 inhabitants, the latter is an intimate festival that takes place in a small community of 5,500 inhabitants and has a low media profile. I look into concepts of identity and tradition for both *encuentros* and how the Jarocho discourse is, as with many other musical expressions around the world, constructed around notions of belonging, cultural memory, heritage, community, and cultural transmission. While looking at these two contrasting *encuentros* I also delve into notions of participatory and presentational music, and *fandango* versus staged performances, a topic often discussed, talked about, and debated among Jarocho musicians and intellectuals.

Although the Encuentro de Jaraneros was for several years one of the most sought-after musical gatherings to attend, its attractiveness has waned for many musicians due, at least in part, to massification and poor organization. For its part, the cohesive message that the Encuentro Jardín Kojima delivers embraces an intimate celebration of roots music, close to the community, intended to nurture rather than showcase.

The Jarocho Region

In Mexico, the term *jarocho* is widely used to refer to inhabitants of the state of Veracruz. It also has a second meaning, referring to a wider cultural region encompassing parts of the states of Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Tabasco (see figure 32). Also known as the Sotavento region, this cultural area extends from the coastline in the middle portion of Veracruz (the lowlands between the Sierra Madre Oriental and the Sierra de Juárez mountain ranges) into northeastern Oaxaca (the Mazateco-Chinoteca area) and western Tabasco. It is a subtropical area, humid and rainy, with extensive flatlands, except in the Sierra de los Tuxtlas mountain range.

Figure 32. The Jarocho region



(© CONACULTA, in Programa de Desarrollo Cultural del Sotavento 2010)

Through hills, grasslands, and forests run rivers such as the Papaloapan, Coatzacoalcos, and Grijalva, which sustain the region with plentiful vegetation and animal life, and—as in the case of the Balsas River in the Tierra Caliente region

straddling the states of Michoacán and Guerrero—have acted as important commercial and cultural corridors over the centuries, as well as sources of inspiration for popular culture.

Together with sugar cane plantations and forestry, cattle production—a key source of income and an important symbolic marker for the region—as introduced into the area during the colonial period. The agricultural practices of indigenous groups were profoundly transformed by these new agricultural products and techniques. Camastra (2005: 39–40) has demonstrated how, over the centuries, the land and the rivers have been polluted and abused by cattle farming, industrial waste, oil exploitation, and urbanization.

The racial and cultural profile of the region was the result of centuries of mestizaje of African slaves, Europeans, and Caribbean people who mixed with indigenous population of Olmecs and Nahuas. Due to the Sotavento's geographic location, it has experienced significant historical links, influences, and exchanges with other Caribbean countries (particularly Cuba). *Son jarocho*, one of the most widely performed traditional musical expressions in the region, is largely the result of significant historical and social processes in Veracruz. As we have seen in chapter 3, starting in the early 1980s, *son jarocho* has been subject to an unprecedented process of revival, specifically in its traditional form, that is, performed with the *requinto* as the leading melodic instrument, the *jaranas* providing the harmonic texture, and the *zapateado* on the *tarima* as the percussive element. At the center of this revival is the *fandango*, the informal gathering that brings the *son jarocho* closer to the popular contexts from which it emerged.

Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan: Mirroring Son Jarocho History, Ethos, and Identity

The first Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan, Veracruz took place in 1979. Organized by well-known folklorist Salvador Ojeda “El Negro,” from Tlacotalpan, and Humberto Aguirre Tinoco, then chairman of the Casa de Cultura Agustín Lara (Agustín Lara Cultural Center), it was originally envisioned as a *son jarocho* competition. Their endeavor had the support of Radio Educación, the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), and the government of the state of Veracruz. In order to feature the rich diversity of styles within the *son jarocho* genre, it was decided to turn the event into an *encuentro* to eliminate the element of judgment by a jury. It was also agreed to hold the event concurrent with the feast of the Virgin of Candelaria (Candlemas) on February 2.

Since 1979, *jaraneros* (Jarocho musicians) and *decimistas* (improvisers of *décima* poetry) have been gathering for three or four days in early February to listen to music, improvise *décimas*, meet friends, attend lectures and workshops on Jarocho music and culture, and attend homages to noted musicians and poet-improvisers. At present, the Encuentro¹²⁷ is organized by Grupo Siquisiri, A.C.,¹²⁸ the Casa de la Cultura Agustín Lara, Tlacotalpan’s City Hall, and the Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura (IVEC) (Veracruzán Culture Institute), the state institution mandated to preserve and promote Veracruzán culture.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Throughout this chapter, I use the term “Encuentro” to refer to the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan.

¹²⁸ Based in Tlacotalpan and founded in 1989, Grupo Siquisiri has been an emblematic musical groups of the Jarocho music scene over the last twenty years. Two of its founding members, bass player Rafael Figueroa Alavés and *decimista* and *requinto* player Diego López Vergara, have helped coordinate the Encuentro de Jaraneros since 1990. A.C. stands for *asociación civil* (civil association), meaning non-profit organization.

¹²⁹ See the IVEC’s web site at <http://litorale.com.mx/ivec>

According to several authors, *son jarocho*, along with the so-called *movimiento jaranero* (Jaranero movement)¹³⁰ of the last thirty years, cannot be understood without taking the Encuentro into account: it connected older and younger generations and was instrumental in the renewal of *son jarocho*. It served as a platform to vindicate this genre as a legitimate cultural expression, to stimulate the continuity of the genre, and to draw attention to its regional styles. The Encuentro empowered older generations of Jarocho players, creating a space for them—as well as newly formed groups—to perform. It also brought to the forefront *son jarocho* as a hybrid genre whose African roots and rural origins were obscured by stereotyped versions of *son jarocho* from previous decades. Both musically and socially, the Encuentro was instrumental as a meeting point for musicians from rural parts of Veracruz. The history of the Encuentro parallels that of *son jarocho* itself over the last three decades.

There were several factors in the 1970s that opened the way for both the Encuentro and the renewal of *son jarocho*. First, although isolated rural musicians continued on according to tradition,¹³¹ other musicians who had moved to Mexico City in the 1930s and 1940s and returned to their places of origin in Veracruz (e.g., Julián Cruz, Andrés Alfonso, and Rutilo Parroquín) brought home a *son jarocho* that was already

¹³⁰ The *movimiento jaranero* sought to promote the *son jarocho tradicional*, which had been overshadowed by the urban *son jarocho* popularized by the media in the 1940s and by folkloric ballets in the 1950s. Musicians in the *movimiento jaranero* strove to revitalize *son jarocho* by, among other initiatives, favoring performance contexts closer to the rural one where the tradition was born, learning from older performers, producing recordings, and organizing workshops and musical gatherings. They felt that it was particularly important to restore the *fandango* as the core musical occasion for the performance of *son jarocho*. The movement also stressed the African roots of the genre.

¹³¹ For example, a single *son* may last half an hour, instrumental and vocal improvisation was key in the performance, dancing was participative and essential to the music as well, *sones* might use different tunings, and those who lead the gathering decided on such tunings.

transformed. Also, new groups like Mono Blanco began to play in the traditional style, and several researchers (e.g., Daniel Sheehy, Antonio García de León, Arturo Warman, Irene Vázquez, and Bonfil Batalla, among others) did fieldwork on *son* and made field recordings in the region (Figueroa Hernández 2007:91–93; García de León in Castro García 2008). One particular collection of field recordings was key in the revitalization of *son jarocho*. The first edition of *Sones de Veracruz*, recorded by Arturo Warman was released in 1969.¹³² This recording introduced to a broad audience the varied forms and subtleties of the genre, as well as a rich diversity of interpretative styles in the hands of musicians in whose families this music had been played for generations. It also revealed the artistic possibilities of *son*, the combination of poetry and musical artistry that ultimately functioned as a magnet attracting other musicians to the tradition.

Moreover, this recording projected an image of *son jarocho* that was different than that of the Jarocho groups who migrated to Mexico City during the 1930s and 1940s. As mentioned in chapter 3, the rural *son* became an “urban” (or “commercial”) one in the hands of musicians such as Lorenzo Barcelata, Andrés Huesca, and Lino Chávez, who came up with musical arrangements more appropriate for the stage and molded their interpretations of *son jarocho* to fit urban scenarios and public demands. They sped up the tempo, reduced the number of stanzas, and designed a larger harp that they could play standing up. Long improvisations in both instrumental and sung sections disappeared in the commercialized version of *son jarocho*. In addition, they created a stereotyped image of the Jarocho musicians (Andrés Barahona Londoño, personal communication, November 23, 2010; Figueroa Hernández 2007:87–90). The great majority of the musicians were men dressed in white pants and a white shirt, with a red bandana around

¹³² See Warman (2002d).

the neck. A particular hat with four indentations around the crown, the *sombrero de cuatro pedradas*, also became distinctive of this urban Jarocho dress (see figure 33).

Character features were also stereotyped, such as mischievousness and wit.

Figure 33. Jarocho musician and dancer



It was this *son jarocho* that was popularized by folkloric ballets in their staged presentations.¹³³ Female dancers in these ballets wore the “party dress,”¹³⁴ designed for special events such as weddings or festivals (Alberto de la Rosa in González 2004:59): a white shirt, a ruffled white skirt, a *rebozo* (lace shawl), a black embroidered apron, and a Spanish *abanico* (fan). Earrings and ribbons or flowers in the hair completed the outfit (see figure 34).

¹³³ For more on this, see Nájera-Ramírez (2009) and Hutchinson (2009b).

¹³⁴ The white dress was popularized by Mexican films of the 1940s and 1950s, as well as the folkloric ballets.

Figure 34. Dancers from ballet Chalchihuecan, Puerto de Veracruz, Veracruz



Recently, as part of a renewed recognition of traditional *son jarocho*, I have witnessed folkloric ballets that included numbers in which the women wore a simpler outfit, similar to that of traditional *son jarocho* practitioners: a white blouse with a hand-crocheted collar and short sleeves, a long petticoat with an embroidered hem that shows peeks out from under the colorful skirt, and often times, a *rebozo* (see figures 35 and 36).

Figure 35. Dancer's shoes and embroidered hem



Figure 36. Dancers in Tuxtepec, Oaxaca



Both men and women wear shoes with soles fitted with small metal plates at the heel and toe allow the dancers to achieve the desired percussive sonority when striking the *tarima* (see figure 37).

Figure 37. Ballet Chalchihuecan



Three Decades of Encuentro and Movimiento Jaranero

After the decline of the *son* musical tradition between the 1950s and the 1970s, the first Encuentro de Jaraneros coincided with the early renaissance of *son jarocho* towards the end of the 1970s through the mid-1980s. This revival was made possible by several actors whose main objective was to “romper inercias que apuntaban al no reconocimiento del son campesino como una expresión cultural válida, rica y socialmente importante” (break inertias that failed to legitimize the peasant *son jarocho* as a valid cultural expression, rich and socially important) (Alcántara López in Castro García and Palafox 2008). Alcántara López reinforces this idea of collective creativity, arguing that social movements do not occur because of one social actor, but several (Álvaro Alcántara López, personal communication, October 27, 2010). These actors included, among others, the INAH, with its landmark recordings (particularly “El Fandanguito” by García León and Arcadio Hidalgo¹³⁵); the musical group Mono Blanco; poet and musician Arcadio Hidalgo,¹³⁶ who performed with this group; the work of Radio Educación recording and broadcasting from rural communities and the first *encuentros* such as Tlacotalpan’s; the government of Veracruz; and national entities such as Culturas Populares and INBA.

A number of scholars and musicians (Alcántara López and García de León in Castro García and Palafox 2008; Barradas 2010; Cardona 2013; Figueroa Hernández

¹³⁵ Included in the recording *Sones de Veracruz* (see Warman 2002d).

¹³⁶ Arcadio Hidalgo (1893–1985) is renowned as one of the region’s best-ever *versadores* (poet-improvisers). He performed with the group Mono Blanco at the end of the 1970s. Mono Blanco was founded in 1977 with the idea of vindicating *son jarocho* as a festive and community genre. The group toured extensively through Mexico with Hidalgo during his few years with them. The ensemble fed from both the energy of its young performers and Hidalgo’s knowledge and artistry in singing, composing, and playing his *jarana*. He was one of the first of the “elder musicians” to inspire the young to explore the musical tradition and Jarocho cultural heritage. See more on Mono Blanco and Arcadio Hidalgo in Camastra (2005) and Pascoe (2003).

2007; and Pérez Monfort 2003, among others) argue that the Encuentro and *movimiento jaranero* went through a succession of phases, the late 1970s to mid-1980s being the first. One of the main ideas behind this first phase was to work with the older generation of Jarocho players to remember the old ways of playing *son jarocho* and to reinstate the *fandango* as the collective occasion in which the music, dance, and traditional *versada* or poetry serve as the medium for the passing down of cultural heritage.

In a second phase, from about 1985 to 1993, the *son jarocho* movement was consolidated at the regional level. The number of performers at the Encuentro from different parts of the state of Veracruz increased. Their performances illustrated the multiple singing and dance styles and instrument tunings, as well as the breadth of regional repertoires, within the *son jarocho* tradition. For Barradas (2010), the most important element in this phase was the consolidation of a “collective Jarocho consciousness,” which among young generations translated into politicized action channeled mostly through the reclaiming of dance and lyrics as a statement of ownership of culture.

The third phase of the Jaranero movement and the Encuentro took place from about 1993 to 2000. This period was characterized by both the national expansion and the regional consolidation of *son*, particularly in the central part of Veracruz. The Encuentro became a massive event in which performances lasted until three or four in the morning due to the great number of performers. Coinciding with this phase was the establishment of groups such as Chuchumbé and Son de Madera, and the consolidation of other groups that were already on the music scene such as Siquisirí, Los Parientes de Playa Vicente, Zacamandú, and Mono Blanco. By then, these groups had a discographical catalogue that

allowed them to reach audiences at regional, national, and international levels. Many other *encuentros de jaraneros* emerged at local and regional levels, which benefited the tradition as they brought exposure to other groups, styles, and repertoires. It became “cool” to play *son jarocho*; it which was taken up by many groups in Mexico City, and popularized by performing groups touring nationally and internationally and performing in the rural, “traditional” style of *son*.

Lastly, the fourth phase in the history of the Encuentro began around 2000 and continues in the present: the Jarocho groups mentioned above (and others) joined the world music circuit and numerous new groups were formed in Veracruz and other regions of Mexico, Mexico City, and the United States.¹³⁷ Social circumstances changed rapidly and the digital era and mass media introduced new forums for discussion and exchange of information. According to Andrés Moreno Nájera, these developments came with a down side: the depletion of musicians from the rural areas (Personal communication, May 3, 2011). Several authors comment on this very issue. One of the best *requintistas* in the region, Andrés Vega, states (in Castro García and Palafox 2008):

El son hoy por hoy, tal parece que la parte urbana está ganando la batalla a esa parte donde el son jarocho demoró por muchos años que es la comunidad. La comunidad se está quedando huérfana de soneros y de sones. Es en el medio urbano donde ahora abundan los soneros y el trabajo

(It seems that the urban *son* is winning the battle against *son jarocho* in the communities, where it dwelled for many years. The community is being left orphaned of *son* musicians and *sones*. Now it is in urban centers that there is an abundance of musicians and work).

Several researchers talk about the challenges brought in by the expansion of the Encuentro and the *jaranero* movement in general and how key concepts such as

¹³⁷ In the last thirty years, at least three hundred ensembles were formed in the Veracruz area alone.

fandango, community, tradition, and Jarocho identity were not fully grasped. This quote by researcher and musician Rebolledo Kloques (2009) sums up some of these concepts:

De la misma manera en que un *jaranero* es más que un músico, el *fandango* es mucho más que una fiesta; es un ritual, un acto simbólico, una solemne ceremonia comunitaria que hemos recibido de generaciones pasadas. Está lleno de connotaciones y significados que hacemos nuestras al asumir la fiesta con el respeto y convicción que todo rito demanda. En el *fandango* se cultivan y renuevan los nexos de amistad, la celebración de la vida, los principios de solidaridad y tolerancia, de espíritu comunitario, de convivencia e integración grupal. Representa el espacio más importante para enriquecer nuestra formación, reforzar nuestra identidad y recrear la tradición.

(In the same way that a *jaranero* is more than a musician, the *fandango* is much more than a party: it's a ritual, a symbolic act, a solemn community ceremony we have received from past generations. It is full of connotations and meanings that we make our own in treating the fiesta with the respect and conviction that any rite commands. The *fandango* is the place where ties of friendship, the celebration of life, and the principles of solidarity and tolerance, community spirit, coexistence, and group integration are cultivated and renewed. It represents the most important venue in to enrich our knowledge, strengthen our identity, and recreate the tradition).

For the Jarocho, the *fandango* embodies the *son jarocho* as a whole, that is, the social aspect, the musical (instrumental ensemble), the literary-popular (singing and improvisation of stanzas), and the dancing on the *tarima*. The *fandango* brings forth the participatory character of *son jarocho*, that is, “a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles” (Turino 2008:26). For its advocates, it represents the core of the tradition: it is a space where everyone can participate at different levels (playing, singing, dancing, being a spectator, collaborating economically in its preparation, etc.). Seen in this light, the *fandango* is an integrative ritual that connects individual and social experiences in which social rules are learned through the musical practice.

At present, instead of being a space for reciprocity and the sharing of knowledge, the Encuentro is felt by many musicians and scholars as having lost its historical link with the communities. This situation is seen as threatening the centrality of notions of sharing, transmission of culture, and community in the conception of *son jarocho* as cultural tradition. While the growth of the *jaranero* movement has been important for the reclamation and rebirth of the musical tradition, many think that the changes within this tradition (e.g. standardization of tunings, limitation of repertoire, stanzas that do not maintain thematic focus or play off the imagination of the other singer) are not necessarily good for the music, the musicians, and their communities (Moreno Nájera 2009a; Rebolledo Kloques 2009). According to Gilberto Gutiérrez (2009), today's *son jarocho* boom is “chaotic” and “unpredictable.” I posit that this unpredicted expansion is a reflection of the many performers seeking in the Jarocho ethos a new voice for their own identity as Mexicans, an expression of their own Veracruzanness.

Identity, Tradition, and Community within the Jarocho Discourse

The program of the 2009 Encuentro de Jaraneros states:

Todo está listo para que más de 60 agrupaciones musicales de son tradicional [...] se reúnan en el XXX Encuentro de Jaraneros, [...] una de las actividades de mayor aporte a la cultura, evento que se celebra desde hace tres décadas con el objetivo principal de preservar el son jarocho como la música folclórica propia de la región

(Everything is ready for the more than 60 musical groups of traditional *son* [...] to meet at the 30th edition of the Encuentro de Jaraneros [...], one of the activities that represents the greatest contribution to culture, an event that has been celebrated for three decades with the main objective of preserving the *son jarocho* as the folkloric music of the region).

Specifically what culture? What is being “preserved”? What tradition? Here, the concept of culture is that of a source of meaning in the way people feel and behave. Thus, this concept is interwoven with that of identity. To be Jarocho encompasses many aspects of life, culture, and society. For Rebolledo Kloques (2009)—and for many others I have spoken with while doing fieldwork research in the region—the concept of Jarocho is an expression of the life of the people, a framework through which they learn how to understand the world, the people, and the way we act in it. It is, in his words,

una manifestación en la que se expresa la vida de ciertos pueblos; es una cultura. Implica una cierta forma de ver la vida, de relacionarnos con la diversidad, de disfrutar las fiestas, de concebir a los ancianos y percibir a los jóvenes, de entender la amistad, de vincularnos con el entorno natural, de hacer poesía. En ella nos formamos en una nueva manera de comprender al mundo y a las personas que lo pueblan, así como de actuar en él

(an expression of the life of certain communities; it is a culture. It implies a certain way of seeing life, of relating with others, of enjoying the fiesta, of understanding the elder and perceiving the young, of understanding friendship, and connecting with the natural environment, of creating poetry. It is within our culture that we learn how to understand the world and the people in it, as well as the way we act in it).

This notion of Jarocho suggests Bourdieu’s habitus, an internalized disposition that carries what has been directly learnt and conditions an agent’s practices (1984:170).

Among other scholars, Castells considers that from a sociological standpoint, all identities are constructed from historical, geographical, institutional, political, and religious elements, as well as from the collective memory and personal fantasies (2004:7). Under this view, Jarocho identity is not fixed, but a subjective representation within a particular sociocultural context. Group agency is particularly significant in a postmodern conception of Jarocho as an all-encompassing notion that informs cultural

expressions both as political manifestations of belonging and as ownership of culture. Adherence (physical or conceptual) to a Jarocho collective has been strengthened by a dominant discourse on Jarocho identity and culture in which conceptions of tradition and modernity are both redefined and contested. *Fandangos*, musical gatherings, festivals, and Internet-based social networks have functioned as venues for the sharing, exchange, construction, contestation, and consumption of Jarocho culture. Moreover, the discourse of disappearing traditions has added value to festivals and educative projects.¹³⁸

The concept of tradition, along with those of identity and community, is ubiquitous in the Jarocho discourse. The notion of tradition is seen as all-encompassing, allowing for continuity, experimentation, recreation of the old, and production of the new. It is the partnership between the old and the new that makes up the very conception of tradition in the Jarocho ethos and in which the idea of *son* as malleable and as a bridge with the past and with what is still to come resonates. Many Jarocho musicians argue that musical recreation and renewal can only be undertaken after comprehensive study of how to play “according to tradition.” They insist on the need to follow tradition closely, taught and nourished by those who have carried it for many years and working within the community environment. Yet young generations often seem to be more interested in performing on stages than in experiencing the music within the community. For researcher and musician Andrés Barahona Londoño, this generation gap in the Jarocho region may explain the lack of ability on the part of younger musicians to connect with older musicians and communities. While talking with me about the differences among the Mexican cultural regions I deal with in my study, he comments on this generational

¹³⁸ For more, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:70–72.

breach and how it is reflected in the way young Jarocho musicians focus on performing on the stage rather than playing within the community:

En la Huasteca hay un elemento muy aglutinador que es el elemento indígena, la cultura indígena en donde todavía prevalece el culto al mayor, el consejo de ancianos. Son parámetros que todavía no desaparecen en la medida en que el mundo rural está vinculado con el mundo urbano o semi-urbano y en Veracruz, curiosamente, padecen un fenómeno muy similar al de la pérdida de relación intergeneracional porque la brecha generacional está tan grave que es como si no hubiera quien tocara. Lo que sé es que son tantos los jóvenes que tocan que están volviendo la espalda a los viejos músicos porque lo que prevalece en Veracruz es el criterio de profesionalización y el escenario (Personal communication, November 23, 2010)

(In the Huasteca region, one of the main unifying elements is the indigenous one, the indigenous culture in which the cult to one's elders and counsel of elders prevails. That frame of reference exists because the rural world is linked to the urban or semi-urban one. In [Jarocho] Veracruz though, intergenerational relationships have disappeared because the generation breach is so severe that it is as if there were no one playing music. What I know is that there are many young players who are turning away from the older musicians because what prevails in Veracruz is the criteria of professionalism and stage performance).

Is the performance side of *son jarocho* something to consider as part of the recreation and production of new forms of expression within the *son jarocho* tradition? How, then, does the new generation view “tradition”? For several young people I have spoken to, their musical practices are informed by tradition, that is, social customs, core values, beliefs, behaviors, and ways of living and thinking, as well as intellectual and artistic creations inherited from past generations. How to reconcile values that are part of traditional culture with present-day musical concerns? How to reconcile these values, generally understood as resistant to change and moored to the community of the past, with an all-encompassing and inclusive notion of tradition in a present-day Jarocho ethos? While some groups introduce innovation by including, for example, different musical idioms

(e.g., jazz and flamenco) in renditions of *sones jarochos*, others choose to stick as close to the tradition¹³⁹ as possible. In both cases, young musicians argue that tradition informs their particular musical take on *son*. In my opinion, tradition offers a sense of continuity with the past. Symbols are continually transformed and transvalued in traditional culture as well as its contemporary offshoots. The degree and level of self-consciousness of such transformations and transvaluations is what explains the different ways of explaining the role of tradition within the *son* experience. Furthermore, although informed by tradition to different degrees and using different approaches, young musicians are drawing on *son jarocho*'s myriad of musical idioms and performative styles primarily as a tool for finding their own voices and crafting their own means of self-expression.

Understanding tradition as an evolving feature of societies and cultures and as a reworking of the past (Handler and Linnekin 1984) might elucidate the understanding of the concept of tradition in the Jarocho ethos. The notion of tradition as fluid allows for the negotiation of ideas and lends meaning to the present, allowing for modernity and the inclusion of intercultural relationships. In fact, the Encuentro de Jaraneros could be viewed as a negotiation of cultural meanings and conceptions of tradition. In this scene, Jarocho identity is culturally dynamic and contextually determined. Individual, cultural, and collective identity are defined through this and other *encuentros* in which Jarocho culture is enacted and performed.

It is obvious that Jarocho identity is deeply felt and much discussed. As Pérez Montfort argues, the preoccupation with the conceptualization of identity in a socio-economic and cultural space not only responds to the needs of a specific social group in a given moment, but also has to do with the intellectual trends in those specific moments

¹³⁹ Or as closely as they have been taught.

and within defined social groups (2007:177). Jarocho is an identity that arises from a common desire for community bonds, to maintain or re-forge ties that are perceived to have been generally abandoned in modern society. Thus, the Jarocho intellectual contribution seeks to reconnect old and new, moving the tradition forward through the knowledge and respect for the old and the inclusion of the new. Or, as Schnell would say, “By viewing identity and tradition as human constructions we eliminate [...] the idea that there is a ‘pure’ version of a particular culture [...] that remains unchanged over time” (2003:9). That is the place of innovation within this conception of tradition, culture, and identity.

Presently, the Encuentro de Jaraneros is an arena in which all the ideas mentioned above interact: identity, contested conceptions of tradition, a stage filled with such a great number of musical groups that each group can only play three *sones*, stereotyped musical practices in which newly formed groups render standardized versions of the same *sones*. Moreover, the line-up is decided by one person and circumscribed by Internet registration, the regional state government has appropriated the space over the last three years to promote its political agenda, and many *jaraneros* feel there are so many people at the massive *fandangos* that these have lost their social function and symbolism. In its programming, the Encuentro’s priority is to make sure that every group is included, resulting in an overwhelming schedule that precludes long performances due to a lack of space in the program. As I comment later on in the chapter, this is lamented by some *jaraneros* because they feel that massification not only encourages stereotyping but drastically transforms the overall musical experience.

Despite the fact that the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan in recent years has reflected the chaotic boom that Gutiérrez describes, its impact cannot be denied. It was instrumental in the renewal of the tradition, as well as in a process of identity reconstruction, a celebration in which the musical experience provides Jarocho people with a sense of coherence. As mentioned in chapter 1, festivals can serve as vehicles for processes of identity-formation and contestation (López 1997:312). They are sonic and social spaces where those experiences and processes can take place. As Mendoza argues, public performances are “key sites of identity construction, maintenance, and contestation” (1998:165).

In my own experience, *son* festivals in general—and the Encuentro de Jaraneros in particular—gather performers and audiences together in a cultural space in which tradition and innovation are represented, experienced, contested, talked about, and even experimented with. In them, culture can be contested and/or consolidated, which may be decisive for the tradition itself. The concept of Jarocho tradition as inclusive may explain, for example, why certain instruments that entered the Jarocho scene as recently as thirty years ago, such as the *marimbol*,¹⁴⁰ are now considered part of the tradition (Rebolledo Kloques 2005:15–16).

For Jarocho practitioners, innovation is part of the tradition as long as social and musical values that are part of the Jarocho ethos are respected. Among these values are the respect for others, particularly the elders, the transmission of knowledge through the

¹⁴⁰ The *marimbol* is a lamellaphone known in Cuba as the *marimbula*. It has been put to extensive use within several Jarocho ensembles in the last thirty years. According to Rebolledo Kloques (2005:15), the *marimbol* contributed to the development and diffusion of the Cuban *son* in Mexico during the first half of the 20th century. Then, the instrument went into oblivion. Rebolledo Kloques was one of the musicians responsible for bringing the *marimbol* into Veracruz. He tells the story of how, while participating in a *fandango* in the community of El Hato, Veracruz, the late *jaranero* Esteban Utrera invited him to move closer to the group to play the *marimbol* with the *jaraneros* attending the *fandango*. After that an interest in both playing and constructing *marimboles* spread very quickly (ibid., 16–17).

teaching of younger generations, the commitment to knowing the tradition, and the cultivation of *son jarocho* within the community and not exclusively for stage performance.

Striking a Balance Between Community Values and Musical Imperatives

I have explained that the idea of community is key in the Jarocho discourse: the music is considered by a majority of musicians to be born of the community and performed and experienced in the community. Nearly every well-known performing Jarocho group will tell you that it contributes to the community by “giving back”: performing musicians feel they owe something to those from whom they learned the music, the elders and people in rural communities, and they repay them by attending popular *fandangos* and giving workshops for younger generations.

As in other highly participatory traditions, in the Jarocho world, equal access to participation is granted a higher priority than achieving the aesthetic ideals of musical performance (Turino 1990:405; 2008:35). Alcántara López says that participation and continuity of the tradition is more important than, for example, achieving pitch precision (Personal communication, October 27, 2010). On the other hand, a stage performance poorly rendered in terms of tuning, rhythmic precision, interpretive quality, or lack of variety in the repertoire will flop. While the music at the *fandango* is open to all and one is not required to be a virtuoso to participate in it (Gottfried Hesketh 2009), formal groups are expected to deliver a more sophisticated, stage-oriented performance than those in a *fandango*. They must deliver an artistic rendition of music that is in tune, in rhythm, and meaningful in both musical arrangement and choice of repertoire. We need to understand these two aspects of the fiesta that take place in Tlacotalpan: the

performance on the stage, and the communal fiesta at the *fandango(s)*. Gilberto Gutiérrez (2009) harshly comments that “el Encuentro de Jaraneros en Tlacotalpan, uno de los pilares de este movimiento, ahora es un espacio que confunde al público sobre qué es lo tradicional, ya que se maneja sin criterio” (The Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan, one of the pillars of the Jaranero movement, is now a site that confuses the public about what is traditional, as it is now practiced without any norms.) As Gilmore argues, “the aesthetic focus and legitimation of aesthetic behavior is guided by the current activities of the artistic community as well as [...] by the artistic tradition. These artistic interests are clearly not independent of organizational rationality, but the effect of the artistic community on patterns of cultural participation is quite powerful in its own right” (1993:239). Therefore, it is the shared responsibility of performers, organizers, and audience to reclaim a coherent and inclusive representation of the *son jarocho* tradition at the Encuentro, both on stage and at the *fandango*.

While the expansion of the Encuentro has benefitted the musical tradition, core concepts within that tradition, such as the sharing, building of community, and transmission of knowledge that take place in the *fandango*, have been underplayed in the last ten years. Culture, identity, and tradition are not fixed features within the evolving communities. Thus, the role of innovation is instrumental for the conception of tradition as ever-evolving. The concept of tradition as inclusive opens the way for experimentation and recreation of culture and identities, while respecting the Jarocho ethos and tradition. This leads to representing the tradition while fulfilling minimum performance standards, understanding the role of a stage performance, and upholding the notion that participation in the *fandango* is open to all. To be on a stage requires an extra effort and involves more

than simply being able to play a few *sones*. Institutions, too, foster their own important processes of musical transmission, not just within the institutions themselves, but also in how they relate to the social and political forces that use and shape them in order to maintain musical viability within the life of a community (Cohen 2009:323).

Cons in Tlacotalpan and Other Encuentros in the Jarocho Region

Since the early 1980s, both official institutions and private initiatives began to promote traditional music and culture by organizing, among other activities, musical gatherings and educative projects such as workshops on traditional music, dance, poetry, and the construction of musical instruments. As we saw in chapter 4, the Festival de Amatlán was one of the first festivals in the Huasteca region to embrace this interest in the renewal of musical tradition. The Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan was one of the first in the Jarocho region. In fact, like the Festival de Amatlán, the Encuentro de Jaraneros served as a reference for many other *son jarocho* festivals and *encuentros* that came after it. Musician and cultural promoter Ana Zarina Palafox comments:

El mismo formato de encuentro es netamente generación de Tlacotalpan aquí en México. Cualquier encuentro que tu veas, en cualquier lugar del país, viene de influencia de Tlacotalpan (Personal communication, October 15, 2010)

(Here in Mexico, the format of the typical *encuentro* is clearly based on that of Tlacotalpan. Any *encuentro* anywhere in the country has been influenced by Tlacotalpan).

As I earlier described, the Encuentro de Jaraneros changed over the years. At the very beginning, it functioned to bring together musicians from different communities in the region; as a way to learn about different expressions of *son jarocho* that were isolated and, in several instances, on the verge of oblivion; as a means to share and exchange

music; and to fuel a common incentive for the re-appropriation of a musical tradition as “one’s own.”¹⁴¹

Significant transformations took place over the Encuentro de Jaraneros’ thirty-year history. What started as a reunion among friends, a community fiesta, and a gathering of musicians turned into an excess of many things, mostly of groups wanting to play on the stage. Over time, stage presentations took over the spotlight. Sometimes there were so many groups that stage performances would continue until five in the morning, making it impossible for the *fandango* to take place. Also, the massive number of attendees, musicians, and dancers at the *fandangos* transformed the musical conditions as well as the ways in which the music could be experienced. It was difficult to run *fandangos*—the core objective of the *movimiento jaranero*—with so many musicians and participants not knowing the conventions and protocols of the *fandango* tradition such as who leads the music, how dancers take turns on the *tarima*, and the expectation that the place of older and more experienced musicians is at the front, near the *tarima*, with newcomers positioning themselves behind them in the back. There are conventions and expectations for dancers, singers, and players. Gottfried Hesketh (2009) mentions a few: a change of dancers must not occur while a stanza is being sung; *jaraneros* should recognize the *son* as soon as the *requintista declara el son* or strikes the opening theme, then switch to strumming according to the tempo and rhythmic characteristics established by the *requintista*; singers must wait for dancers to *repiquetear* (deliver an ornamented

¹⁴¹ After the Latin American “New Song” movement at the end of the 1960s, young musicians in Mexico began to look into their own cultural roots in a search for regional or local elements that could bring some cohesiveness to their own sense of identity. The *nueva canción* or “New Song” movement had represented the search for a pan-Latin American political and cultural identity. Socially conscious songs sung by singer-songwriters reflected a search for vernacular culture and the rescue of folkloric music as well as the liberation struggles against North American imperialism. Among other things, the movement strove to bring visibility to the people who struggle to survive in unequal societies (and, indeed, achieved this goal).

zapateado) before they move to a new stanza; if two singers begin singing a stanza at the same time, one of them should stop and wait for the other to finish.

The absence of older musicians who once traveled from rural communities in Veracruz to participate in the Encuentro in Tlacotalpan has become a significant problem in recent years. To start with, the call to participate in the festival is now done through the Internet, which limits access to those who have access to a computer and an Internet connection, as well as the ability to fill out a written application electronically. Moreover, older musicians may find themselves excluded from the *fandangos* if the mostly young performers lack an understanding of the basic rules of age respect, as well as because of new trends in performance practice. For example, the tempo at which *sones* tend to be performed has sped up as a result of younger musicians incorporating increasingly virtuosic elements into the *fandango*, an element that clashes with traditional norms (Álvaro Alcántara López, personal communication, October 27, 2010). The lack of musicians from different regions in Veracruz and of representation of various Jarocho styles translates into a lack of diversity at the Encuentro and subverts one of its primary aims: that of showcasing the richness of local styles within *son jarocho*.¹⁴²

Since many musicians, intellectuals, and “cultural activists” feel they had a part in the making of the Encuentro in Tlacotalpan and the Jaranero movement, they blame the organizers who have taken it over—Grupo Siquisirí, and in particular, its *decimista* and *requinto* player Diego López Vergara—for failures of organization. Mario Cruz Terán,

¹⁴² There are several variants of *son jarocho* distinctively marked by locality: 1) the *son* from Tlacotalpan tends to be faster and more energetic and its ensembles include *jaranas*, *requinto*, and a *pandero* (tambourine); 2) the *son* from the Tuxtla region in southern Veracruz tends to be slower, with some groups using a small, rustic violin that carries the melody; 3) the *son campesino* from the Sierra de Sotapan is sung in the Popoluca and Nahuatl languages; and 4) in Tierra Blanca, *sones* tend to be faster and are performed with harp and *requinto*.

owner and director of activities at the Luz de Noche cultural center, voices such complaints and comments on personal disputes between López Vergara and other members of the *jaranero* community that translated into an appropriation of spaces at the Encuentro.¹⁴³ This is Mario's telling of how López Vergara shut down the *fandango* that the group Mono Blanco, led by Gilberto Gutiérrez, ran for years in the neighborhood of San Miguelito, purportedly because he thought it would compete with the Encuentro's main venue at Plaza Doña Marta:

No sé en qué fecha agarraron la administración de todo pero se fueron apropiando y apropiando del Encuentro de Jaraneros. Tanto así que ni el municipio ni el propio IVEC tenía acceso. Ya era el grupo Siquisiri el que manejaba todo el Encuentro, como independiente. Entonces, todos los recursos le llegaban al grupo y todo se manejaba desde la organización del grupo. Hace cinco años fue cuando empezamos a hacer el *fandango* de Luz de Noche. Fue a raíz de que Diego Lopez levantó al grupo Mono Blanco del Barrio de San Miguelito, que siempre hacía ahí su *fandango* y era un espacio fuerte donde ellos tenían su *fandango* y a donde la gente que quería participar en el *fandango* de Mono Blanco llegaba. Llegó la policía, los levantó, les dijo que no podían hacer *fandango* ahí y que se fueran.

Raquel- ¿Por qué no quería Diego López que hicieran ahí el *fandango*?

Mario- Pues porque siempre ha habido cierta riña, pero pues era un evento aparte de lo que siempre hacía Diego López en su encuentro en Plaza Doña Marta. Y Gilberto agarraba su San Miguelito como su lugar para hacer su *fandango* (Personal communication, January 31, 2011)

(I do not know when they completely took over the administration, but they gradually appropriated the Encuentro de Jaraneros as their own, to the point that not even the municipality or IVEC could access it. Grupo Siquisiri handled the Encuentro as if it were an independent event. Thus, all the resources went to the group [Siquisiri] and they ran everything. It was five years ago that we began to put on the *fandango* at Luz de Noche. It was after Diego López prevented the group Mono Blanco from holding their *fandango* in the neighborhood of San Miguelito where they had been doing so for years. It was a powerful place where they held their *fandangos* and where people who wanted to participate could congregate.

¹⁴³ Unfortunately, I did not speak to López Vergara to get his side of the story.

The police came, moved them off, told them they could not hold their *fandango* there, and ordered them to leave.

Raquel- Why did Diego López not want them to have the *fandango* there?

Mario- There has always been a quarrel of some kind and [Mono Blanco's *fandango*] posed a threat to the event that Diego López runs during the Encuentro at Plaza Doña Marta. Gilberto [Gutiérrez] had San Miguelito as the place to hold his group's *fandango*).

Since this event, well-known groups such as Mono Blanco, Estanzuela, Son de Madera, and Los Cojolites have expressed their disagreement with the way the Encuentro is organized. Besides avoiding playing the main stage, they have created alternative spaces for the music, such as the Luz de Noche cultural center, where concerts (see figure 38), the showing of documentaries, and CD releases take place, as well as the *fandango* that Mono Blanco has been organizing there since 2007, which is attended by many *jaraneros* “in the know.”

Figure 38. Concert at Luz de Noche



Other issues are worrisome at the Encuentro de Jaraneros. Ricardo Perry, a significant figure within the *movimiento jaranero*,¹⁴⁴ harshly criticizes how the made-easy process¹⁴⁵ of signing up to perform on stage has translated into young performers learning the bare minimum—just a few *sones*—for a performance, rather than engaging in in-depth study and practice covering the breadth of *son jarocho*. He comments:

... Hay muchas músicas y que nosotros tenemos una que es muy particular que es el son jarocho, que es muy valiosa y nos da unidad, que genera sentimiento. [...] Aprender a tocar la jarana lo puedes lograr, pero ese sentimiento que nace de miles de años, esa percepción que tienes de la naturaleza, la forma como la miras y cómo haces tus versos que vienen de ese legado histórico, es difícil que alguien lo logre. Por eso el son jarocho es de aquí (Personal communication, May 7, 2011)

(... There are many musics and we have one that is very special, the *son jarocho*, which is very valuable, unifies us, and generates feeling. [...] You can learn to play *jarana* but [without spending time in the region] it is difficult to capture that feeling that comes down over thousands of years, that perception you draw from nature, the way you look at it and how you make up your own verses that come from this historical legacy. That is the reason why *son jarocho* is from here).

According to Perry, being able to learn two or three *sones* should not be enough to win a slot on the stage. Groups should differentiate between playing on stage and playing in a *fandango* or on other musical occasions. If they perform on stage, they should deliver a well-developed stage presentation rather than just playing the three *sones* they have learned in one of the many workshops that Jarocho musicians teach in the region and that have contributed to the revitalization of the genre (Personal communication, May 7,

¹⁴⁴ Perry was a founding member of pioneer groups, such as Chuchumbé, in the revival of *son jarocho*. He writes and composes for the Grammy-nominated group Los Cojolites, and also manages them. He also runs a famous international Jarocho seminar and festival, El Rancho de la Luna Negra, in Jáltipan, Veracruz, the same town where he co-founded the Centro de Documentación del Son Jarocho (Center for the Documentation of *Son Jarocho*).

¹⁴⁵ Organizers do not vet stage performances, do not audition groups or make choices to ensure quality stage performances: anybody who signs up is granted a slot on stage, which accords with both the original idea of the Encuentro as a gathering of musicians to showcase the diverse expressions of son jarocho, and the idea of the musical tradition as integrative and inclusive.

2011).

“Activists” within the Jaranero movement fought, and continue to fight, to bring the richness of the cultural tradition into the present, believing that this richness fosters a much-needed strong sense of belonging and social identification. If, as Zerubavel argues, reconstructing a past may help with future agendas (1994:105), the Jarocho cultural script is being written by constructing cultural memories that may help future generations to feel part of the Jarocho community.

Ana Zarina Palafox comments that *son jarocho* has become a commodity in Tlacotalpan (Personal communication, October 15, 2010). Can that process of commoditization explain many young musicians’ desire to perform at the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan as if it were a rite of passage for entrance into the *jaranero* community? Are the young musicians learning two or three *sones*—the number of *sones* a group can perform in a given time slot—to be able to perform and thus be provided with food and lodging for the duration of the festival as Perry and Palafox argue? If this is the motivation, essential principles sought by the *movimiento jaranero* are being ignored.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, the desire to perform on stage might be reflective of a set of values in which attention to a past, a heritage, and a community are all considered equally valuable. For example, young *requinto* player Kevin Leyva Trujano comments that

Tocar en Tlacotalpan es como un sueño para los nuevos grupos: es como un examen para ver si pasas la prueba, ya que el público es un público que gusta del *son* y te califica. Es un foro muy importante, pues es el puente para que nuevas tocadas se abran y para que la gente te vaya conociendo (Personal communication, May 17, 2011)

¹⁴⁶ In particular, the experience of *son jarocho* as an expression of Jarocho cultural identity, a way to reconnect with cultural roots and vernacular culture, and a way to re-contextualize the musical tradition as cultural practice deeply rooted in the community.

(To play in Tlacotalpan is like a dream for new groups: it's like an exam you take to see if you pass, because the audience is an audience that likes *son* and will pass judgement on you. It is a very important forum because it is the bridge that can open up new performance opportunities as well as a way for people to get to know you).

In another conversation with Kevin, he commented that he admired virtuoso *requinto* player Ramón Gutierrez because Ramón knows the musical style extremely well, is able to play according to “the tradition,” and, at the same time, is able to innovate and create new musical idioms. For Kevin and the members of his group, Los Alebrijes, while it is important to know the musical tradition and participate in communal celebrations, it is equally important to perform at the Encuentro. For Alcántara López, the question of performing on the stage is not the central issue; the real difficulty new generations face is in finding their own voices as musicians (Personal communication, October 27, 2010).

Thus, massification brought new stereotypes of traditional *son jarocho* practitioners (such as the simpler traditional *son jarocho* worn by women mentioned before and the small *tarima* [see figures 39 and 40] set on the stage for a [very often] female dancer to use) while creating a need to come up with some way of differentiating particular groups: musical arrangements, new instrumentation, the incorporation of other musical styles, original compositions, etc.—that is, *sones* that often times were seen as not having much to do with the traditional ones. If at a certain time in history Tlacotalpan functioned as a pioneer *encuentro* in which to showcase a musical tradition reclaimed by musicians as roots music and embodiment of cultural identity, developments since the

mid-1990s have obscured some of the festival's original aims¹⁴⁷ and come to favor a very different kind of *son jarocho*. At present, pioneers of the *movimiento jaranero* would say that Tlacotalpan, as a catalyst for musical gatherings featuring traditional *son*, is a model that should no longer be followed.

Figure 39. Group La Zafra



Figure 40. Small *tarima*



¹⁴⁷ Such as sharing and exploring the diverse expressions of *son jarocho*, and to empower older musicians with scarce opportunities to share the music they grew up with.

Since 1990, it was not only Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan that grew rapidly. Many other *encuentros* tripled their number of performing musicians. For Álvaro Alcántara López, the problem with such *encuentros* and festivals has been their inability to find a way to accommodate diversity and to deal with the great number of people performing or wanting to perform:

Yo creo que no hemos sabido qué hacer con tanta diversidad. Yo creo que ese ha sido el problema. Parte de los encuentros es que no se ha querido plantear salidas a un crecimiento exponencia de una tradición musical (Álvaro Alcántara López, Personal communication, October 27, 2010)

(I believe that we have not known what to do with so much diversity. I think that has been the problem. Some of the issues with the *encuentros* is that they have not wanted to find outlets for such exponential growth within a musical tradition).

Ana Zarina Palafox shares this view and suggests that the commitment to inclusiveness is the main difficulty in figuring out how to manage the amount of groups wanting to perform. Moreover, among other musicians and researchers—e.g., Moreno Nájera and Barahona Londoño—she argues that the main problem is that *son jarocho*, a music that at its origin is performed, shared, and lived as a community, is being staged. In Palafox's words:

Estamos hablando y repitiendo muchas veces la palabra escenario pero el son jarocho, de naturaleza, es una música comunitaria, de fandango. Y el fandango no tiene público y performadores. Y no se aprende por talleres. Entonces, esa falla de origen, de volver escénica una música que no lo es por naturaleza crea esta incomodidad que se refleja en un montón de circunstancias inadecuadas y que van a ser inadecuadas las que sea que plantees porque tienen una falla de origen (Personal communication, October 15, 2010)

(We keep using the word “stage,” but the *son jarocho*, by nature, is communal music, for the *fandango*. The fandango has neither audience

nor performers. It cannot be learned in workshops. That is the main problem: to bring to the stage a musical genre that isn't designed for the stage creates tension that shows through in many uncomfortable situations, and will be discomfiting at any rate because the main problem is poor transmission [from the *fandango* to the stage]).

According to many, the *fandango* embodies a collective Jarocho identity that is key in the Jarocho ethos. Thus, a culturally specific practice merges individual memories and experiences to feed into the collective memory. Can this recent emphasis on performance be a part of that collective memory and collective identity in view of the interest young generations have in performing *son jarocho* on stages at *encuentros*?

Ironically, the de-contextualization of the tradition that happened back in the 1950s is repeating itself. New contexts, stereotypes, and standardizations have been constructed. Taken out of the rural context, the genre takes on new meanings. Not understanding the difference between the stage performance and the *fandango* confuses things further. As the *son jarocho* is performed by many, both in and outside of Mexico, *encuentros* present challenges as they grow bigger and the connection with the rural communities, forms, and contexts for the music is weakened.

For musicians, cultural promoters, and researchers who were part of the revival movement, *encuentros* are no longer true to the aims originally set for them. Several musicians told me that playing at the *encuentro* has lost its charm and it is the *fandango*—shared among friends—that keeps them coming back to the *encuentros* in Tlacotalpan and other places in the region. Andrés Moreno Nájera,¹⁴⁸ one of those

¹⁴⁸ Author, musician, cultural promoter, and main figure in the *son jarocho* revival movement in the Tuxtla region, Moreno Nájera has been the director of the Casa de la Cultura (Cultural Center) of San Andrés Tuxtla for over twenty years. He has done a lot of work within the communities to bring visibility to the *son jarocho campesino* and to rescue old musical styles of *son jarocho*. He has organized and taught

responsible for the revival of *son jarocho* in the San Andrés Tuxtla area, sadly comments on how musicians have turned the *encuentros* into a marketplace for their CDs or DVDs and how this has changed the very nature of the *encuentros* as they were before:

Los músicos tienen que vender, tienen que hacer un montón de cuestiones porque si no hay ese mercadeo pues no van a vender lo que tienen. Entonces, en eso se han convertido los *encuentros*. Para mí eso dejó de tener sentido hace tiempo. Me gusta la convivencia, ir y convivir, y haber ido a Tlacotalpan... bueno, pues vamos al fandango, más que nada a convivir con la gente (Personal communication, May 3, 2011)

(Musicians need to sell, they need to do a lot of things because without engaging in marketing activities they won't sell what they have. That is what *encuentros* have turned into. Thus, for me, *ecuentros* became meaningless a while ago. I like the connecting with people, going and bonding, and having gone to Tlacotalpan... well, we go to the *fandango*, mostly to interact with people).

Many festivals came after Tlacotalpan, each with its own particular characteristics and emphasis: San Andrés Tuxtla, Santiago Tuxtla, Jáltipan, Otatitlán, Alvarado, Cosoleacaque, and others. Since the *encuentro*/festival boom, musicians committed to the *movimiento jaranero*, have questioned the worth of attending these events these events, viewing them as overly commoditized and lacking a coherent message. Ricardo Perry, for example, complains about the lack of funding for the *encuentros*, which is tiresome for the musicians, and shows a certain disappointment with these conditions since it was the organizing of *encuentros* that brought attention and recognition to *son jarocho* in the first place:

Pues mira, ahora estamos un poco en contra de la “*encuentritis*”, que le llamamos, porque son muy desgastantes. Uno va a muchos de esos *encuentros* que no tienen sentido, pues te cansas. Pues no le dan importancia a la participación de un grupo. Y esto ha pasado también

son jarocho workshops and produced radio programs to feature rural musicians dispersed in remote communities in the area.

porque los grupos no cobran, vamos a dormir en el suelo, sólo nos dan la comida y a veces el pasaje, como pasa en Tlacotalpan, y así todo. Y eso hizo posible en un momento que el son jarocho creciera, como aquí en Jáltipan. Porque ya no había un interés por el son. Al hacer los festivales la gente llega (Personal communication, May 9, 2011)

(Look, now we are a little against the “encuentritis,” as we call it, because they are very draining. You go to many *encuentros* that make no sense, and you get tired. They do not place importance a group’s participation. And this has also happened because the groups do not get paid, we [the groups] sleep on the floor, they only feed us and sometimes pay travel expenses, as they do in Tlacotalpan. Everything is like that. At one point the *encuentros* made the growth of *son jarocho* possible, like here in Jáltipan. The interest in it had been lost. If a festival is organized, people will come).

As we have seen in this last section, Tlacotalpan was the pioneer *encuentro* that served as a model for many other musical gatherings that followed. At present, in a sense, Tlacotalpan is now focused on providing a platform in which new trends in *son jarocho* are performed and experimented with. Though many new people attend the festival every year, experienced participants continue to come to meet up with friends and, like at the Festival de la Huasteca, share in the music and the fiesta.

Even as organized and “official” stages and *fandangos* are being challenged in Tlacotalpan, new spaces to play and dance “according to tradition” (e.g., the Luz de Noche cultural center) are being created. While massification has drastically changed the Encuentro contextually and musically, it endures as an iconic space where the new and the old coexist, where private and official initiatives can promote the experiencing, selling, and living of cultural expressions, and where Jarocho cultural identity is performed through music, food, poetry improvisation, *fandangos*, and clothing, among other elements. Notwithstanding local tensions between tradition and innovation, collective memories create new narratives, fluid and contextual, around Jarocho culture.

While intellectuals try to understand the multiple strands of *son jarocho*, how such strands are re-signified by old and young generations, and how to grasp the split between participatory and presentational performances, I believe the Encuentro de Jaraneros will continue to be a benchmark among musical gatherings. It is both a rite of passage and a corner of nostalgia. Though the Encuentro may be seen to have been a victim of its own success, it still functions as a catalyst for the gathering of both older and younger *jaraneros*. Does the *movimiento jaranero* need to find alternative platforms for its goals, which by definition would mean a rejection of gatherings that take the form of massive festivals? I leave this question as I delve into a very different form of musical gathering, that which can be found at the Encuentro Jardín Kojima in Otatitlán, Veracruz.

Jardín Kojima

First Contact

In early May 2011 I attended the *son huasteco* festival that Arturo Castillo has been organizing in Citlaltépec (northern Veracruz state) for the last five years. Talking with him about my project and my interest in festivals and cultural projects, he encouraged me to contact Julio Mizzumi, one of the founding members of the group Yacatecuhtli and the Jardín Kojima cultural project. I arranged my schedule so I could meet Julio and the rest of the group in Otatitlán (southern Veracruz state) in mid-May, participate in the two-day festival—Encuentro Jardín Kojima—they organize yearly coinciding with Yacatecuhtli’s anniversary, and take a close look at Jardín Kojima, the cultural project the group has been carrying out for the last ten years. I cite from my field notes:

I drove from San Andrés Tuxtla to Otatitlán through some treacherous roads that you navigate zigzagging to avoid the countless holes in the pavement. I arrive around 4 pm. It is very hot in this small town. The streets are empty, burnt by the sun and melted by the humidity. Leaving the air-conditioned car feels like a rite of initiation to this southern region of Veracruz by the Papaloapan River. I drive downtown looking for a hotel. It is better to be in places where you are visible and people can see you. I follow my safety routine and call my friends to let them know I have arrived.¹⁴⁹

After unpacking, I drove to Julio’s house. We sat in the shade in the back garden of his house and started talking about Yacatecuhtli, the group’s yearly festival, and the

¹⁴⁹ Making sure someone knows when and from where you depart and when you arrive at your destination is vital when you are traveling in an area where kidnappings and other drug-trafficking-related activities take place.

cultural project, Jardín Kojima. For Yacatecuhtli, within both the *encuentro* and the cultural project *son jarocho* functions as a powerful tool for the construction of collective, self-, and cultural identity, as well as a means for social reconstruction.¹⁵⁰ Community is constructed through music through members of the groups seeing themselves in action and imagining others who might share the same style of performance (Rice 2007:25). As mentioned in chapter 1, self-identity is understood as self-understanding of the self and the particular ways of life specific to the individual construct through social interaction (*ibid.*), and cultural identity is understood as chosen groups' habits elected to represent it for themselves and for others (Mageo 202:493; Turino 2008:95). Social reconstruction is very much needed in this area of southern Veracruz, where the social fabric has been severely damaged by massive migration to urban areas in Veracruz State, Mexico City, and the United States, as well as by conditions created by drug-trafficking-related violence.¹⁵¹

Encuentro Jardín Kojima cannot be completely understood without familiarity with the cultural project to which it is connected (which I discuss below). Moreover, this gathering of Jarocho music and culture cannot be separated from the site where both the cultural project and the *encuentro* take place: the garden (or *jardín*) and backyard of Margarita Kojima, mother of three of the members of Yacatecuhtli.

Otatitlán is a small town of about 5,000 inhabitants. Located on the upper end of the Papaloapan River, it is about two hours south of the port of Veracruz. A few tourists come to visit the image of a Black Christ in the cathedral that dominates the main plaza.

¹⁵⁰ See discussion (chapter 3) regarding the construction of festivals and cultural project during the 1980s.

¹⁵¹ In this hot and humid part of Mexico, cool late afternoons are the perfect time for women to sit outside to embroider and chat, and for children to play soccer on the streets or at the soccer field or go swimming in the river. These activities are impossible at the moment due to security issues.

With the imposition of Catholicism, this Black Christ supplanted the devotion to Yacatecuhtli, the Mexica god of commerce and traveling merchants. Before colonial times, Otatitlán was a market town.

It is in Otatitlán that Margarita (Mago) Kojima lives and raised her three children in the group. Julio Mizzumi is the oldest one. His wife, Belén, and his son, Julio, are part of the group as well. Also in the group are Martín and José, the younger brothers, and Diego Almazán Parroquín. Julio tells me about all of them:

Todos somos familia excepto Diego, el moreno. Pues [Yacatecuhtli] es Martín, el que toca la leona, es llenito, así alto, gordo. Es José, el que toca la jarana tercera, un moreno chaparrón. Es Julio, mi hijo, que toca la percusión, el pandero. Es Belén, que toca la jarana segunda; y es Diego Almazán, un moreno muy moreno que trabaja por Playa Vicente (Julio Mizzumi, Personal communication, May 11, 2011)

(We are all family except Diego, *el moreno* [a dark person]. Yacatecuhtli is Martín, who plays the *leona* [four-stringed bass lute]. He is plump, tall, fat. Then José, a short *moreno* who plays *jarana tercera* [a large *jarana*]. Julio, my son, plays percussion, the *pandero* [a frame drum]. Belén plays *jarana segunda* [a mid-sized *jarana*], and Diego Almazán, a very dark *moreno* who works in Playa Vincente).

The *encuentro* is a two-day celebration that in 2011 coincided with group's fifteenth anniversary. It was to take place over the two days following Yacatecuhtli's performance at a local middle school with a group of children from the cultural center. Everyone was excited about the *encuentro*, a collaborative enterprise organized by Yacatecuhtli and children at the cultural center. Mago and some of the children's families also helped. The food that would be served on the second day had been ordered. Chairs for about 150 people would be ready in time for the start of the *encuentro*.

Jarocho identity surfaces in the context of Jardín Kojima as a community fiesta that emphasizes cultural roots and personal relationships. Jarocho identity is performed in

a simple yet sophisticated manner. For this group of children and adults, Jarocho music and culture function as means to create both community and a place/space for children whose self- and cultural identity were lost amid harsh social circumstances and dysfunctional family environments¹⁵² resulting from these circumstances. Jarocho music and culture are central to the social interactions in which this community engages.

The Jardín Kojima Cultural Project

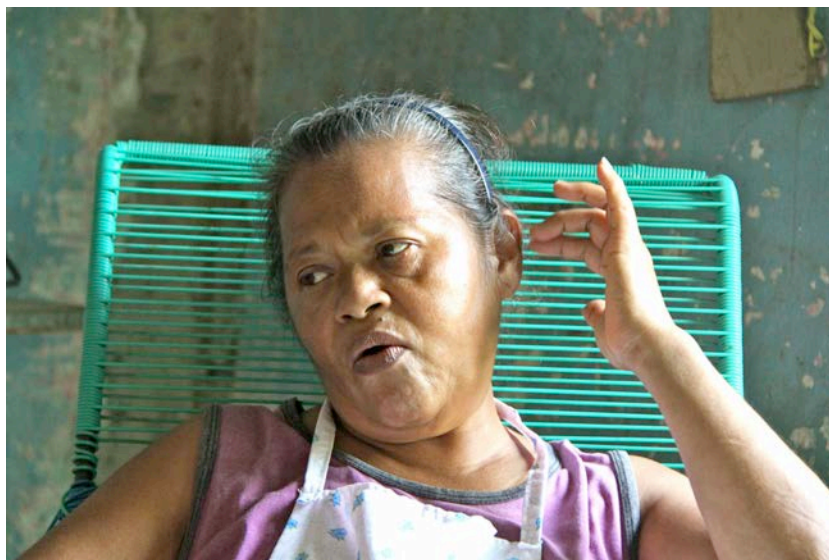
“... Este gran equipo no es gracias a la casualidad del destino sino al trabajo que realizamos a diario todos y cada uno de nosotros
 ... Capaz de ver en cada alumno al futuro hombre o mujer que transformará realidades en lo positivo
 ... Formamos un núcleo solido para formar grupos de seres humanos críticos, reflexivos y creativos”
 (Julio Mizzumi Kojima, Written communication, February 14, 2013)

(...This great team did not happen by chance but through the work we—each and every one of us—carry out every day
 ... [The team] is able to see in each student the future man or woman who will transform realities into something positive
 ... We are a solid nucleus able to form groups of critical, reflective, and creative human beings).

Margarita Kojima Villavencio was sixty-two years old when I met her. Her son, Julio Mizzumi, told me of her strength and her passion for gardening and cooking, something that I discovered for myself on my first day in Otatitlán. She keeps her garden fresh and vibrant. Her cooking—particularly her pastry—is exceptional, “¡y tiene una energía...! ¡Y habla...!, ya la vas a conocer” (and she has an energy...! And talks! You will get to know her), Julio told me (Personal communication, May 11, 2011). Doña Mago (see figure 41), as most people call her, is the figure around which Jardín Kojima revolves. Her house is always open and her vitality fills the space.

¹⁵² Family dysfunction often manifests as one of the parents, often the father, being addicted to alcohol and/or prone to promiscuity and exerting violence over the mother. At times, family dysfunction stems from the parents’ inability to provide financial care and emotional support to the child.

Figure 41. Mago Kojima



As mentioned above, the group Yacatecuhtli was formed fifteen years ago. Julio and Belén began the ensemble. Julio first fell in love with *son jarocho* when he was a student in Tlacotalpan. He learned to play *requinto* and *jarana*, sing, and dance by listening to and playing with others at *fandangos*. A few years later, he spent time in San Andrés (Tuxtla region), where his passion and knowledge of the musical tradition continued to grow. He attended *fandangos* and played with Andrés Moreno Nájera, among others:

Anduvimos tocando juntos como unos tres años. De ahí las cosas cambiaron porque cuando te dan la plaza de maestro, cada quien se va a un sitio a trabajar. Pero como queda la semilla y el son jarocho es una música que envuelve muchas pasiones, muchas cosas hermosas, mucha energía, no te puedes deshacer tan fácil de ello. Y yo llegué aquí a mi pueblo con toda esa carga de energía que agarré en Tlacotalpan y fortalecí en Los Tuxtlas —me dieron mi primer trabajo ahí en San Andrés, en una ranchería—. Me chuté todos los *fandangos* de la Virgen de los Remedios, los encuentros de Andrés Moreno, las visitas de Oreja Mocha... Anduvimos con Andrés Moreno un buen rato por ahí. Y ya cuándo te vas a deshacer de toda esa cantidad de vivencias, ¿no? Al contrario, se te va fortaleciendo y llega el momento que quieres dárselo a conocer a otros porque tampoco te vas a quedar con eso guardado. Y ahora lo que estamos

haciendo es provocando que la otra generación, mis hermanos, que son más jóvenes, que le enseñen a los otros: el relevo generacional (Julio Mizzumi Guerrero Kojima, personal communication, May 11, 2011).

(We played together for about three years. The things changed because when you obtain a position as a schoolteacher, you go off to a particular location to work. But the seed remains and since *son jarocho* is music that involves many passions, many beautiful things, and a lot of energy, you cannot get rid of it easily. So I came here, to my village, carrying all this energy I got in Tlacotalpan and strengthened in Los Tuxtlas—where I got my first teaching job, at a ranch in San Andrés. I attended all *fandangos* for the Virgin of Los Remedios, Andrés Moreno’s musical gatherings, [musician] Oreja Mocha’s visits... I hung around with Andrés Moreno for quite a while. It’s impossible to ignore all those experiences, isn’t it? On the contrary, it keeps growing stronger, and you get to the point where you want to share it with others because you are not going to keep it all for yourself. What we are doing now is encouraging the next generation, my younger brothers, to teach to others: it is handing it over to the next generation).

With the idea in mind of handing down to the next generation, Julio, Belén, and Julio’s brothers, Martín and José, initiated a cultural project headquartered in the Kojima family’s household garden, Mago’s backyard. Martín thinks of both the project and the community as symbiotically linked and connected:

Jardín Kojima [es] un espacio donde la gente se puede integrar, es decir, donde se puede integrar la comunidad para poderle transmitir ideas, experiencias. Y el camino es el son jarocho para llegar a esa gente. [...] También tenemos una cuestión con las tortugas, las plantas, el plástico. Hacemos también papel de reciclado, dulces, una serie de actividades que fortalecen nuestro acervo cultural, nuestra tradición oral (Martín Yasuo Guerrero Kojima in *Mano Vuelta* 2011)

(Jardín Kojima [is] a space where people fit in, that is, where members of the community can feel welcomed and we can communicate ideas and experiences. And the road to reach those people is *son jarocho*. The project also involves turtles, plants, and plastic. We also recycle paper, make pastry, carry out a number of activities that strengthen our cultural heritage, our oral tradition).

Thus, Jardín Kojima is a community project by which the Kojima family teaches children to play, sing, dance, and experience *son jarocho*. The project started as workshops for children and expanded to become a project of sustainability that, through recycling, selling pastry and plants can bring in enough revenue for the project to support itself and not depend on institutions. It was Martín who had the idea of recycling, each girl or boy paying for a lesson with a small bag of fourteen or fifteen plastic bottles:

Lo del plástico fue una buena idea por mi parte, el decirle a la banda: te podemos enseñar el son jarocho pero no te podemos cobrar porque es algo que nos pertenece a todos. Estoy en contra de lucrar con el son jarocho y estoy en contra de esas personas que lucran con el son jarocho de esa manera (Personal communication, May 12, 2011)

(Recycling plastic was a good idea of mine, to say to the group: we can teach you *son jarocho*, but we cannot charge you because [*son jarocho*] is something that belongs to us all. I am against profiting from *son jarocho* and I am against those people who cash in on it).

As both a community and an ecological project, Jardín Kojima functions as a powerful tool to create critical awareness. Notions of solidarity, sharing, and exchanging are significant aspects of the ideology on which the project is based. In fact, not charging for teaching others to play is one of the principles many *jaraneros* stand by.¹⁵³ In this regard,

Diego Almazán Parroquín, comments:

Hace diez, once años yo estuve aprendiendo. Después tuve la oportunidad de ir y enseñar a otras personas y pues ahora tenemos la oportunidad de compartir todo eso que hemos aprendido estos años. Compartir y regarlo aquí en Jardín Kojima. Yo creo que eso no tiene comparación. Es lo mejor (Personal communication, May 13, 2011)

(Ten, eleven years ago I was learning. Then I got the opportunity to teach others, and now we have the opportunity to share all that we have learned

¹⁵³ Many groups give *son jarocho* workshops. Those who are hired to teach by institutions such as the Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura receive money. Other professional musicians are paid when they are hired to teach at seminars. Many others teach for free.

over the years. We share and spread it here at Jardín Kojima. There's nothing like it. It's the best).

Revenue from the collection and sale of plastic finances, among other things, musical instruments for the children and the yearly festival that takes place around May 15. Not all fifty children in the project play an instrument. Those who do take one home with them, it belongs to them as long as they practice and keep on playing. Belén and Julio coordinate the project and teach classes. Martín and José teach as well, and are also in charge of the recycling project as well as more recent initiatives such as selling plants and the maintenance of a small aquarium in which they keep turtles and some native fish species (e.g., *juiles* (catfish) from the nearby Papaloapan River. Martín comments:

El acuario fue hecho para matar dos pájaros de un tiro. Una, recolectar tortugas y evitar que se las coman, evitar su extinción. (...) Es algo muy importante a nivel ambiental. Pero también está que las tortugas fueron un atractivo más para que los niños se quedaran realmente aquí porque una jarana, en aquel entonces, no era suficiente para que un niño estuviera en contacto con todas estas ideas. Entonces les tuvimos que meter más ideas y sobretodo llamativas para que a ellos les llamara la atención (Martín Yasuo Guerrero Kojima in *Mano Vuelta* 2011)

(We started the aquarium to kill two birds with one stone. First, we wanted to collect turtles and save them from being eaten, avoid their extinction. This is something very important at an environmental level. Also, the turtles provided interest for the children to help them stick with the project [at Jardín Kojima] because back then, a *jarana* was not enough for a child to be in contact with all these ideas. Thus, we had to come up with attractive ideas to get their attention).

Though the main idea at Kojima centers around the teaching and learning of *son jarocho* music and culture, the deeper meaning of the project is to give children the power of “awareness”: “la labor no está encaminada tanto a formar músicos. Estamos tratando de formar consciencias,” Julio tells me (Personal communication, May 11, 2011)

(the work is not aimed at so much about training musicians. We are trying to raise awareness). Above all, the cultural project seeks to empower children as individuals and community members to increase their ability to have control over their own lives, thereby improving the choices they may have in life. Culture and identity are the most important aspects of this process empowerment. Once children are aware of their own culture, they can build other layers:

Uno de ellos dice, bueno... yo ya puedo escuchar reguetón: mientras yo ya sepa lo que es mi música, ya puedo escuchar lo demás (Julio Mizzumi Guerrero Kojima, personal communication, May 11, 2011)

(One of them says to me, well... I can already listen to reggaeton: as long as I know what my music is, I can listen to everything else).

Self-consciousness through an awareness of cultural heritage constitutes the basis for individual and collective identity at Jardín Kojima. The self is rearticulated through discursive practices, and heritage functions as a bonding element within the collective. The production of both identity and heritage have recourse to the past while being produced in the present.

The statement cited above is telling as the young person is stating his/her awareness of ownership of culture in referring to his/her music, his/her “own culture” or “cultura propia,” a notion that I borrow from Bonfil Batalla to refer to a culture whose material, organizational, symbolic, affective, and intellectual elements are controlled by the social group in its capacity to produce, use, and reproduce it (1991:52–53). Jardín Kojima (see figure 42) provides a space for children to experience Jarocho culture and music, “la música que les pertenece” (the music that belongs to them) (ibid., May 14, 2011).

Figure 42. Children at Jardín Kojima



Classes take place on Saturdays from 4 to 6 pm, two hours that, according to Julio, children do not watch bad programming on TV, do not wander around, do not bother parents, and spend two hours having experiences with the other children. About fifty children are in the program. Several play *jarana*, a few *requinto*, and many, particularly girls, dance. Many will tell you that being part of Jardín Kojima was their idea and not their parents'. Moreover, they not only have a place to learn music and share cultural experiences, but one where they can go whenever they need to.¹⁵⁴

The Jardín Kojima community shares a cultural memory that connects past and present. Its members feed and create traditions that they have deliberately selected and that they perpetuate voluntarily. As Handler and Linnekin say, “tradition refers to an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity” (1984:273). Thus, not everything is handed down to us from the past. There is a lot that is built into the present by the children at this cultural center. The past works as a reference, but not as a

¹⁵⁴ Margarita Kojima keeps her house open for children to spend time there if they need or feel like it.

pattern to follow slavishly. Because of so many participants in the project being children, the closeness of the community, and the small number of people involved, the sense of belonging that these children have is very strong, which helps with Julio, Belén, José, Diego, and Martín passing on their own understanding and practice of *son jarocho*? Other elements that help in this process is the humility and simplicity in the learning/teaching endeavor, how comfortable everybody seems to be in their roles, and the powerful message they believe Jarocho music contains. José Mitsumori Guerrero Kojima says:

Debemos conservar esa música que es nuestra, que es impresionante, maravillosa y que en lo particular, me gusta bastante. Me gusta ver a todos esos señores tocando son jarocho en la tarima; todos esos señores de 70, 80. Te dan fuerza para seguir tocando. Te da mucha fuerza ver a una persona de mucha edad y que todavía sigue bailando y siguen con una fuerza impresionante para tocar el son jarocho. Yo me lleno de todo eso, de toda esa vibra bien bonita que a veces se encierra en el fandango (Personal communication, May 13, 2011)

(We must preserve this music, which is ours, which is awesome, wonderful, and that I really like. I like to see all those gentlemen playing *son jarocho* on the *tarima*, all those gentlemen in their 70s or 80s. They give you strength to keep playing. It gives you a lot of strength to see an old person who still dances and has a lot of strength to play *son jarocho*. All that fills me up, all those beautiful vibes that the *fandango* sometimes has).

And Martín adds:

Lo único que nos queda es luchar por ello y que la gente (...) que tenga la fortuna de estar en nuestras actividades, pues que a la vez también lo transmitan, ese gozo que se siente al entrar aquí al jardín y nuestra meta dentro de unos años es cambiar la conciencia de la gente mediante la cultura, que es el camino para llegar a eso, a ser totalmente independientes ideológicamente, llegar a crear una identidad verdadera, que es lo que nos hace falta para cambiar todo lo cruel que se vive hoy en el mundo, no nada más en México, en el mundo (Mano Vuelta 2011)

(The only thing left is to fight for it [Jardín Kojima] and that those who have the chance to be part of our activities, to pass on the joy one feels when entering Jardín Kojima. Our goal within a few years is to change the consciousness of people through culture, which is the right path to take in

order to be totally independent ideologically, create a true identity, which is what we need to change all the cruelty that exists in the world today, not just in Mexico, but throughout the world).

The “true identity” Martín talks about is that to feel confident and to know how your “own culture” can provide a center of stability, a sense of belonging, and a critical mind that can lead you to a state of happiness.

I borrow the conception of construction and interpretation of community at Jardín Kojima from sociologist Anthony Cohen. As seen in chapter 1, for Cohen, community is “a matter of feeling, a matter which resides in the minds of the members themselves” (2001:21). Community boundaries are constituted by people in interaction, and the reality of such boundaries lies in the meanings people attach to them (ibid., 98). Thus, Jardín Kojima is consciously perceived and constructed as a community by its members. At both the *encuentro* and the cultural center, community refers to a body of people linked by social and cultural processes that take place around the experience of Jarocho music and culture: it is an entity whose members share symbols that create meaning. The Jarocho experience elicits both a sense of belonging to the community and a particular cultural memory that is key in the construction of both self and cultural identity.

An Intimate Encuentro at Jardín Kojima

As a response to massive *encuentros*, Yacatecuhtli looked for a festival format that could better fit with the core idea of a musical gathering: a *fandango*, a get-together among friends or a few musicians with whom to perform—or rather, live—the musical experience, enjoy it without competition and without losing the sense of sharing as has happened with the large *encuentros*. In a sense, the festival at Jardín Kojima was born as

a reaction against the growing trend of festivals and *encuentros* that had turned into staged presentations rather than a group bonding through playing music. According to Julio Mizzumi, for Yacatecuhtli, the *encuentro*'s format of the past no longer existed. He commented:

Sí, un formato que ya cayó en desuso porque, al menos desde nuestra percepción, había una competencia insana en la que [los grupos] traían arreglos muy rebuscados o venían como a exhibirse en el estrado. Te pones a ver y pues lo que nosotros perseguíamos era que se hicieran fandangos como en las décadas anteriores que venían los músicos, se subían a la tarima y todo lo que había en torno a eso (Personal communication, May 11, 2011)

(Yes, a format that has already fallen into disuse because, at least as we see it, there was insane competition in which [groups] brought in very convoluted arrangements or came to show themselves on stage. What we were looking for were *fandangos* as they used to happen in previous decades when musicians would come, come up to the *tarima*, and all that *fandangos* involved).

Like other musicians and *jaraneros* who experienced the early phase of the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan and other *encuentros* in the region, Yacatecuhtli could not avoid referring back to the idea of an event pivoting around collective participation, the sharing of the musical experience, and the connection with other musicians as happened at the *encuentros* in the mid-1980s. Looking for an event that could accommodate the group's articulation of notions of Jarocho music and culture through musical performances, the group experimented with different formats. The year they called the *encuentro* "fandango entre amigos" (*fandango* among friends) many musician-friends attended the event. The fact that formalities typical of stage presentations—such as formal introductions, time constraints, specific numbers of *sones* to performed, and specific criteria concerning repertoire—did not take place was attractive for many of them. This positive response led the group to commit to a small-scale format. Previously, they had organized a festival in

which different groups from the region were invited to perform, which necessitated finding economic support to cover travel expenses, food, and lodging. The uncertainty of the availability of economic resources to cover such expenses, the need to deal with institutions to look for funding, and the fact that musicians came to Otatitlán, performed, and left without any further participation with other musicians or the community at Jardín Kojima—meaning that there was no *fandango* after the formal performances—was disappointing and decisive for the group to organize their next *encuentro* counting on their own resources and on a smaller more local scale:

Llegaban los músicos que venían [al festival], se subían a la tarima y se acababa eso [lo del fandango]. Entonces, bueno, decidimos hacer fandango y de un tiempo para acá utilizamos de pretexto el aniversario de nuestro grupo: llevamos ya trabajando trece años con éste para hacer una reunión de amigos. Invitamos a un grupo nada más. Ese grupo da un concierto, nosotros hacemos una presentación, y ya de ahí se abre el fandango para todo el que quiera venir. Ya no vamos a subirnos al foro. Vamos a reunirnos en el fandango. Y vamos a hacer todo lo que hay en torno a él: vamos a comer, vamos a platicar de los problemas comunes, a tocar, a bailar, a tomar una cerveza o un vino también. Y básicamente por ahí es por donde estamos caminando ahorita (Julio Mizzumi Guerrero Kojima, Personal communication, May 11, 2013)

(Musicians who came [to the festival] arrived, climbed onto the stage and that was it [there was no *fandango*]. Then, well, we decided to organize a *fandango* and since then, we have used the anniversary of our group as a pretext: we have been organizing the gathering with friends for thirteen years now. We only invite one group to hold a concert. We [Yacatecuhtli] also play in the concert, and right after the concert, the *fandango* is open to everyone who wants to participate in it. We no longer perform at stage-oriented festivals. We go to festivals to meet at the *fandango* and take part in everything that involves: we eat, talk about common problems, play, dance, drink a beer or a glass of wine. That is basically what we are into right now).

Julio's comment raises important topics such as the conception of the *fandango* as a community fiesta that includes not only music and dance, but also other aspects of life and culture, and the difference between performing music on the stage and participating

in a *fandango*, or to use Thomas Turino’s terminology, the differences between “participatory music” and “presentational performances.” As we have seen in chapter 3 and in the earlier discussions on the *movimiento jaranero*, the Mexican *son* genre in general, and *son jarocho* in particular, is participatory music when experienced within the context of the *fandango*. This participatory side of *son jarocho* is one of the main features practitioners have been promoting in their objection to presentational performances. The *fandango* embodies social interaction and bonding, participation, inclusiveness, and communitary conceptualizations of sound aesthetics and musical meanings.

The Two-Day Encuentro

May 13. Friday

Everything was ready for the *encuentro* to begin at 7 pm, when the sun is down and the night cools the air. The *jardín* was all tidy and arranged to host about fifty children, some of their family members, a few neighbors from Otatitlán, and musicians—mostly friends and acquaintances—from other parts of Veracruz. The stage was low, about 50 centimeters from the ground. With grass on its surface and short walls made of stone, it seemed more natural than artificially made. It was not imposing, rising just high enough to allow a small seated audience to see the performers. A backdrop of tall corn, sugar cane, and other trees stood behind it (see figure 43).

Figure 43. Stage at Jardín Kojima



Everyone arrived early: girls and boys with their beautiful white shirts (see figure 44), dancing shoes, and colorful skirts, many with their *jaranas*.

Figure 44. Girls at Jardín Kojima



It was a special occasion. I also arrived early, helped with last-minute chores, and spent time with some of the children while we waited for the first talk of the night. Huasteco violinist Osiris Cabellero León talked about *son huasteco*, played two *sones* so the children could hear particular characteristics such as the falsetto singing and violin improvisations, and taught them how to dance the basic steps. Then percussionist Javier Cabrera displayed his collection of Mexican pre-Columbian instruments and talked about them, their sonority, function, and musings about what could have been the music of the Mexica and the Maya.

The screening of the Mano Vuelta media cooperative's¹⁵⁵ documentary *Jardín Kojima* began soon afterwards. The children had been awaiting that moment

¹⁵⁵ Based in Oaxaca, Mano Vuelta actively [perhaps this word isn't necessary?] works in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz to empower communities to own and create media resources and productions [do you mean "to own media resources and make their own independent productions"?] (radio programming, video, and audio recordings). This activist cooperative challenges notions of mass media production [or maybe, "mass media production values and paradigms"] and strongly believes media should be community-based and -owned (Simón Cedillo, personal communication, May 13, 2011).

because the documentary is on their very own project. Many of the children who participated in the documentary watched it for the first time that night. Simón Cedillo from Mano Vuelta was there and after the showing, he gave each child a copy of it.

Unfortunately, the night came to an end sooner than expected. After a few minutes into the documentary, children started to stand up and leave quietly. Simón approached me and softly said: "Ha habido una balacera" (There's been a shooting nearby). There was fear more than disappointment in everyone's faces. The young ones left and the rest of us sat there trying to make sense of it. It was then that I understood several things that had happened in these couple of days in this quiet town that no one had told me was struggling with drug-violence-related issues: why go by car to buy tortillas when the grocery store is two doors down, why cars are parked on only one side of the street, why Julio insisted on me staying at their place rather than at the hotel downtown, why children don't play in the streets at sundown, why women don't sit at their doors. Soft voices. No one raises their voice. Instead of walking, we drove the four blocks back home.

May 14. Saturday

Entonces, vamos a matar un marrano, a comer rico, a tomarnos una cerveza entre amigos. Y a tocar como locos en una fiesta que es para todos.

Este año el grupo invitado es Estanzuela. (...) Son unos amigos, hermanos casi en edad, son amigos-hermanos en ideología y muchas cosas que hemos compartido en común. Ellos tocarán y ya después de que ellos den su concierto empezamos nosotros el fandango (Julio Mizzumí Guerrero Kojima, Personal communication, May 11, 2011)

(We will kill a pig, eat delicious food, and have a beer with friends. And we will play like crazy at a party where everyone is invited. Estanzuela is the group we have invited this year. They are friends of ours, nearly brothers in age, friend-brothers in ideology and in many other things we have in common and share. They will play and, after their concert, we will begin the *fandango*).

We spent most of the morning at Mago Kojima's. The roasting of the pig was taking place in the back yard. They were making *barbacoa de cerdo* (barbecued pork), *cueritos* (pork rind), rice, *frijoles refritos* (refried

beans), and tamales (steamed masa corn) so everyone attending the event could be served dinner. Pastries were shared.

It was about 7 pm when the concert began with two groups of children ranging from from six to fourteen years old. Beginners sang, played, and danced “El colas.” Then, the more advanced played “El zapateado” and “El cascabel” (See figure 45). Soon after, both Estanzuela and Yacatecuhtli—including Osiris

Figure 45. Children playing and dancing at Jardín Kojima



Caballero as guest artist—performed. The *tarima* was on the ground, front and center of the stage. Children’s *zapateado* of *sones* completed the sonic space. (see figure 46). Both groups delivered renditions of *sones jarochos* tastefully performed: a smooth sound system allowed us to hear exquisite *requinto* introductions by Julio Corro and Julio Mizzumi Guerrero, the *leona*’s deep bass, Estanzuela’s *marimbal*, Yacatecuhtli’s *pandero*. Everything and everyone seemed to fit.

Figure 46. Group Estanzuela



Samuel Aguilera, one of the most prestigious *decimistas* (poetic improvisers) in the region, had come to the gathering. His poetry, inspiring and powerful, closed the concert and opened the *fandango*, praised the children at Jardín Kojima, invited the instruments to join in with his improvisation to complete the rhyming and embroidering. Aguilera's poetry slowly wove through the air:

... y llego y me sorprendo, se me llenan los ojos de asombro
 de ver que la tierra fructifica
 y la semilla se vuelve flor sobre las tarimas.
 Entonces mi corazón se estremece porque no es que quiera,
 es que nadie puede evitarlo,
 pero si de los que estamos aquí somos llamados a otro lado,
 sabemos que nuestro canto viejo, nuestra semilla, nuestra sangre,
 no va a perecer
 y no habrá ningún viento que corte lo que se ha sembrado.
 Hoy en los niños siembro y siento futuro.
 Siento requinto, mi voz se vuelve grano (Samuel Aguilera, May 13, 2011)

(... I arrive and am surprised, my eyes are filled with wonder
 to see that the earth bears fruit
 and the seed becomes a flower on the *tarimas*.
 And so, my heart trembles against my will,
 I cannot help it
 but if those of us who are here are called away,
 we know that our old song, our seed, our blood,
 will not perish
 and there wind will blow down what has been sown.
 Today, in the children I sow and feel the future.
 I feel the *requinto*. My voice becomes grain).

Musicians had come from Tuxtepec, from Jáltipan, from Xalapa, and from Veracruz to attend the concert and the *fandango*, small and very pleasant. Many children stayed and participated in the *fandango*. As wonderful as the concert was, the *fandango* felt even more “rooted in the place.” Musicians were positioned around the *tarima* and dancers took turns. Everyone knew the etiquette. It was not about competing but about feeling, collective participation, and sharing knowledge and experience. Beauty. Passion.

Closing

In the sheer humble beauty of these two days of the festival, one can sense the pride in belonging to a group of people that share a common cultural heritage, collective memory, and sense of continuity. No doubt an important intergenerational connection takes place in both the cultural project and the festival. From the multiple motivations for performing Jarocho identity, the one most commonly mentioned at Jardín Kojima is the connection between past and present and the “continuation of the tradition”: the symbolic meaning assigned to this “tradition” delivers a powerful sense of identity, belonging, and legacy.

Through music, Festival Jardín Kojima’s organizers embrace Jarocho culture as a banner for social cohesion, historical continuity, cultural heritage, and musical practices as close to the community as possible. If symbols provide the capacity to make meaning and culture is constituted by symbols, the Jardín Kojima community is culturally meaningful and symbolically significant of Jarocho culture: it allows people to create meaning.

Both the *encuentro* and the Jardín Kojima cultural project articulate a common understanding of Jarocho culture, of collective identity and community. Jarocho music

encloses notions of community, belonging, and a shared past. In it, local knowledge and sensibilities are signified and collectively defined. At Jardín Kojima, place and space matter: they allow for the musical experience to take place. Sheila Whiteley argues that “musical processes take place within a particular space and place, one which is inflected by the imaginative and the sociological, and which is shaped both by specific musical practices and by the pressures and dynamics of political and economic circumstances” (2004:1). Although in this case political and economic circumstances are—to a certain extent—not determined by external actors, the musical processes that take place at Jardín Kojima are determined by both place and space. I believe Jardín Kojima’s positive outcome, coherence, and cohesiveness emerge from its significance in the community, the collective and collaborative participation model, and the experience of the musical and cultural within contexts symbolically tied to notions of tradition and heritage.

Last Thoughts about Presentational vs Participatory, Stages vs *Fandango* in *Encuentros* in the Region

Place and space are decisive in the planning of a festival. Both the physical location and the setting are important in delivering a message of inclusion or exclusion, participation and connection or separation between the performing groups and the audience. Take, for example, the stage. At Jardín Kojima, the unobtrusiveness of the stage and the friendly garden create a sincere invitation for the performance and the gathering. At the Festival de la Huasteca, the giant *tarima* just below the stage welcomes a great number of dancers, while at the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan, there is no *tarima* by the stage for members of the audience to dance on, and in the *fandangos* that

take place after the programmed performances only the few who are near the *tarima* have access to it.

Is the difference in setting arrangements contingent on the number of participants in the musical event? Has the Encuentro de Jaraneros grown so much that any connection with more traditional practice has disappeared? Does the more cohesive and solidary community at Jardín Kojima deliver a stronger sense of connection within a smaller setting and space? How does participatory music adjust to performative settings?

As we have seen, the Encuentro in Tlacotalpan functions as a gathering where anyone may perform: professional, amateur, and semi-amateur musicians. Since *son jarocho* is at its origin participatory, the role of being a musician per se, as Alcántara López argues, does not exist (Personal communication, October 27, 2010): everyone can play, sing, or dance. Nonetheless, differences between performative and participatory occasions are crucial. While *fandangos* are open to everyone, stage performances require different approaches to the arrangement of the music and a planning of the presentation. Turino maintains that in participatory events “the etiquette and quality of *sociality* is granted priority over the quality of the sound per se” (2008:35). While that is true of *fandangos*, in the past, experienced musicians had subtle ways of letting participants know how they were expected to conform to the group’s playing. Alcántara López talks about his own experience:

En un fandango (...) tiene cabida el chaparro, el gordo, el negro, el feo, el blanco, el chino, el zambo. Y yo creo que podríamos añadirle a eso: tiene cabida el que toca menos mal, más o menos mal, regular, el que canta bien, el que canta mal, el que canta más o menos, el que se emborracha, el que... Yo creo que eso es un atractivo. Habrá quien te diga algo, quien te quiera dar un consejo, decirte algo para corregirte.... Al menos en el ámbito jarocho, aunque puedas ser el objeto de burla de medio mundo, difícilmente hoy alguien te va a decir: cállate. Puede ocurrir, pero sería la

menor de las veces. Sin embargo, antes, los señores sí te decían. A mí me tocó de chavo que me taparan la jarana. Estaba tocando yo pésimo. Seguramente estaba yo atravesado o algo así. No me acuerdo. Pero sí me acuerdo que se volteó y me puso la mano en las cuerdas. No sé si la sigan haciendo. Creo que también ahora estas buenas formas, estas maneras correctas que hay que cada vez le dicen a la gente que hay que ser más políticamente correcto tal vez le hayan atenuado ese impulso (ibid.)

(A *fandango* (...) accommodates the short, the fat, the black, the ugly, the white, the Chinese, the *zambo*.¹⁵⁶ And I think we could add to that there is room for playing less badly, more or less badly, just OK, for those who sing well, badly, OK, for those who get drunk... I think that attracts people. Some may tell you something, others might want to give you advice or say something to correct you.... At least in the Jarocho milieu, even if you can be mocked by many, it would be difficult for someone to say: shut up! It could occur, but very rarely. However, in the past old *jaraneros* did tell you. When I was very young, someone put his hand over the strings of my *jarana* for me to stop playing. I was playing terribly. I was probably playing out of time or something. I don't remember. But I do remember that he turned and put his hand on the strings. I don't know if they still do things like that [nowadays]. These new norms of political correctness may have attenuated that impulse).

As Alcántara López comments, such internal control mechanisms are not happening today. So, how to negotiate a participatory music transformed into a performative one? How to reconcile participatory practice with massification and present-day performance demands? Does informing people about the differences between performing on stage and participating offstage solve the problem? Commenting on the need to differentiate between the *fandango* and the stage, Ricardo Perry states:

En el *fandango* no hay grupos sino músicos alrededor de la tarima. En el escenario hacemos arreglos, se muestra un trabajo creativo a partir del son jarocho con esa libertad que se tiene de que nadie te puede decir que no lo hagas, pero que no es *fandango* (personal communication, May 9, 2011)

(In the *fandango*, there are no musical groups: there are musicians around the *tarima*. On stage [musical groups] play their musical arrangements, show the work they have created using *son jarocho* as a starting point and with a freedom that no one could argue against. But this is not *fandango*).

¹⁵⁶ Racial term used in Colonial times to identify individuals of African and indigenous heritages.

While this is clearly understood by some, others may confuse the dynamics of Jarocho musical practices.

In summary, over the thirty-five years of *movimiento jaranero* and *son jarocho* revival, musicians and intellectuals have changed the *son jarocho*'s sonic landscape. They have brought to the forefront traditional ways of performing this musical expression. They have also experimented with new arrangements, instrumentation, and playing styles while searching for a new Jarocho voice able to convey new identities, aesthetics, and needs. Old and new coexist in *son jarocho*, which symbolizes heritage, tradition, cultural values, community, and continuity. For now, *son jarocho* is a powerful vehicle for social consciousness. *Encuentros* and cultural projects are modes of cultural production. As they are informed by heritage, they add value to the cultural forms that are performed, imagined, and circulated while creating something new in the present.

CHAPTER 6. RE-CONTEXTUALIZING TRADITIONS: FANDANGOS, FESTIVALS, AND CULTURAL PROJECTS IN TIERRA CALIENTE

Historically, Tierra Caliente has been one of the regions of Mexico that has been most affected by the abandonment of traditional culture by both government institutions and inhabitants of the region.¹⁵⁷ Only since 2000 have some state initiatives taken shape in the form of programs seeking the revitalization of traditional culture.

I begin this chapter by briefly describing the region of Tierra Caliente and giving an overview of cultural projects in the region since 2000, particularly Música y Baile Tradicional A.C. Two main sections follow. In the first, I describe a *fandango* in Huetamo, Michoacán as an example of the re-contextualization of traditions that is taking place in Tierra Caliente as well as in other Mexican regions. In the second, I discuss El Tecolote Cultural Center and the VI Festival de Tierra Caliente in Arcelia, Guerrero as part of the process of revitalization of traditional music in the region and the use of this music in the construction of collective identities.

The Tierra Caliente Region

Tierra Caliente occupies a territory straddling northwestern Guerrero State, southeastern Michoacán State and southwestern Mexico State (figure 47).¹⁵⁸ This region

¹⁵⁷ See Castillo Aguirre (2000:204), Estrada Castañón (1994), and Martínez Ayala (2004).

¹⁵⁸ Tierra Caliente includes municipalities (cities and their surrounding land) in the three states. In Guerrero these are Ajuchitlán del Progreso, Arcelia, Coyuca de Catalán, Cutzamala de Pinzón, Ciudad Altamirano, San Miguel Totolapan, Tlalchapa, Tlapehuala, and Zirándaro de los Chávez. The municipalities in Michoacán are Apatzingán, Ario de Rosales, Buenavista, Gabriel Zamora, Parácuaro, Nueva Italia, La Huacana, Churumuco, Carácuaro, Huetamo, Madero, Nocupétaro, San Jerónimo, San Lucas, Tepalcatepec, Tuzantla, Tiquicheo, Turicato, and Tzitzio. Mexico includes Amatepec, Tejupilco, and Tlatlaya (Alanís 1998:89–90; Calderón Mólgora 2001:234–235).

is situated at 300 to 500 meters in altitude, surrounded by two mountain ranges, the Sierra Madre del Sur and the Eje Volcánico Transversal, with temperatures between 77°F and 104°F throughout the year. The region's very hot temperatures and dry tropical climate are strong contributing factors to the region's cultural idiosyncrasies and to the Terracalienteño lifestyle.

Figure 47. Location of the Tierra Caliente region (States of Guerrero, Michoacán, and México)



The most populated cities and villages in Tierra Caliente are located around the middle course of the Balsas River¹⁵⁹ (figure 48) and the middle and lower courses of its tributary, the Tepalcatepec River in the valley of Apatzingán, an area where land conditions are favorable for agriculture and the Balsas River provides fishing. Far from these urban centers along the river are scattered smaller villages and ranches.

¹⁵⁹ See Dehouve (2002:21) for more on the Balsas River and its main subdivisions.

Figure 48. The Tierra Caliente region and the Balsas River



(<http://www.maps-mexico.com/maps/guerrero-state-600x450.gif>)

Minimal industrial development and a reliance on agriculture make Tierra Caliente an economically marginal region within Guerrero. The area's three main geographic features—the Sierra Madre del Sur mountains, the Balsas River, and the lowlands—present a landscape of mainly pine and deciduous ilex forest, grassy pastureland, and irrigation farming (melon, watermelon, lemon, papaya, mango, sorghum, and sesame seeds) (Alanís 1998:91–92; Dehouve 2002:21–22). Lack of road infrastructure makes Tierra Caliente difficult to access.

Of the several ethnic groups present in Tierra Caliente before the arrival of Europeans, the Tarascan (or P'urhépecha) were dominant until the Mexica gradually conquered Guerrero in the middle of the 15th century (Espinosa Quiroz and Arias Castillo 2002:43; Dehouve 2002:32–39; Maldonado Gallardo 2001:439). The indigenous population fell drastically in the 16th century with the arrival of the Spanish and the

African slaves they brought in to work their cattle ranches, mines, and estates.¹⁶⁰ The mestizaje process was swift, and by the 17th century, Tierra Caliente was a “tierra de mulatos” (land of mulattos) (Martínez Ayala 2004:11) and *pardos*, the result of the intermixing that took place between Africans—mainly from Cape Verde, Angola, and the Congo—Spaniards, and/or Indians (Aguirre Beltrán 1981:241). Mulattos became part of the economic life and labor force of the region:

En el transcurso del mundo colonial cuando se implantó el sistema de castas para el resguardo de los blancos descoloridos, así como también en los primeros decenios de vida independiente, los mulatos y sus parientes desempeñaron papeles estelares en el ramo de servicios, barreteros, pastores, arrieros, sirvientes domésticos, peones, artesanos, músicos, tamboreros, soldados, y diluidos ellos serían—si no los únicos—, si de los principales actores en las diversas temporadas del fandango, entendiéndolo éste como vivencia-espectáculo. (...) Con todo, en ambas dimensiones, urbana y rural, se brindaba un escenario de primera a los mentados personajes (Ochoa Serrano 1997:133–134)

(During colonial times when the caste system was introduced to protect the *blancos descoloridos* (bleached white people), and in the first decades of the Independence period, mulattos and their families carried out stellar roles in the branches of services, pick miner, shepherds, muleteers, domestic servants, farmhands, artisans, musicians, drummers, soldiers, and they would be—if not the only ones—the main actors in the various *fandango* seasons, *fandango* understood as experience-spectacle (...) All in all, in both urban and rural settings, the situation was excellent for the above-mentioned).

¹⁶⁰ As a consequence of overwork and introduced diseases, great numbers of Indians died during the decades following the Conquest. According to Carroll, Mexico’s population had reached 22 million by the time Hernán Cortés entered the country in 1519. By 1610 the population had diminished by more than 21 million (2001:31). In spite of the New Laws issued by the Spanish Crown in 1542 to protect the Indians, exploitation and violation of the rights of Indians continued. The Mexican indigenous population reached its lowest point between 1600 and 1650 and the importation of slaves from Africa was accelerated make up for the resulting shortfall in the labour pool. Colin Palmer estimates that the total number of slaves sent to Hispanic America was 224,205, out of which the minimum entering the Viceroyalty of New Spain (which included much of the southern United States and what is now Mexico and Central America, as well as the Philippines and the Caribbean) easily could have been more than 150,000 (1976:30). The ninety-year period of 1550–1640 was the most active in terms of the number of slaves entering New Spain and a 1646 census indicates the presence of 35,089 Africans and 116,229 Afro-descendants there (Bennett 2003:1). From that date to Independence in 1810, the slave population declined while the population of free blacks grew steadily and by 1810 numbered approximately 10 percent of the total population (*ibid.*, 1). The Mexican Constitution banned slavery and the slave trade in 1839 (de la Serna 2001:152).

At present, indigenous,¹⁶¹ European and mixed populations co-exist.

The Balsas River was the main communication route in the region until the mid-20th century for the exchange of goods and musical traditions. It has been vital in the region and has conditioned Terracalenteño life and culture over the centuries.

Terracalenteño *sones*, for example, are referred to as *sones del Balsas* (*sones* of the Balsas [River]): *sones de tamborita*, *sones del Tepalcatepec* (*sones* of the Tepalcatepec [River]), and *sones de arpa cacheteada* or *planecos*. As mentioned in chapter 2, similarities in repertoires and instrumental ensembles between *sones de tamborita* and *sones de arpa cacheteada* suggest that these subgenres shared a common root.

The Terracalenteño *son* has been one of the *son* subgenres whose reach has been largely limited to its region. It was particularly popular in Tierra Caliente during the first half of the 20th century. During that period, itinerant musicians circulated through the region to play at festive life-cycle occasions, patron saint celebrations, and other events throughout the year such as La Candelaria on February 2 and El día San Juan (Saint John's Day) on June 24. Musicians learned from each other, played together, and even competed amongst themselves.¹⁶² Towards the 1960s, changes in social conditions and musical tastes contributed to the reawakening of traditional music. Since the mid-1990s,

¹⁶¹ Tarascans, Nahuas, Matlatzincas, and Ocuiltecos in Michoacán State, and Mixtecs, Nahuas, Amuzgos, and Tlapanecos in Guerrero State.

¹⁶² One such competition was called *los bancos*, literally the benches. In the 1950s, when several groups gathered at fiestas to play, the first to arrive tuned up, thus choosing the tuning pitch—which often did not correspond with A=440 since musicians tend to prefer a lower tuning. The next group to arrive would sit on the bench next to them and not only had to tune to the same pitch, but also reply to them by playing a piece in the given musical style and tonality. Each group would take turns playing, one piece at a time. For example, if the last piece was a *son* in D or a waltz in B-flat, the next piece would have to follow suit. If there were rivalries between musicians, *los bancos* were a good opportunity to battle out their differences and to prove themselves as musicians. Musicians who could not play in the given key were viewed in a negative light. *Sones* and *gustos* from the Balsas area, for example, are not easy to play in tonalities foreign to the musical style such as D minor, G minor, C major, or F major.

and particularly since 2000, a few non-profit organizations and institutional projects have been working to revitalize traditional Terracalenteño music.

Cultural Initiatives and Festivals in the Region since 2000: The Música y Baile Tradicional Project

Perhaps due to the difficult geographic and climatic conditions of Tierra Caliente as well as stereotyped images of its inhabitants as aggressive and belligerent,¹⁶³ the region has not received much government attention over the years. However, since 2000 a few cultural initiatives have slowly been taking shape, such as the Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de Tierra Caliente (Program for the Cultural Development of Tierra Caliente). Funded by CONACULTA, the Instituto Guerrerense de la Cultura (Cultural Institute of Guerrero), and the Secretaría de Cultura de Michoacán (Department of Culture of Michoacán), this program was established in 2003 to promote Terracalenteño culture. It put on conferences, published books and CDs, and organized musical gatherings. A branch of this program, the Programa de Revitalización de la Música de Tierra Caliente, was created in 2005 for the revitalization of traditional music. This branch was funded by the sources mentioned above as well as by cultural institutions¹⁶⁴ from Colima, Jalisco, and Mexico (Martínez de la Rosa 2010:282). Aside from educational projects such as music and dance workshops, cultural events organized by the program included the music and dance festival Encuentro de Músicos y Bailadores de Tierra Caliente (2006 to 2009), a competition of photography of Tierra Caliente (2006 to 2009), concerts honoring the work of traditional musicians from the region (Homenaje

¹⁶³ See Martínez Ayala (2008) for an excellent discussion on the construction of stereotyped images of Tierra Caliente and the Terracalenteños.

¹⁶⁴ The Secretaría Cultural de Colima (Department of Culture of Colima), the Secretaría Cultural de Jalisco (Department of Culture of Jalisco), and the Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura (Cultural Institute of Mexico [State]).

“Juan Reynoso” from 2008 to 2010), teachers’ conferences (Encuentros de Formadores de Tierra Caliente, from 2008 to 2013), as well as books, CDs, and video productions.¹⁶⁵

Another significant effort in the revitalization of Terracalienteño traditional music has been that of the non-profit organization Música y Baile Tradicional A.C., set up in 2003 by cultural promoters, researchers, and musicians David Durán Naquid, Jorge Amós Martínez Ayala, and Alejandro de la Rosa, among others. Through publications on Terracalienteño traditional music and dance, field recordings, and CD productions, they began to reveal the cultural diversity of Tierra Caliente and the need to “preserve” what was left of it by gathering memories of older musicians scattered sparsely throughout the region.

In an effort to connect old and young generations, they organized in December 2003 the first Festival Cultural de Tierra Caliente, which took place each year until 2007. This festival combined music and dance workshops taught by musicians from the region, concerts, and *fandangos*. The main idea behind the festival was to create a space for musicians and students interested in learning traditional music to gather and share the experience. Each festival paid tribute to different older musicians.¹⁶⁶ In a given festival, anywhere between five and eighteen regional musical ensembles were featured. In an

¹⁶⁵ Since 2008, the Programa de Revitalización de la Música de la Tierra Caliente (Program for the Revitalization of the Music of Tierra Caliente) became the Programa Regional de Salvaguarda de la Música, la Versificación y el Baile Tradicional de Tierra Caliente (Regional Program for the Safeguarding of Traditional Music, Poetry, and Dance of Tierra Caliente), which was embedded into the Programa Nacional para la Salvaguarda (National Program for the Safeguarding), based on UNESCO’s Convención para la Salvaguarda del Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage), signed by the Mexican government in 2003. For further details, see Martínez de la Rosa (2010).

¹⁶⁶ The first festival (2003) was dedicated to guitarist and singer Benito Cástulo de la Paz (1927-1911). It took place in the communities of San Antonio el Rosario (Mexico), and in Arcelia and Tlapehuala (Guerrero) (Jorge Amós Martínez Ayala, Personal Communication, November 26, 2010). I attended the festival in 2006, which took place in Churumuco, Zicuirán, and Arteaga, Michoacán, and paid tribute to violinist Leandro Corona (1907-2009).

effort to bring exposure to different musicians from different communities, the festival changed location yearly.

The festival was sponsored by COLMICH¹⁶⁷ and by some of the local municipalities in which the festival took place. During my interview with Martínez Ayala, he harshly criticized the lack of institutional support for the project *Música y Baile Tradicional A.C.* at large and the Festival Cultural de Tierra Caliente in particular (Personal communication, November 26, 2010).

While the festival helped with the promotion of traditional music and to connect musicians and musical groups in the region, the educational efforts did not reach the expected goal: since music lessons were an isolated effort with little or no continuity outside the festival, children did not continue learning throughout the year. To address this problem, in 2005, *Música y Baile Tradicional A.C.* implemented a summer music camp, *Música para guachit@s*, in which young people were offered daily music and dance lessons for two weeks. The idea behind this project was, in Martínez Ayala's words:

tratar de fortalecer a la música a través de la práctica entre los jóvenes, entre los niños. Creo yo que la única manera de que esto se de entre niños y jóvenes es a través de lo lúdico, que sea divertido, que sea gratificante para ellos tocar y no lo vean como un acto escolar o como un discurso hueco: la identidad regional, la música guerrerense o la música michoacana, sino [...] que en primera instancian digan, bueno, yo toco esto porque es divertido, es bonito. Y ya que crezcan un poco ya se van a dar cuenta de los significados profundos que tiene la música (ibid.)

(to try to strengthen the music through its practice among young people, among children. I think that the only way to do this with children and young people is through playfulness, that [they feel] playing [music] is fun and rewarding, and don't look at it as a school task or as hollow discourse:

¹⁶⁷ From 2002 to 2007, COLMICH (El Colegio de Michoacán A.C.), one of the largest universities in Michoacán state, was instrumental in researching and cataloging the historical and cultural patrimony of Tierra Caliente from Michoacán through its Proyecto Tepalcatepec.

as regional identity, music from Guerrero or Michoacan but rather... that they primarily could say, well, I play it because it is fun, it is nice. And as they get a little older they will realize the profound meanings that music has.)

Música y Baile Tradicional A.C. opened the El Huerto cultural center in Morelia, Michoacán in March 2011. This represented a significant step forward in the educational effort. El Huerto is both a school offering lessons¹⁶⁸ throughout the year and a center for traditional music and culture. They teach music (mostly *sones*) from the Michoacán and Guerrero parts of Tierra Caliente.

The summer music camp continues to be a main cultural event in the promotion and exchange of Terracalenteño culture, and a fundamental source of connection between young and old generations. In the morning, summer camp participants¹⁶⁹ attend music and dance lessons. Each student attends three different classes and all are encouraged to learn to dance. There is also a workshop on poetic improvisation (*versificación*). In the afternoons, they travel to different communities to meet musicians and musical groups with whom they spend the rest of the day and play in a *fandango*. In 2011, for instance, the camp took place in Turicato, Michoacán, where several traditional musicians and dancers live. From there, students traveled to nearby communities to meet, spend time, and play with groups such as Los Capoteños (who live in the community of El Capote), Los Jaraberos de las Cieneguillas (in Cieneguillas de en Medio), Los Jilguerillos del Huerto (in Cieneguillas del Huerto), Los Reales de Michoacán and Los Hermanos Quevedo (both groups in Puruarán).

Since 2000, a few private and official initiatives have addressed the promotion of the culture of Tierra Caliente, including the emergence over the ten years of cultural

¹⁶⁸ Violin, guitar, *guitarra de golpe*, *vihuela*, harp, and *tamborita*, as well as dance.

¹⁶⁹ Sixty to one hundred children aged 9 to 17.

centers and music schools.¹⁷⁰ Such centers are integrative spaces in which culture from the Tierra Caliente of Michoacán and Guerrero, particularly music and dance, is experienced, promoted, transmitted, and recreated. As I discuss later in this chapter, El Tecolote has been another important cultural center in the region.

Re-contextualizing Traditions around the *Tarima (Tabla)*: A *Fandango* in Huetamo

In this section I focus on the importance of the *tarima* (the wooden platform on which *sones* are danced), known as the *tabla* in this particular region, as a key element within the experience of the Mexican *son*. The *tarima*, which becomes a musical instrument through the dancers' footwork, is central to the *fandango* and has been appropriated by *son* musicians and dancers as a symbolic representation of community. Dance was one of the performative aspects of Mexican *son* that experienced the greatest decline in the de-contextualization process the genre has undergone since the 1940s. Hence, at present, the dancing of *sones* has been reclaimed as a marker of local, regional, and cultural identity, and functions as a powerful element in the re-contextualization of the musical tradition, which I discuss in this chapter as the process in which actors draw from existing traditions and practices and relocate them in time and space. As an example of this re-contextualization process, I describe, with reference to my field notes, a trip by a group of musicians from Morelia to Huetamo, Michoacán to attend a *fandango* that took place around a *tarima* that they "planted" over a hole in the ground (referred to in Spanish as *plantar la tabla*). This may be understood as an example of Kirshenblatt-

¹⁷⁰ A few music schools and cultural centers have opened in Tierra Caliente in Guerrero where there were none when I first visited the region in 2003. Some of these centers are La Tortolita cultural center in Tlapehuala, run by Pedro Paredes Chamú; Centro Cultural Las Zirandas in Zirándaro de los Chávez; Centro Cultural Hugo Salmerón, Tlapehuala, run by Guillermo Nájera Flores; and El Tecolote, Arcelina. In Michoacán, the main cultural endeavours are Centro Cultural El Huerto in Morelia and Claudio Naranjos' cultural project in Apatzingán, where he utilizes public spaces such as parks and plazas as his teaching space.

Gimblett's argument of production of heritage: a vital new product with added cultural value being created in the present out of resources from the past (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:369–373).

Fandangos, Contexts, and the Tarima

As in other Mexican regions, *fandangos* in Tierra Caliente were rural in origin. Town fiestas hardly took place that did not include a *fandango*. The absence of electricity,¹⁷¹ television, and radio in rural areas well into the 20th century¹⁷² shaped celebrations as much as other aspects of people's lives. *Fandangos* were the place to socialize, find a mate, make friends, and eat and drink with foreigners, acquaintances, and buddies. *Fandangos* were the place where a person could let their hair down and have a multi-sensorial experience of dancing, playing, watching people, and listening. In short, they provided important opportunities to be with others.

Patron saint days, weddings, and other life-cycle celebrations and festivities were the perfect occasions for *fandangos*. Well-known musicians such as Juan Reynoso Portillo (1912–2007), Cástulo Benítez de la Paz (1927–2012), and Natividad Leandro “El Palillo” (1929–), among others, mentioned how music was part of the entertainment within the communities and how musical groups were essential in any kind of cultural

¹⁷¹ Ruiz comments that in Andalucía, Spain in the 18th and at least the first half of the 19th century, *fandangos* that took place in private homes were called *bailes de candil* (oil lamp fiestas) after the type of lighting used in the space where the *fandango* took place. At rural *fandangos* in Mexico, the space was lit with candles or an oil lamp (2014:27–28). As it was only in 1881 that a public electricity service was implemented in Mexico City and electrical lamps installed, we can assume that *fandangos* prior to that time took place by the light of candles or oil lamps, if they were lit at all.

¹⁷² Sound mechanical reproduction began in Mexico with the first sale of a gramophone in 1893, and the first radio broadcast was aired in 1923. By 1926, Mexico had thirteen radio stations. The boom came in 1930 with the inauguration of the XEW radio station, which was owned, as later would be the powerful TV station and present-day media giant Televisa, by the Azcárraga family (Rubenstein 2000: 644–645). The first Mexico City television station started broadcasting in 1950 and by 1963 more than a million Mexicans had television sets. As with radio, television broadcasting was well developed in Mexico before it became available everywhere else in the country (ibid., 662).

event, at least during the first half of the 20th century. Urban *fandangos* also existed in colonial times, as is evidenced by Martínez Ayala's description of a 1746 *fandango* in the city of Valladolid, Michoacán (2001b:368–373).

By the late 1950s, many of the original rural contexts in which *sones* were performed had disappeared. Cultural politics during the post-revolutionary nationalist period affecting the film, radio, and recording industries, as well as social conditions in general, contributed to the near-extinction of some regional *son* subgenres, while the promotion of others resulted, in several instances, in their transformation and de-contextualization to fit urban scenarios.

These new urban scenarios resulted in new playing and singing styles and practices in which dancing on the *tarima*—as both a musical and a participatory element—was no longer considered part of the musical ensemble or essential to a *son* performance. Since the end of the 1980s, *sones* have been regaining social and cultural relevance as they have come to be consciously embraced as an embodiment of cultural identity and community. This revival is infusing new life into the organizing of *fandangos* as a community expression in which *sones* are performed instrumentally, sung, and danced. If one of these elements is not present, the musical genre undergoes a de-contextualization process, changing its social, cultural, and symbolic meaning.

Through this process of revival, the *son* community—musicians, audiences, promoters, and researchers—are claiming both the text and the context of *son* as roots music. Music, dance, and poetry are being re-contextualized around the *tarima* in scenarios where the musical tradition is reintroduced to the community. Meanings of elements and actors within the *son* experience are being transferred from (a) past and

transformed in (a) present. As in other cultural revitalization movements, *son*'s practitioners have chosen distinctive emblems,¹⁷³ which in this case is the dancing on the *tarima* (see figure 49).

Figure 49. David Durán's dancing feet



A *tarima* is a wooden platform set over dirt or cement and measuring anywhere from 50 cm x 50 cm to 10 m x 5 m with a height ranging from 10 cm to 30 cm. When dancers perform on the *tarima*, the rhythmic patterns sounded by their feet are considered part of the musical arrangement and play an essential role within the instrumental ensemble. These dimensions vary for different *son* subgenres as well as local styles. In

¹⁷³ With reference to the Peruvian urban panpipe movement of the mid-1980s, Thomas Turino comments how young mestizos in urban cities chose the *siku* as a distinctive emblem “in combination with styles and aesthetics of performance that, initially, fit most closely with the predominant musical values of the mainstream society” (1993:153).

Tierra Caliente in particular, dimensions range from 60 cm to 70 cm wide, 1.5 m to 2 m long, and 10 cm to 30 cm in height.

The *tarima* is the site sitting at the center of the fiesta around which musicians, dancers, and the audience gather. It is the resonator that, symbolically, embraces the past and present through a sonic, physical, and affective experience. The *tarima* embodies community and its importance is reaffirmed with each unique performance.

Drawing on Qureshi's argument that musical instruments are sites of meaning (2000:811), I argue that at present, the role of the *tarima* as a vital element within the tradition is being reaffirmed as a cultural symbol that articulates meaning and acts as a site where cultural and social memory are deposited. The *tarima* connects individual experiences with communal practices in sites where the Mexican *son* is revitalized in community contexts.

This meaning of the *tarima* has not been the case since it was documented by Enrique Barrios de los Ríos at the end of the end of 19th century as a wooden platform on which dancers would deliberately create percussive sounds to accompany and complement the music (Jaúregui 2008:67). Thus, its rebirth as a musical instrument of symbolic significance in both the *fandango* and in musical practice is one facet of the revival of the Mexican *son*: music, poetry, and dance are being re-contextualized around the *tarima*.

The Construction of Social Identities through Dance

In attempts to re-contextualize the tradition, or at least bring back as many elements as possible (dance, music, and poetry centered around the *tarima*), the *fandango* has become a statement of roots, identity, and ownership of one's culture. In cultivating

their awareness about the importance of regaining control of cultural practices and in taking the view that all aspects of traditional *son* are vital to the genre, practitioners engage in cultural politics.

The revitalization of the *son* experience entails a connection with the past, which brings a powerful element into the practice. Three generations of musicians may be playing or dancing together at a *fandango* (see figure 50). The oldest might dance with the youngest. Everyone feels that the tradition belongs to them, that they are part of it, that they carry it out, that they will hand it over. Each is an actor in this re-contextualization, which gives rise to new contexts and exercises the power that reclamation gives to these new practitioners in Mexican traditional music cultures.

Figure 50. Dancing at El Tecolote



Bauman and Briggs¹⁷⁴ (1990:77) argue that both meaning and context emerge from ongoing social practice, performance being a mode of social production. I thus extrapolate that re-contextualizing a tradition activates the power of social production and exercises the power of “an act of control” (ibid., 76). It legitimates the tradition and validates our present, creating a sense of continuity and connection with the past that regrounds our sense of community and cultural identity. It challenges other musics imposed by the mass media and signifies the musical experience as a healer for a damaged society.

In my recent fieldwork in different Mexican regions I witnessed the dancing of *sones* as the core of the fiesta. The dance codifies and negotiates social identities and ideologies: it is a powerful means to ideological re-appropriation of the tradition. As mentioned in chapter 1, social identity refers to aspects of the self that are determined by the social group to which the individual belongs (Brewer 2001:118). In the case of Terracalenteño dancing, in the shared social experiences that such membership to the group implies, the emphasis is on “the acquisition of customs, beliefs, and ideologies that are associated with belonging to a particular social group” (ibid.).

The dancing of *sones* also signals the importance of dance expressions as a powerful force “in the continuing social construction and negotiation of race, gender, class, and nationality, and their hierarchical arrangements” (Desmond 1993:39). In this particular case, with their dance, individuals in the group enhance elements within the re-contextualization process to make the group distinctive from others, “at the same time

¹⁷⁴ Bauman and Briggs deal with the study of verbal art in the social interaction between performers and audiences. They are concerned with the study of language as indexical meaning—rather than solely referential or symbolic—as it occurs at discourse, and the assumption that speech is heterogeneous and multifunctional. I am applying their ideas to musical performance.

enhancing uniformity and cohesion within the same group” (Turner et al. in Brewer 2001:119).

In general, when dances move from the participatory to presentational, they often go through a process of standardization and stylization, losing improvisation capacities. In participatory contexts, *sones* are grounded in an interaction between dancers and musicians, allowing for individual freedom and creativity. Mexican musicians and promoters are aware of the fact that every transmission is a transformation, losing and gaining something in the process. When re-contextualizing takes place, the new habitat brings new conditions and elements that are incorporated into the musical tradition. In this case, re-contextualizing implies not only the introduction of a form or style into a different context in time and place, but the infusion of meaning into the experience through musical and dance particularities. As Hanninen argues, both sonic and contextual criteria are key to the process and the essence of re-contextualization (2003:63).

Re-contextualizing: The “Planting” of the Tabla, and the Dance

Field Notes (June 11, 2011)- Traveling from Morelia to Huetamo, Michoacán, for a *fandango*

We leave early in the morning from Morelia, Michoacán. We gathered at El Huerto cultural center for 8 am. The trip ahead is a five-hour drive through the rough Sierra Madre Occidental mountains. The *tarima* is on top of the minivan. All other instruments are packed inside: harp, *guitarra de golpe*, violins, guitar, and *tamborita*. It is five of us in one car and four in another. From the plateau where Morelia is situated we drive through the mountains to later descend to Huetamo, in Tierra Caliente, “el fondillo del mundo” or the end of the world as it is also called. We stop a couple of times along the way. As soon as we begin to descend, the green of the mountains fades away. As we enter Tierra Caliente, the soundscape also changes. Villages and

small towns do too. They are untidy, not particularly charming. You know you are in Tierra Caliente because of the men who pass by wearing the particularly Terracalenteño hat, unique in shape, unmistakable (see figure 51).

Figure 51. Musicians Angel Huipio (guitar) and Francisco Ortega (violin) at the *fandango*



It is around 3 pm when we arrive. It is a sleepy summer afternoon and not much is happening at that hour in Huetamo. It is June. If it rains, it will be at night. The water will refresh the air and help to calm the screaming dry soil.

David leads the way. He knows where the *fandango* will be held and that's where we are heading. Rosita turns fifteen today and she has asked for a "traditional" *fandango* to celebrate. Rather than a gathering of two hundred people, a fancy bride-like dress, and music provided by a DJ, a *banda* (band), or a mariachi—if not all three—she has chosen to have traditional music from Tierra Caliente. Los Jilguerillos del Huerto is the main group leading the event, although any other group in town or from nearby towns may come and play as well.

We are the first ones to arrive. The family has prepared food and drinks for this celebration of music and life around the *tarima*. They have set some chairs and tables near the backyard's western wall. The back and center of the

enclosed space is empty for now, waiting to be filled. The *tarima* is the first instrument that is brought in. David and Martín carefully choose the spot where it will be *plantada* ("planted"): under the big tree towards the back wall. As soon as the spot has been chosen, the "planting" begins. They start digging the hole in the ground.

It is at least 30°C. Others join the group. "El Zurdo de Tiquicheo"¹⁷⁵ brings out his violin. He is 74, but looks at least twenty years younger, which is something I have often seen in Tierra Caliente. He tells me he learned to play the music of the region as an adult because he loved the music. I don't think I have ever seen a violinist playing backwards, that is, holding the violin on the right shoulder and the bow in the left hand. When I ask him if he had changed the strings, bridge, and sound post to accommodate his left-handed playing, he says that he originally did, but change it back because he could never share his violin with anyone in the *fandangos* or play the violins of others. Instead, he relearned his playing to be able to do it as a right-handed player does.

Alain, guitarist and singer with Los Jilguerillos del Huerto, takes up his guitar. El Zurdo and Alain play a few slow waltz-like tunes in 3/4 meter from the *piezas* repertoire¹⁷⁶ of Tierra Caliente. It is beautiful. Martín, David, and Rosita's father continue with the digging. Children are around, playing. One of them lies down inside the *tarima*, which is upside-down on the ground. Seeing him lying there while the others dig a hole is jarring: his body inside the *tabla* resembles a corpse in a coffin ready to be buried, just as the *tabla* is waiting to be planted, two bodies becoming part of the soil, the dance and the music that taproot.

It takes a while to dig a hole three feet deep and two feet wide hole. When it seems like it might be finished, they place the *tabla* over it and check its resonance. Not quite yet. They dig a bit more, and finally, the *tabla* is well set (see figures 52, 53, 54, and 55).

¹⁷⁵ Nickname for left-handed (*zurdo*) violinist Epifanio Merlán Granados, from Tiquicheo, a small town near Huetamo.

¹⁷⁶ *Piezas* actually refers to short instrumental or vocal compositions that include waltzes, *boleros*, *pasodobles*, *danzones*, *danzonetes*, tangos, marches, polkas, foxtrots, and swing.

Figure 52. Planting the *tabla*



Figure 53. Planting the *tabla*



Figure 54. Planting the *tabla*



Figure 55. Planting the *tabla*



David makes it sound with his bare feet. He is a great dancer. He tells me how he used to make his living touring with a folkloric ballet troupe and teaching folkloric dance. In 1993 he was invited to teach in the small town of San Lucas in Tierra Caliente. It was then that a schoolteacher, Daniel Magaña Infante, invited him to judge a traditional dance competition that the middle school in San Lucas was organizing as part of the school's anniversary activities. After a comment David made at the end of the competition about how uncomplicated the dancing seem to be, he was challenged to dance with traditional dancers accompanied by a Terracalenteño ensemble. It was that experience that brought him to realize that he was unable to execute the intricacies of the interlocking patterns required of the dancer in connection with the *tamborita* or or engage his dancing in an interplay with the ensemble. After that, he decided to spend time in Tierra Caliente to learn to dance traditional Terracalenteño *son* from dancers in the region. He never danced *folklórico* (choreographed folkloric dance) again.

It might be five o'clock when we sit to eat. Los Jilguerillos del Huerto are already playing by the *tarima*. *Sones* and *gustos*, and a few *pasobles* and polkas, fill the air. Other groups, dancers, and musicians have arrived. Now, the *tarima* is rarely unoccupied. Couples jump onto it and dance. They do not have to dance through to the end of a *son*. Rules are less strict than in

Jarocho dancing, where the *tarima* cannot be left unoccupied. In Tierra Caliente, it is OK to dance only a section of a *son* that you like, and then step down. Furthermore, the physical effort that the dance demands is too great for a single couple to dance the entire *son* or *gusto*.

Each dancer has his/her own style. Good dancers are recognized by the unmistakable dexterity of their *zapateado* (footwork) variations. They say that some variations—particularly in improvised sections during instrumental interludes—can be traced back to well-known individual dancers in the region. In the course of any *son* or *gusto*, several couples take turns on the *tabla*. Bodies do not touch. Dancers do not move their upper bodies while dancing, which they do in place, facing each other, and without turning, swirling, or traveling on the *tarima*. The man keeps his arms loose by his sides while the woman holds the two sides of her skirt—if wearing one—with her hands. In such a small space, about 60 cm wide and 1.5 m long, only one couple dances at a time. This *tarima* is not as big as those in the Huasteca region where fifty to one hundred couples may dance. It cannot host two couples or a few women like the *tarimas* in the Jarocho *sones* can. In Tierra Caliente, the intensity of the dance is in the steps, in the interplay between the *tamborita* and the dancers, and in the production of sound that seeks a deep resonance from the *tarima*. *Tamborita* and *zapateado* are the queen and king of the party on and around the *tarima*: they maintain an interplay of counter-rhythms and ostinatos, making calls and complementing the playing of the ensemble. Eventually the man gently puts his hand on the woman's shoulder to indicate that it is time to step down and allow the next couple to jump onto the *tabla*. This may seem to take place in a random fashion, but closer inspection reveals that dancers never step down in the middle of an intense *zapateado* section or halfway through a verse during a sung couplet in a *gusto*¹⁷⁷ (see figure 56).

¹⁷⁷ A sung *son de tamborita*.

Figure 56. Dancing on the *tabla*



Other musicians, dancers, and attendees keep their eyes on the *tarima*. All participants are in communication. From time to time, exclamations of encouragement emerge from the audience, such as: “¡Voy polla! ¡Ese no es gallo!” (Girl, here I go! He is not a rooster!) or “¡Voy polla! ¡Para esa polla no hay gallo!” (Girl, here I go! There is no rooster for that girl!) or “¡Voy polla, porque’l gallo se and’hogando!” (Girl, here I go, because the rooster is choking!). Such comments incite the dancers, particularly the male dancer, who finds new impetus to *zapatear* energetically on the *tarima*.

Through the afternoon, many others have come with their instruments. Chatting and drinking have started a while ago. Mezcal¹⁷⁸ and beer, food, music, dancing.. The *fandango* is at its peak, the fiesta is on. When the harp joins the ensemble, the *tamborita* is replaced by the striking of the harp on its sound box. *Guitarra de golpe* and one more violin are added to the ensemble. *Sones de tamborita* are replaced by those of the *arpa cacheteada* style from the Tepalcatepec River. The *ay na na nas* that close the stanzas confirm it.

¹⁷⁸ Alcoholic beverage made from the *maguey* (a kind of agave) plant. Though mezcal is produced in many parts of Mexico, the ones from Guerrero and Oaxaca are particularly famous.

Different rhythmic patterns and singing style, new dance steps. A new session begins. *Ay na na na, na na na na na na.*

I don't think anyone attending pauses to think why this is called a *fandango*, whether the term is of African origin,¹⁷⁹ whether it comes from the Mandinga term "fanda" (banquet, celebration, gathering of people) or from the same term in Kimbundu Bantu language meaning "caos primigenio" (the primordial chaos) or chaos before creation (Martinez Ayala 2001b:365). Here, *fandango* is the fiesta and the dance and music that take place in it. It is the festive occasion and the musical experience, musicians, people around the *tarima*, food and drink, feeling, social rules, the moment, the person organizing and providing food and drinks for those who come (see figure 57). It is a dialogue, the sharing, and the dance on the *tabla* as a medium to connect it all.

Figure 57. Musicians at the *fandango*



In Tierra Caliente in the past, *fandangos* took place where there was a *tarima* or a *tabla*, or in its absence, where one could be "planted," that is, a hole made in the ground over which the *tabla* is placed. Lost over time, this custom is one of the practices that is

¹⁷⁹ The African origin of the term *fandango* has also been studied by Pérez Fernández (1996, 1997, and 2003).

being revived by groups such as Los Jilguerillos del Huerto in an effort to bring back as many former elements as possible into a given performance. The *fandango* in Huetamo narrated above can be considered as an example of enacting tradition as this group of musicians from Tierra Caliente carry a *tabla* and plant it on the ground where the *fandango* takes place. Los Jilguerillos del Huerto perform music from both Michoacán and Guerrero. They are part of a larger collective, Música y Baile Tradicional A.C., that brings together researchers and music lovers who believe in traditional music as a way to re-establish lost social values and identities through music.

The *tabla*, properly tuned and expertly played, has the potential to engage in fantastic interplay with the small drum called *tamborita*. In the past, two pots filled with water would be placed inside the hole to achieve different sonorities. Two holes about a half inch in diameter were bored into the center of the *tarima* to achieve deeper resonance. Even without such pots, a well-set *tarima* could offer a great, resonant bass timbre to complement the *tamborita*.

As in many other *son* traditions, the dance of Terracalienteño *sones* and *gustos* (sung *sones*) is a couple dance in which the *zapateado* or footwork—a syncopated, rhythmic stomping and tapping of the feet—on the *tarima* plays a central role. The man and the woman dance out specific, discrete rhythmic patterns: the woman keeps the basic beat, marking either on- or off-beats, and the man executes the intricate footwork, combining different steps and improvising (David Durán, personal communication, June 18, 2013). Martínez Ayala describes it as follows:

La guitarra marca el ritmo base al que se ‘pega’ el zapateo suave de la mujer, el cual sirve para marcar el tiempo, mientras el hombre pasa del valseado con que ‘entra’ a la tabla y sin pausas llega al pespunteo (con la punta de los pies), el banqueteado, el redoble o el repiqueteado (con

los talones o con la planta del pie), haciendo adornos rítmicos cada vez mas complejos que imitan en rapidez a la percusión de la tambora (Martínez Ayala 2002)

(The guitar marks the basic rhythm to which the woman's smooth *zapateo*¹⁸⁰ 'sticks' [follows very closely], which serves to mark the time, while the man goes, without any pause, from the *valseado* with which he 'enters' the *tabla* to the *pespunteo* (with the tips of his toes), the *banqueado*, the *redoble* or the *repiqueteado*¹⁸¹ (with the heel or with the sole of the foot), performing rhythmic ornaments, each more complex than the last, that closely follow and imitate the *tamborita*'s percussive patterns).

If the *tarima* is not placed over the hole in the ground, the depth of the sound is insufficient to enable interplay between the dancers and the musicians and it can no longer function as a part of the ensemble, and instrument's connection to the dance is lost. The *tamborita* loses its function as the dancers cannot achieve the timbre differentiation that complements its part. Positioning the *tarima* over a hole brings back the role of the dancer as part of the ensemble.

According to Cohen, music produces place as "a concept or symbol that is represented or interpreted" (1995:434). Pertinent to my work is the idea that both music and dance produce a "place" that it is referred to symbolically, connecting past and present. Thus, the setting of the *tarima* speaks of place as meaningful and central to the performance of these traditions: place as a symbolic recall for the community and as the focus of the fiesta where the *tarima* is located. At the *fandango* in Huetamo, the *tarima* was placed under the tree. At the El Tecolote cultural center during the VI Festival de Tierra Caliente, it was placed in the central garden. By means of the *tarima*, audience, musicians, and dancers make meaning (Duffy 2005:678).

¹⁸⁰ *Zapateo* is interchangeable with *zapateado*.

¹⁸¹ *Banqueado*, *redoble*, and *repiqueteado* are the names of dance steps. For more on the particulars of the dancing, see Durán Naquid (2004) and Martínez Ayala (2001a and 2002).

In urban settings, for example, I have seen how musical promoters and musicians are choosing specific public locations to hold festivals, workshops, and *fandangos* as a way to deliberately re-appropriate such spaces for the “musical tradition.” For example, the Festival de la Décima has been taking place (2008 to 2013) in downtown Mexico City at the Monumento a la Revolución, a highly symbolic and emblematic monument built in 1938 to commemorate the Mexican Revolution; more than 60 traditional music groups performed all around Mexico City’s Zócalo (central square) during a one-day “Son por la Tradición” event on January 21, 2012; and workshops and concerts are frequently staged in public parks and plazas.

It is within this ideological mindset that the musical experience is gaining momentum and strength and leading to the building of community, which continue after the event. Through social media (Facebook and various internet list servers), individuals in this community keep in touch, attend workshops, concerts, and *fandangos*, and inform of events that take place in various cities and locations. The re-appropriation of performance contexts for these traditions, and the dance as the center of the fiesta, are seen as a vehicle for a performance of cultural identity.

VI Festival de Tierra Caliente and El Tecolote Cultural Center

Envisioning a center for traditional music and culture, Josafat Nava founded in El Tecolote Cultural Center in 1998 in Arcelia, in the heart of Tierra Caliente in Guerrero State. Since 2006, Nava has been organizing every year the Festival de Tierra Caliente at El Tecolote on the third weekend in June, coinciding with the end of the school year.

In this section, I describe El Tecolote as an example of one of the cultural centers in the region working towards the revival of traditional music and culture. I also discuss the VI Festival de Tierra Caliente as an occasion in which traditional culture and collective identities are constructed, experienced, and transmitted. In the context of both the festival and the cultural project, I understand traditional culture as an integrative system that encompasses several expressive arts, customs, practices, and beliefs. In the context of both the festival and the cultural project, traditional culture is the music and dance, singing, lyrics, clothing, food, religion, crafts, art, lifestyles, and festivities, that is, shared experiences and meanings created, experienced, and transmitted in a given community over time.

Throughout this section, it is useful to consider Graburn's conception of heritage in relation to tradition as both 'own' and 'owned.' According to this author, viewing tradition in this way "makes necessary the consideration of inter-generational cultural continuity" (2001:68). Heritage, a cultural model defined by agencies and transmitted among a given population, is constructed (ibid., 71). As in other regions and cultural projects, at El Tecolote, transmission of heritage is key in the process of cultural production. In Tierra Caliente, a region historically marked by a lack of institutions working on the development of regional culture, projects created by non-profit

organizations such as El Tecolote open up new spaces for the revitalization of regional culture. Cultural production is mediated by such agents through the selective process that takes place in cultural transmission.

In the case of El Tecolote, it is Josafat Nava—the mind and soul behind the center—who selects what is transmitted, and how: particular playing styles and musical repertoires within the *sones de tamborita*, traditional food and utensils for traditional cooking techniques, social theater, cockfights, and *jaripeos* (Mexican rodeo), among others. Nava, passionate about traditional music and culture, is a charismatic gatekeeper who selects and supervises the cultural repertoire taught, performed, created, and experienced at El Tecolote. He envisions a better world by living according to ideals closely connected to local cultures. As mentioned in chapter 1, recent processes of revitalization of cultural traditions are marked by deliberate efforts at the hands of *son* practitioners and activists. The purpose in this case is to bring cohesiveness to a social group to identify with Terracalenteño. El Tecolote constitutes a center of power in which traditions are (re)created, connected to a past, and projected onto new generations. Ceremonies, symbols, and celebrations are used to sustain renditions of cultural traditions.

El Tecolote Cultural Center

As soon as you enter El Tecolote, Josafat Nava will tell you that this center is not only for music, but also for traditional culture more broadly. He proudly shows you the place, a compound of delineated spaces separated by thin wooden logs covered with palm leaves and corn husks. There is a room, functioning as a kind of gallery, in which photographs of musicians from Tierra Caliente are displayed. Near it, a small room

functions as a library where CDs and old cassettes, along with some books and materials on the Tierra Caliente region, are kept. These two rooms lead to a bigger space in which there is a small *tabla* over a hole in the ground and a few chairs and benches along the sidewalls. The small clay oven and clay dishware at the back of the room are used when there are special gatherings.

The kitchen is separated from these three rooms by a garden. The kitchen has no walls except for the adobe back wall. The roof is made of palm leaves and supported by posts. There are two clay *comales*¹⁸² set over a fire pit (see figure 58 and figure 59), large wooden tables, big clay water jugs, kitchen utensils, and silverware.

Figure 58. Clay *comales*



¹⁸² A *comal* (singular for *comales*) is a large shallow pan or flat surface used for cooking (mostly grilling).

Figure 59. Clay *comal* and corn *tortillas*



Crossing the garden there is the theater, which is made out of walls covered with corn husks. The stage, rising about 60 cm up from the ground, is made of wood. Another *tabla* is set over a hole in the ground by the center of the stage. The theater can seat about two hundred people. In the central garden that connects the different areas in the compound, there are small native trees and vegetation and a small pond.

Built using indigenous materials and traditional construction techniques from the region, El Tecolote represents another effort to create spaces and contexts for traditional music, similar to the planting of the *tabla*, within the re-contextualization of tradition.

Reinforcing this idea, and in connection with ideological principles behind both El Huerto Cultural Center and Música y Baile Tradicional A.C., Jorge Amós Martínez

Ayala comments:

Creo [...] que la propuesta del Tecolote, que hicieron un espacio que es una casa, que tiene las tablas en el suelo, que tiene árboles ... lo hace distinto, lo hace más atrayente. Y es como debe aprenderse la tradición,

como nació. Y es una fiesta que se hace en cualquier lugar donde haya sombrita, al menos en la Tierra Caliente—y eso sí que es importante—, y normalmente debajo de un árbol, debajo de una enramada (Personal communication, November 26, 2010)

(I think [...] that El Tecolote's idea—a space that is a house, that has *tablas* [to dance] on the ground, that has trees—makes it different, more appealing. That is how the tradition should be learned, as it was born. This is a fiesta that can take place anywhere there is a shade, which is very important in Tierra Caliente, and it is generally under a tree, under a bower).

Josafat Nava is proud of the place, the space, the idea, and the results. For him, the center is a social service he felt he owed to Tierra Caliente:

Para mí, El Tecolote es como el servicio social de mi vida, como que yo le debía algo a la tierra y de alguna manera, es como un homenaje a la naturaleza, a las tradiciones, a las costumbres, a las pasiones, a los amores, a las plantas, a las aves, a los ríos, a las piedras (Josafat Nava, personal communication, October 17, 2010)

(For me, El Tecolote is like the social service of my life, as if I had a debt to my homeland and somehow, it [El Tecolote] is an homage to nature, traditions, customs, passions, love, plants, birds, rivers, stones).

Nava started El Tecolote in 1998 without any in-house musicians to teach Terracalenteño music. He took his first students to villages and small towns in the region where older musicians¹⁸³ lived. In time, those students who learned to play taught others. At present, every Saturday morning, El Tecolote is filled with approximately one hundred children who are learning to play and dance to music from the Balsas River on violin, guitar, and *tamborita*. Classes are free. The center loans musical instruments—donated by individuals or bought with funds from CONACULTA—at no cost to students.

As mentioned previously, the center is not only about music, but also about

¹⁸³ Cástulo Benítez de la Paz, Juan Reynoso, Ángel Tavira, Natividad Leandro “El Palillo,” Rafael Ramírez, and Zacarías Salmerón, among others.

Terracalenteño culture: “El Tecolote es una puerta para abrir y conocer la tradición cultural calentana” (El Tecolote is a door to be opened to get to know the Calentana¹⁸⁴ cultural tradition (Josafat Nava, personal communication, June 17, 2011). According to Nava and those who run the center with him, they are not aiming to create technically accomplished violinists or *tamborita* players, but rather, people who embrace their own culture:

Lo único que uno sueña es que la gente venga [al Tecolote] y conozca lo que hay aquí: que conozca una tamborita, que hubo un músico que se llamó Isaías Salmerón, otro que se llamaba Zacarías y otro que se llamaba Juan Bartolo Tavira, y que aquí hay un señor que anda soldando cubetas y que se llama Julio Flores y que compuso la pieza que se llama Flor de dalia. Aquí es un lugar para reconocerse y saber lo que somos, y que tomen la decisión de saber si quieren defender esta patria, sí o no (ibid.)

(All one wants is for people to come [to the Tecolote] and see what we have here: to find out what a *tamborita* is; that there was once a musician named Isaías Salmerón, another one called Zacarías, and another called Juan Bartolo Tavira; that there was a man whose name was Julio Flores who welded buckets and composed a piece called “Flor de dalia.” This is a place to acknowledge one another and to know what we are, and for them [young ones] to decide whether they want to defend this homeland, yes or no).

By “this homeland,” Nava symbolically refers to an imagined Mexican nation built upon values associated to traditional cultures from the various Mexican regions. He strongly argues that at El Tecolote they offer the chance for young generations to know and defend their national cultural roots. At the center, traditional culture is viewed as a powerful tool that can inform individual lives. Music, in particular, is the medium chosen to construct cultural heritage.

Transmission of cultural heritage is a fundamental notion in both El Tecolote’s

¹⁸⁴ Calentano/a: belonging to Tiera Caliente. In Mexico, this term is used interchangeably with Terracalenteño/a and Terracalento/a.

project and the Festival de Tierra Caliente. As mentioned in chapter 1, heritage provides a sense of belonging and demands responsibility for preservation in the use of heritage-identity forms (Graburn 2001:71). This sense of responsibility shows through in Nava's statement referring to El Tecolote as a means of opening the door for those who want to get to know, experience, and assume their responsibility as owners of such culture.

As an essential part of culture, heritage is constructed and can be recreated by those who claim it as their own: "whether or not the owners of heritage received it within the bounds of kinship—the original social paradigm of identity—a claim to heritage cannot only give a sense of concrete identity, but it may also demand the preservation and respect of its forms" (AlSayyad 2001:12). To me, this statement sums up El Tecolote's take on heritage and tradition, and its conception of music as a medium that enables the creation of new selves. Here, enabling is an important notion. In Nava's own words, his task as founder of El Tecolote is

enseñarle a los muchachos, a los niños, y a los jóvenes cuál es su tradición, nada más. Yo no tengo la pretensión de formar a violinistas ni tamboreros ni guitarristas ni compositores ni poetas ni nada, solamente que conozcan ellos (ibid.)

(to show young ones, children, and teenagers what their tradition is. That's it. I do not pretend to build great violinists, *tamborita* or guitar players, composers or poets, nothing, just give them the opportunity to know about these things).

It is, then, those in charge of El Tecolote who construct heritage. They do so by choosing what practices, customs, objects, places, artistic expressions, and values are passed on, and those who participate in this project feel that the heritage transmitted is either their own by birthright or something they have chosen and acquired, that is, come to own.

Youth attending El Tecolote's activities feel empowered by traditional culture as defined

and transmitted by this particular agent.

Following Richards (in Revill 2005:701), El Tecolote can be viewed as a place that articulates materials and resources of traditional music and culture. There is the space to gather, the music lessons, the musical instruments loaned to students, the library, and the community of children and parents involved in the project. Rather than a static social force, the place is fluid and processual, embracing a “multiplicity of experiences, attachments and associations” (ibid.) generated within the location. It is a conduit for the production and transmission of culture as well as the construction of cultural and collective identity, “a site of meaningful action for the individual” (Oakes 1997: 510). Such action, Oakes argues, is derived “from linkages across space and time, which make a place more of a dynamic web than a specific site or location” (ibid.). Thus, El Tecolote functions as a physical and symbolic space in which members of its collective feel empowered by traditional music, which facilitates an awareness of ownership of culture as well as new conscious selves. The Festival de Tierra Caliente that Josafat Nava has been organizing since 2006 is a product of El Tecolote. Although the festival has included different Mexican *son* subgenres in its programming in recent years, it mostly features Terracalenteño music.

VI Festival de Tierra Caliente

The first thing that Josafat Nava did when I visited him in the fall of 2010 was to drive me to El Tecolote, the heart of the cultural project. He also invited me to attend the upcoming VI Festival de Tierra Caliente, to be held the third weekend in June 2011. He described the festival as an experience of initiation:

¡Cómo te dijera! Son actos iniciáticos. Es un acto ritual. La convivencia de la gente, las señoras que vienen a hacer tortillas, que vienen a guisar el mole y bueno, yo voy a meter hasta tres peleas de gallos. Y la pelea de gallos no por hacerle fama a los palenques que hay en México sino porque era una antigua tradición de los calentanos donde igual como en la boda del general Coyote, se jugaba pelea de gallos, se bailó baile de tabla, hubo diez músicas tocando, duró una semana la boda del general, hubo jaripeo, entonces... hubo todo eso. Bueno, yo no puedo hacer jaripeo pero sí voy a hacer un anillo para que jueguen los gallos y para que los muchachos conozcan las peleas de gallos porque ahorita, para que un joven de Arcelia vea una pelea de gallos necesita pagar 200 pesos la entrada en el palenque y no tienen dinero. Ya invité al señor que tiene gallos y van a ver una topada, de tres peleas nada más, para que la gente vea, para que vaya a la pelea de gallos que hay en el fandango, el fandango con todas sus acepciones (Josafat Nava, personal communication, October 17, 2010)

(How can I put it! [Festivals] are acts of initiation. It is a ritual act. People sharing, women who come to make tortillas, make *mole* and... well, I'm going to include up to three cockfights. [I am including] the cockfight not to boost the reputation of Mexico's *palenques*¹⁸⁵ that exist in Mexico but because it was an old *calentano* tradition where they [*calentano* people], like at General Coyote's¹⁸⁶ wedding, held cockfights, danced on the *tabla*, there were up to ten musical groups playing, and the General's wedding lasted a week, there was a *jaripeo*, then... there was all that. Well, I cannot hold a *jaripeo* but I will make a ring for the cockfight so boys will know what cockfighting is because now, for a young man in Arcelia to see a cockfight he has to pay 200¹⁸⁷ pesos for entry into the arena and they have no money. I have already invited the man who has roosters. People will see three fights, so they will attend a cockfight as happens at a *fandango*, the *fandango* with all its aspects).

Nava's statement is a clear example of the subtleties of the selective process of cultural transmission and how powerful a social agent can be in negotiating ideologies within a structured scenario.

Just as the *fandango* in Huetamo that was discussed earlier in the chapter stands

¹⁸⁵ Places where cockfights take place.

¹⁸⁶ The *corrido revolucionario* (a ballad that narrates events from the Mexican Revolution) "El Coyote," by Celedonio Serrano Martínez, chronicles the life of Nabor Mendoza, "El Coyote," a peasant who joined Emiliano Zapata's army during the Revolution. Among other events related to the struggles of the Revolution (e.g., the criminal actions of traitor Victoriano Huerta), the author narrates how El Coyote stayed true to Zapata, became a general, and his wedding celebration lasted a week.

¹⁸⁷ About 18 USD.

as an example of re-contextualizing traditions, the Festival de Tierra Caliente also attempts to re-situate the musical experience into inclusive community contexts. Nava facilitates the running of the festival on most organizational levels. He is in charge of finding funds to cover musicians' travel, food, and lodging expenses. To achieve this, he seeks support mostly from the community in Arcelia, who contribute by providing lodging and food for musicians performing at the festival as well as food for all attendees. Most meals take place at El Tecolote. Since one of the main objectives of the festival is to foster sharing, shared meals provide an additional occasion to spend time with others attending the festival.

Just as Nava provides most of the funding for the cultural center, he also pays travel expenses for the musicians who are invited to perform at the Festival. He is convinced that dependence on the state compromises freedom and sets limits on any event. Proudly, he says: “Yo estoy seguro que la tradición debe sostenerse en la sociedad” (I am convinced that tradition must be sustained within society) (ibid.). Musicians, though, do not receive economic compensation for their performances. As in the case of Festival de la Huasteca, while musicians feel honored to be chosen and participate voluntarily, they acknowledge the fact that they need to make a living and it is difficult when organizers do not pay them for their performances (Isabel Salinas, personal communication, October 15, 2010).

Although the festival focuses on music from Tierra Caliente—particularly music from the Balsas River catchment—Nava invites groups from other Mexican regions to participate, an initiative that reflects his desire for a pan-regional community empowered by and created around traditional music, a means to create a sense of wider belonging.

For the 2010 festival, Nava invited a group from the Costa Chica (Guerrero and Oaxaca) and another from Tixtla (Josafat Nava, personal communication, October 17, 2010). For the VI festival in June 2011, guest groups were the Huasteco ensemble Los Brujos de Huejutla, the Terracalenteño group Los Jilguerillos del Huerto, and Los Fandangueros de Tixtla, who perform *sones* from Tixtla (Guerrero). Other Terracalenteño ensembles in the region attended the festival, performed in the morning concerts, and participated in the *fandangos* that took place in the evening.

On the opening day of the 2011 Festival, musical performances lasted from about 10:30 am to 4 pm. After short performances by the ensembles of children learning music at the center, Manuel and Carmen Aguirre opened the concert with traditional songs from Guerrero. Then, the rhythmic drive of *sones* and *gustos*, *tamborita*, and dancers' *zapateado* filled the space. Los Nietos de Don Juan, Los Brujos de Huejutla, Los Jilguerillos del Huerto (see figure 60), and Grupo Regional Tlapehuala (see figure 61) performed.

Figure 60. Los Jilguerillos del Huerto



Figure 61. Grupo Regional Tlapehuala



Dancers never left the *tabla* unoccupied and musicians kept playing for as long as there were dancers on it. At any given moment, one could go outside, get some food in the kitchen-dining area, and converse with others. The architectural design of El Tecolote encourages participants to socialize.

After the morning and afternoon performances, the central garden was transformed into the space for the *fandango* and the group celebration. Before the sun set, Los Jilguerillos del Huerto excavated a hole in the ground and set up the *tabla* around which the *fandango* would take place. Night was greeted with music. Los Fandangueros de Tixtla (see figure 62) arrived from Tixtla (about three hours away) and joined the group. *Cajón de tapeo*, *harp*, and *vihuela* joined in on the *sones* and *gustos* that Los Jilguerillos del Huerto played to open the *fandango*, Los Brujos de Huejutla improvised lyrics while singing Huasteco *sones*, and the group Fuentes Brotantes that came from Morelia, Michoacán performed *sones de arpa cacheteada* from the Tepalcatepec River.

Figure 62. Los Fandangueros de Tixtla



Josafat Nava and Ana Zarina Palafox improvised *décimas* from time to time. Beer and mezcal circulated. Again, the *tabla* was hardly ever unoccupied (see figure 63). It may have been two or three o'clock in the morning when music finally stopped and we retired for the day. Children had also stayed up until the wee hours of the morning.

Figure 63. Dancing *sones* de Tixtla



The next day, after a communal breakfast at El Tecolote, Los Fandangueros de Tixtla opened the performances. More groups from Tierra Caliente, more music: Los Brujos de Huejutla, Los Jilguerillos del Huerto, Grupo Regional Tlapehuala, and Los Nietos de Don Juan. Later in the afternoon, music was moved outside the theater to accompany the sacrifice of a goat to be cooked in the pit and served for a late lunch. Mezcal and beer, too.

As with other festivals in the Huasteca region, for the Festival de Tierra Caliente, organizer Josafat Nava seeks community support and involvement to make the festival possible. People come from afar and from the small city of Arcelia to attend the musical performances and participate in the *fandango*. In 2011 there were no cockfights, but there was food from Tierra Caliente, conversations, and music. For Nava and many other attendees, *convivir* (connecting) with the musicians and the people at the festival is one of the best things that can happen on a musical occasion such as the festival.

It was as hot as ever in Tierra Caliente. White dresses, red *paliacates* (bandanas), Terracalenteño hats, violins and guitars, *tamboritas* hanging off the shoulders draw the landscape at El Tecolote (see figure 64 and figure 65). Participants feel they belong there and that the music and culture belong to them. They are Terracalenteños acknowledging a passion for their culture, experiencing it, and constructing their cultural identity through the musical experience.

Figure 64. Terracalenteño musicians



Figure 65. Terracalenteño musicians



Cultural and Collective Identity at the Festival de Tierra Caliente and El Tecolote Cultural Project

Music at the Festival de Tierra Caliente serves both as a means for the transmission of traditional culture and to build a collective pan-regional identity. Music reinforces Mexican cultural values and is key in the construction of the way musicians and traditional culture advocates define themselves. Traditional culture provides a means for collective cohesiveness.

The creation of new selves through the sense of ownership of heritage that emerges from El Tecolote's cultural project and the Festival de Tierra Caliente is similar to the newly formed/invented Andalusian social identities through flamenco music argued by Manuel (1989) and analyzed by Rice not as new social groups with new social identities, but as a form of self-understanding through music (2007:26). The new sense of self-understanding for Andalusian people derived from the process of professionalization and revitalization of flamenco music. Traditionally associated with gypsies and lower classes people, flamenco actively contributed during the 1980s to shape a modern Andalusian identity (Manuel 1989:48). In the case of Tierra Caliente, as well as in the Huasteca and Jarocho regions, the construction of identity as a form of self-understanding through music also functions as a way for people to reconnect to practices that were quickly disappearing, to reclaim their culture and pass it on to others.

Performative and educational musical experiences at El Tecolote provide an opportunity for this community to connect through many aspects of their cultural identity and to imagine themselves as part of a larger Mexican community that shares similar ideals around traditional music. Music also contributes to group identity in creating a

pan-regional identity, as in the festival Son Raíz, around the playing of traditional music. Moreover, music validates a commitment to heritage by practitioners reclaiming traditional music as their own.

The collective identity in evidence at El Tecolote is constructed around what Burkitt calls genres, that is, a “given set of statements involving positions, world-views, ideologies, and linguistic styles which usually find their expression in certain practices in the everyday world” (Burkitt in Steinberg 2002:211), or what Rose calls “rationalized schemes, which have sought to shape our ways of understanding and enacting our existence as human beings” (Rose in Rice 2007:27). The collective at El Tecolote and the Festival de Tierra Caliente combine elements of the “negotiated” culture. Elements and meanings from the dominant discourse at El Tecolote draw on available traditions and cultural resources frequently invoked by power holders and widely accepted through the collective. Thus, collective identity at El Tecolote is constructed within ongoing social practices and cultural assumptions. Robnett argues that in the context of social movements in general, collective identity “is made up of shared ‘cultural capital’ that members acquire through the deployment of knowledge within the movement and use to constitute themselves in their own terms” (2002:267), which is also true for all the regional cultures and musics I discuss in the present work.

Although individuals participating in El Tecolote and the Festival de Tierra Caliente may seem like free agents in the construction of what they consider to be their own self-understanding and sense of group, I believe this construction is mediated by, among other “rationalized schemes,” a dominant idea of using traditional music to heal

the damaged social fabric and to gain back some traditional social and community values in the face of modernization and rapid social changes of the 21st century.

Music at El Tecolote is envisioned as a tool for transmission of heritage and for cultural resistance against mediated and commercialized popular musical trends. Such trends seem to be in conflict with what they are trying to accomplish at El Tecolote: the idea of traditional music as a way to create “soldiers” who can fight for their nation has shaped the nature of the festival and the cultural center. Thus, El Tecolote could be seen as an agency that “helps the music to reflect the larger social and cultural conditions, discourses, and ‘regimes’ that seem to be creating new senses of identity in the first place” (Rice 2007:29).

Music at El Tecolote functions as a catalyst for collective cohesion. Like traditional indigenous fiestas, the Festival de Tierra Caliente brings in elements of traditional culture, manifested in food, music, dance, and some ritual practices (such as the goat sacrifice). At El Tecolote, the connection with the past and the symbolic cultural re-creation and social identification are key in the transmission of culture.

In this chapter I have discussed the re-contextualization of traditions that is taking place in several Mexican regions. The planting of the *tabla* as well as the cultural project at El Tecolote and the Festival de Tierra Caliente serve as examples of such re-contextualization. Music plays an active role in the construction of collective identity and contributes to the processes of cultural change. A strong sense of heritage and tradition inform new conscious selves empowered by traditional music.

CHAPTER 7. FESTIVAL SON RAÍZ AND ENCUESTRO SON PARA MILO: A DIALOGUE AMONG REGIONS

As we have seen in chapter 3, social changes in Mexico in the early second half of the 20th century contributed to the transformation of social contexts and conditions for the performance of traditional music. In the 1950s, foreign music quickly penetrated Mexican repertoires and markets through radio, television, and cinema. Local regional genres such as *sones* and romantic ballads performed by trios gave way to new ones such as mambo, cha-cha-chá, and rock ‘n’ roll. New forms of media brought new ways of providing and experiencing music in both urban and rural areas, which affected how festive occasions are experienced. Music markets changed along with musical tastes.

The folklore movement (*folklorismo*) that swept through South American stages during the 1960s was greatly influential for a sector of young Mexican musicians who began to perform folkloric musics from all over Latin America as “una posibilidad de oposición a la penetración cultural, una respuesta política a una situación política” (an opportunity to challenge foreign cultural penetration as well as a political answer to dominant political regimes) (Salvador Ojeda in Moreno Rivas 1989:270). Towards the end of the 1970s, musicians began to turn to their own regional heritages and move away from pan-Latin American folklore genres. In the 1980s, governmental institutions, musicians, and cultural promoters began to organize festivals in different regions as part of a strategy to reclaim social places and spaces for traditional musics, as well as create new ones, in which to share, experience, promote, and revitalize the legacies of these music cultures. Creating community and reinforcing cultural identity within and across regions were particularly important at these festivals.

In this chapter I focus on Son Raíz and Son para Milo, two annual festivals that mostly feature various genres of Mexican *son* and draw in performers and attendees from several Mexican regions. Son Raíz changes both its dates and location each year. Son para Milo takes place at the Normal de Maestros (School of Education) in Mexico City the first weekend in June. I discuss both festivals as events that cut across regionalisms to signify a larger Mexican cultural identity and to embody processes in the construction and conceptualization of community around traditional music. Son Raíz serves as a cultural medium in which traditional music is utilized as a powerful tool for social action and change, a means of dialogue among cultural regions, and a banner for ownership of one's culture. Son para Milo bridges cultural regions through dance, which taps into collective memory to create a communal cultural experience.

Festival Son Raíz: Building Community and Signifying Identity and Ownership of Culture Across Mexican Regions

Son Raíz is a festival of Mexican traditional music.¹⁸⁸ It is an event with musical performances as well as a gathering of music lovers and professional and semi-professional musicians. Son Raíz's dynamism and pluralistic character comes from the juxtaposition of scheduled stage performances and the informal musical gatherings that take place before and after them, the *huapangos* or *fandangos* in which everyone can participate.

Particular to Son Raíz is its function as a platform for social action. Theoretical dialogues take place in roundtables in which representatives from different Mexican cultural regions—mostly cultural promoters and musicians—share their experiences

¹⁸⁸ Although it is mostly *sones* that are performed, groups also include styles from their regions of origin such as ritual dances, polkas, and *corridos*.

working on various cultural projects. In these roundtables, participants attempt to come up with effective plans of action to empower communities to exert more control over their own cultural property and to give traditional music a more prominent role in society.¹⁸⁹

Organized by CONACULTA through the DVR (Dirección de Vinculación Regional),¹⁹⁰ Son Raíz was designed to combine performances with discussions on matters related to traditional music and culture in roundtables led mostly by musicians and cultural promoters from different Mexican regions. According to Amparo Sevilla Villalobos, director of the DVR at the time, the idea of the festival took shape “ante la necesidad de hacer una programación más eficiente del escaso recurso económico con el que contaban los programas regionales” (Personal communication, January 21, 2014) (out of the need for more efficient use of the scarce economic resources that regional programs had at the time). Sevilla Villalobos and her team¹⁹¹ gave shape to the project so that it could be incorporated into the institutional programming. The first Son Raíz took place in 2004 and one of its main goals was to create a social space for the performance and revitalization of traditional music and culture (Sevilla Villalobos 2009:288–289) through both musical performances and theoretical discussions. Another goal was for the festival to function as a facilitator of cultural dialogue between Mexican regions.

¹⁸⁹ See more on roundtable topics and discussions in the first five Son Raíz festivals in Martínez de la Rosa (2010:285–287).

¹⁹⁰ The Dirección de Vinculación Regional is a program in charge of the cultural development of the different Mexican cultural regions: Huasteca, Sotavento, Yoreme, Tierra Caliente, Istmo, and Maya.

¹⁹¹ Sevilla Villalobos, an anthropologist, gathered a team of intellectuals and cultural activists committed to working on the revitalization of traditional music. Eduardo Hernández, Rodolfo Candelas, Marco García, Patricia Olalde, Gabriela Montoya, and Araceli Romero worked on the design and production of the first Son Raíz. Musician Guillermo Velázquez Benavides and writer Eliazar Velázquez Benavides also collaborated actively on the design of the festival. Years later, Álvaro Alcántara López, Ana Zarina Palafox Méndez, María García, and Rubí Oseguera were part of the team while on staff at the DVR (Sevilla Villalobos, Personal communication, January 21, 2014).

In order for the different cultural regions to leave their imprint on the festival, Son Raíz changes its location each year. The location is chosen carefully: it has to be a place where there is a cultural promoter with a history of having done work in the community and/or region and of contributing to the development of traditional music. The promoter must have organization skills and be able to involve the community in the festival project. Cultural promoter Josafat Nava comments that Son Raíz “viene a fortalecer proyectos que ya existían” (strengthens projects already in existence) (Personal communication, October 17, 2010), which in his case was El Tecolote Cultural Center. The first Son Raíz took place in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán (December 2–4, 2004). Subsequent editions have been sited in localities in the states of Morelos, Querétaro, Guerrero, and Veracruz (both the Jarocho and Huasteca regions). Each Son Raíz has been designed and organized by CONACULTA in close cooperation with the cultural promoter hosting the festival.¹⁹²

Villages and small towns chosen to host the festival over the years are welcoming spaces in which the community has previously worked on other cultural projects. Thus, through the festival practices, the space is “dialectically created” (Lefebvre in Simonsen 2005:6) and re-appropriated for the “aims” of traditional culture.

Son Raíz generally takes place in November or December. Musicians and participants in the roundtables are chosen in the spring. According to Sevilla Villalobos (2009:289), musicians performing at the festival are chosen by both cultural promoters and CONACULTA. Musicians are selected according to their musicianship, the

¹⁹² Cornelio Santamaría in Tlayacapan, Morelos (December 1–3, 2006), Junípero Cabrera Berrones in Purísima de Arista and Arroyo Seco, Querétaro (December 7–9, 2007), Arturo Barradas in Playa Vicente, Veracruz, Jarocho Region (December 5–7, 2008), Josafat Nava in Arcelia, Guerrero (November 6–8, 2009), and Arturo Castillo Tristán in Citlaltépec, Veracruz, Huasteca region (November 12–14, 2010).

meaningful knowledge they have of their regional traditional music culture, and the significant role they play in the revitalization of that culture. This selection prioritizes diversity so that the different cultural regions are represented (Junípero Berrones, Personal communication, November 14, 2010).

Musicians selected to perform on the official stage receive payment for one performance, food, and lodging. Musical promoters invited to participate at the roundtables receive food and lodging. Radio personnel, recording engineers, and institutional staff are reimbursed for lodging and food. Other attendees pay for their own travel expenses. As with the Festival de la Huasteca, meals for everyone at Son Raíz are covered by CONACULTA. If Son Raíz takes place in a small community, attendees generally are housed by local families. Otherwise, they pay for their own lodging.

For six years (2004 to 2010), Son Raíz has stood out as a festival balancing institutional sponsorship and non-governmental initiatives. Even though CONACULTA provided most of the funding, cultural promoters sought to organize the festival independently. In the end, although the involvement of CONACULTA in the festival was originally meant to be limited to economic matters, institutional impetuses have been factors in both selecting the festival location and making decisions concerning performing artists and roundtables. Cultural Promoter Ana Zarina Palafox bitterly commented on how funding bodies end up exerting power: “A nivel de institución se ha logrado un gran avance, pero siempre la institución acaba delineando muchas cosas ¿no?, porque de ahí sale todo el dinero” (Personal communication, October 15, 2010) (Great progress has been made at the institutional level, but the institution always ends up having their say on many things, right?, because that’s where money comes from). In

2011, changes in administration resulted in the funding for Son Raíz being cut, and the festival was postponed until further notice.¹⁹³

Although at Son Raíz institutional and non-institutional organizers seem to work hand-in-hand organizing the festival from the bottom-up rather than from top-down, balancing power between cultural promoters and the institution was not an easy task: while promoters strike at efficient use of economic resources, those who invest in a project need some kind of payback. In the end, power relations proved vital in the organization of the festival and the question left to be asked is if the arts are invariably connected with domination on the part of a particular socio-cultural elite, as scholars such as Becker (1982), Martin ([1995] 2004), and Waterman (1998), among others, suggest.

Three Themes in Son Raíz: Social Action, Collective Identity, Community Building

I attended the VI Festival Son Raíz (November 12–14, 2010) (see figure 66) in Citlaltépetl, a small community in northern Veracruz. In telling the story of this festival, my primary purpose is to undertake a discussion of the festival as a tool for undertaking social action, for creating a broader Mexican collective identity built around traditional music, and for building community across regions.

¹⁹³ The last Son Raíz took place in 2012 in San Luis Potosí with little success due, partly, to the lack of coordination between the new management at the Dirección de Vinculación Regional and local cultural promoters.

Figure 66. Son Raíz poster



(1) The Festival as a Tool for Social Action

A strong thread running through this festival is the idea that the music can function as a way to heal society and as a powerful element for social change. Josafat Nava told me:

[La música] es lo que realmente aleja de la violencia a la gente. [...] Yo estoy muy convencido que México está herido, está muy lastimado. Y digo, la tradición cultural puede ser una de las formas de reencauzar el espíritu de la humanidad [...] Ver treinta guaches aquí con sus guitarras en lugar de estar en un billar o en una cantina... Esto es hacer una labor social y esto es estar generando patria (Personal communication, November 17, 2010)

([Music] really keeps people away from violence. I firmly believe that Mexico is deeply wounded and traditional culture can be one of the ways to redirect the human spirit. To see thirty young people [playing music] with their guitars instead of at a pool hall or a bar... That is doing social work and generating a homeland).

For many attendees, the discussions that take place at the roundtables are what make Son Raíz stand out. Participants working on different musical-social projects

exchange ideas and the methodologies they employ in their projects. They also discuss strategies to create resources for cultural promotion and to encourage the production and consumption of traditional musics.

Participants feel empowered by the sense of connection they establish with others working towards common goals. When I asked cultural promoter Junípero Berrones if the festival has grown over the years, he told me that not only has the festival grown, but also the group's commitment to brotherhood and solidarity:

Una de las cosas más importantes que ofrece Son Raíz es ese punto de encuentro para tocarnos las manos, saludarnos, saber que existimos, que los soldados en la trinchera no somos uno o dos, que somos muchos, y que la podemos defender muy bien ante tantos embates que tenemos (Personal communication, November 15, 2010)

(One of the most important things that Son Raíz has to offer is that meeting point where we can shake hands, say hello, know that we exist, that we, the soldiers in the trenches, are not one or two but many, and that we can defend it [our land] very well against the many attacks we receive).

Josafat Nava made a similar statement in commenting on the importance of Son Raíz as a space where cultural promoters with common dreams and ambitions for traditional music would come to meet:

Y yo no sabía que tenía tantísimos hermanos en este país. Y a mí, lo fundamental que me dio Son Raíz es haber conocido a mis hermanos. Eso es grandioso porque cuando tú sabes que hay otros hombres que están luchando igual que tú, y sabes que no estás solo, entonces a ti te fortalece mucho tu espíritu. Te fortalece y dices, esta caterva de brujos que están regados en este país están haciendo lo mismo que tú. Y vas recapitulando las experiencias de uno, de otro, de otro. [...] Eso [...] para mí ha sido la clave. De ahí que se hacen conferencias, se discute la problemática de la música tradicional en México y se hacen los festivales de música. Está bien, pero lo más importante, lo más importante es haberlos conocido porque [...] a partir de que conozco a todas estas gentes pues me he fortalecido muchísimo. Y Son Raíz ha ido mostrando el México profundo antiguo, todo este corazón que estaba enterrado, como que lo estamos desenterrando, lo estamos desempolvando y lo estamos mostrando. Y ahorita, a mí me da gusto porque hay muchísimos jóvenes. No solamente

somos en Arcelia sino en todo el país que están metidos (Personal communication, October 17, 2010)

(I did not know I had so many brothers in this country. Essentially, what Son Raíz gave me was the chance to meet my brothers. That is a grand feeling because when you find out that there are other people fighting as you are, you realize that you are not alone. That makes your spirit much stronger. It makes you stronger and you say to yourself, this bunch of wizards [cultural promoters] spread around Mexico do the same work than you do. And then you collect experiences and learn from each one of them. [...] That is the key. Yes, we organize conferences to discuss issues around Mexican traditional music and we organize festivals. That is all right. The most important thing, though, has been getting to know them. These people have made me stronger. Son Raíz has also shown the deep ancient Mexico, all this heart that was buried. We are digging it up, dusting it off, and putting it on display. I like that very much because there are many young people involved as well. They are not only in Arcellia but in many other parts of the country).

This sense of brotherhood and solidarity is what makes Son Raíz a powerful source of empowerment. Discussions at the roundtables often challenge institutionally imposed cultural politics and offer new perspectives on possible approaches in various fields such as management of economic resources and cultural production, egalitarian cultural policies, educational projects to give traditional music a more prominent role within school curricula, projects to acknowledge the work carried out by traditional musicians, and work and promotion done by both cultural promoters and musicians within their communities. Thus, discussions over the years have focused on different topics regarding the revitalization of traditional music at the local, regional, and national levels. In 2007, for example, promoters and musicians reflected on the need for cultural transmission to younger generations, and the need to do so with “un enfoque social y comunitario para mantener vigente la música tradicional y difundirla” (a social and community perspective in order to maintain the significance of traditional music and disseminate it) (CONACULTA n/d in Martínez de la Rosa 2010:285). In 2008,

participants at roundtables analyzed the need for cultural promoters and musicians to be the main actors in managing cultural resources and intangible cultural heritages: that is, to make people aware of the importance of their cultural heritages and how regional cultures have contributed to the cultural heritage of the nation; to create music schools and resources for the study of traditional musics; and to draw attention to the government's lack of interest in traditional musics and the lack of funds to protect the intangible cultural heritage, and the patchiness of media coverage of traditional music compared with mediatized and Western classical music's (ibid., 285–286; Sevilla Villalobos 2009:291–304).

In 2009, roundtable participants went beyond reflection and took concrete action: they created the Red Nacional de Músicos y Promotores de la Cultura Tradicional Mexicana (National Network of Musicians and Promoters of Mexican Traditional Culture) and agreed on collective actions to be taken at the community level to revitalize traditional music and culture. Such actions remained mostly within the purview of cultural promoters, who are constantly limited by a lack of funds and working with little more than their own resources. In 2010, the year I attended the festival, roundtables examined the work carried out by this new network of musicians and promoters, discussed the different experiences cultural promoters and musicians had in the organization of their cultural projects, and reflected on community participation in traditional fiestas.

(2) Collective Identity Built around Traditional Music

Son Raíz was the first festival I attended in Mexico in which I could sense a strong community of people brought together by music and dance. Many seemed to know

each other from earlier events. In time, I would discover that many of the participants I met at Son Raíz would also regularly travel to attend other events where traditional music was featured. These people also attend and participate in the events described in previous chapters that mostly showcase one *son* subgenre.¹⁹⁴ Their passion for the music and dance and their pleasure at reuniting with friends were sufficient incentive for them to travel long distances. They became what I call the “festival community,” and I would re-encounter many of them at other festivals and events.

For three consecutive days, the sense of connection was overwhelming. The fact that the festival took place in a small community made things very easy: one walked everywhere and everything was close by. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were communal. Musicians would spontaneously perform (see figure 64 and figure 65). In the main square, presentations of new books, CDs, and DVDs would take place in the late afternoon, after which concerts would start. One could always take a break and stroll through the artisans’ stands selling handmade traditional crafts, clothing, jewelry, medicinal remedies, traditional foods, and goods. The main square functioned as a communal space for the festival community.

Groups selected¹⁹⁵ to perform on the official stage reflected the main theme of the festival—“A dialogue among regions”—in that they represented various Mexican cultural regions: the Tierra Caliente of Guerrero and Michoacán, the Jarocho lands of

¹⁹⁴ In fact, I met many of them again at the Festival de la Huasteca, Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan, VI Festival de Tierra Caliente, and Son para Milo.

¹⁹⁵ First day: Trío Santa Cecilia (Citlaltépetl, Veracruz); brass band Los Originales de la Sierra (San Juan Otontepec, Chontal, Veracruz); Los Venaditos de Citlaltépec (Citlaltépec, Veracruz); and Trío El Maguey (El Maguey, Citlaltépec, Veracruz). Second day: Danza de los Mecos (San Francisco Chontla, Veracruz); Trío de Don Fidencio Ramírez (Xoxocapa, Iamatlán, Veracruz); Picota, polka, redova y chotis (Sierra de San Carlos, Tamaulipas); and Yacatecuhtli (Otatitlán, Veracruz). Third day: brass band Nueva Ilusión (Calnali, Hidalgo), Ángel González y los Campesinos de la Sierra (Palomas, Guanajuato); and Los Capoteños de Michoacán (El Capote, Turicato, Michoacán).

southern Veracruz, the Huasteca region, and the Sierra de Xichú region with its *sones arribeños*. Performers played for a loving audience who danced all night to the different *sones* of Mexico.

Gamson states that each individual festival has “a different starting point and brings a different model of identity to bear” (1996:235). A charismatic collective identity is clearly manifested throughout the three days over which Son Raíz takes place. This collective identity is constructed for the “in-group” as well as for those that are viewed as outsiders. That is, the group’s collective identity is based on a common interest, which in this case is traditional music, and “forges an image of what the group stands for and how it wishes to be viewed by others” (Brewer 2001:119). Regional differences show through at Son Raíz, but are performed within the frame of reference of a broader collective identity constructed around the experience of traditional music. Music functions as a magnet. At any given moment when *sones jarochos*, *arribeños*, *huastecos*, and *terracalenteños* are performed, people gather to listen. The evening concerts keep the *tarima* full. More important that the *requinto* or the violin carrying the melody, and the *decimista* being *arribeño* or *jarocho*, is the message of a group committed to traditional music.

Son Raíz’s sense of shared identity may have the effect of developing within the individual a powerful affective attachment toward others, which strengthens the connection between the self and the collective. That is, individuals adopt the norms, beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors associated with the in-group. A sense of shared identity also leads individuals to situate themselves physically closer to others.

As I mentioned before, the town of Citlaltépetl, where the VI Festival Son Raíz took place, is a community of 11,000 inhabitants. Any community hosting an influx of 500 people for an event can expect to be heavily involved in the event's planning and execution. The festival taking place in a small community allows connection among participants and facilitates the design and execution of the festival as a dialogue among regions. Thus, Son Raíz becomes a site for an intensification of connections—particularly the musical and the social—establishing links within and beyond the locality in which it is held (Duffy 2005:54). Son Raíz falls into scholarly approaches that argue that community persists in spite of the dissolving of place-based ties: it is a community that builds on “the *nature*” of the ties (Brown-Saracino 2011:365).

(3) Community Building

Son Raíz is an itinerant festival whose community challenges the notion of place-based identity. Participants in Son Raíz feel part of a group of people that crosses over regions and regionalisms to create a community around traditional music and culture. We could even think of what some authors call “ambient communities,” or communities organized around shared tastes and activities (Brown-Saracino 2011:278–280).

As in other itinerant festivals, Son Raíz's change of location avoids links between community, context, and place-based identity. Instead, it is dislocation that provides an impetus for community formation, a way to broaden conceptions about place and community. Moving from one place to the other brings a sense of belonging to a group of participants that travels together following a common passion. On the other hand, the itinerancy also brings in another component: each host region brings its specificities and unique characteristics to the festivals, so participants gain a deeper knowledge of the

regions hosting the festival over the years. While the festival community works as an umbrella at Son Raíz, the notion of place of origin of participants and the trip undertaken to attend the festival is also nuanced. This is a topic of conversation as well as a theme that makes it into song introductions and commentary during performances. While Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalenteño identities get showcased at the festival, such identities get to be embedded in a larger collective identity built around traditional music and not tied to a particular location but a larger regional area.

Son Raíz appears as a fulcrum for community building. Like other communities, this one depends on a network of communication among its members: a collective of individuals who seek out and share a common interest. Those who form this collective believe in the notion of community and shared symbols, values, and ideologies. This community is based on the sharing of musical performances and other expressions of traditional culture: they believe that instead of relying on foreign cultural values, the knowledge of and adherence to their region's traditions and practices may improve the quality of the lives of their members. The festival reinforces, rebuilds, and sustains the collectivity as well as a shared Mexican identity with people from each participating region not only enjoying and respecting each other's music, but feeling it to be somewhat "their own" as part of a larger Mexican musical tradition. At one of the concerts, for example, a *trío huasteco* joined spontaneously Jarocho group Yacatecuhtli to perform together a *son jarocho* on stage (see figure 67). Often times, groups of children and adults from different regions gather to learn from each other (see figure 68).

Figure 67. Group Yacatecuhtli and *trío huasteco* on stage



Figure 68. Bella Nava Velazquez showing girls from *trío huasteco* Flor de Azahar how to play basic patterns on a *tamborita* from Tierra Caliente



The festival community forges affective and organizational ties as well as an extraordinary sense of belonging and social cohesion. The collective of musicians, music lovers, and traditional music troupes that attends Son Raíz consists of a group of

individuals that stay in contact throughout the year, attend and organize festivals and *encuentros* in different parts of Mexico, and support each other. In reference to the Rocky Mountain Bluegrass Festival, Gardner comments how “individuals participate in this community for reasons that transcend the music itself and that encompass the bluegrass festival as an intimate and communal cultural experience” (2004:157). For Gardner, this type of community is defined and constructed “through sustained and recurring social interaction” (*ibid.*, 175), which is the case of Son Raíz. Many other authors argue the same communal bonding in different festivals as an essential part of the event (for example, see Roemer 2007:186).

At Son Raíz, I could immediately sense a strong collective of people working towards one goal. Although I was part of the “out-group,” that changed quickly through my participation in the festival and my subsequent participation in other festivals where I kept re-encountering this same mobile community. Son Raíz’s welcoming, humble, and generous atmosphere is the key to its inclusiveness. Many of us attendees felt solidarity and friendship from the very beginning. Also at Son Raíz there is a sense of simplicity that for several of my informants is very attractive: the idea that traditional music can be a kind of reaction against modernity, a means to return to simpler ways of living that reflects a nostalgia for smaller communities where everything seems to be more personalized. The festival provides the people with a link to the past that authenticates their sense of belonging to an imaginary something—call it community, collective, or group of people.

Son para Milo: A People’s Encuentro—The Power of Dance

X Son para Milo, June 3–5, 2011

Final preparations at the School of Education in Mexico City have been taking place for a few days now. As in previous years, two days before the opening of the festival¹⁹⁶ there have been classes of traditional dance from Tixtla (Guerrero), Jarocho (Veracruz), Costa Chica (Guerrero and Oaxaca), Tierra Caliente (of Michoacán and Guerrero), and the Huasteca region. There have been CD launches, a few lectures on various aspects of traditional music, workshops on *décima* improvisation, and various crafts workshops showing people how to make objects by hand out of wicker, palm, clay, amaranth, and waist looms, all of which seem to be a good prologue to a festival of traditional music.

Everything is set for the opening day. The yellow and blue striped marquee is up. It shades a giant *tarima* as well as the two low-rise stages that flank it to the north and south (see figure 69). Chairs are all around the *tarima*. They await the audience, the dancers, the people. I arrive early and leave late. I witness how people come and go, though many sit and stay as long

Figure 69. Marquee over the tarima



¹⁹⁶ In my discussion of Son para Milo, I use the terms “festival” and “*encuentro*” interchangeably.

as I do. Many dance. Many talk and chat with others. Some stroll through the food and craft stands nearby. Food stands offer *carnitas*, *pinole*, *mole*, *tlayudas*, *pozole*, *zacahuil*, sweet breads, candy, and coffee (see figure 70 and figure 71). Artisans sell a variety of crafts from different Mexican regions: clothing, jewelry, toys, and musical instruments as well as books, CDs, and DVDs (see figure 72 and figure 73).

Figure 70. Candied fruit and caramelized dried fruit



Figure 71. *Pinole* and *mole* stand



Figure 72. Embroidering blouses from the Huasteca for sale



Figure 73. *Leona* for sale



For three days, traditional Mexican music is performed, danced, recreated, experienced. Except for the first day, when the music begins at 1 pm, the three days are filled with music and dance from 10 am to midnight –non-stop. About sixty groups perform, each on stage for thirty minutes, with a five-minute break between performances to allow groups to do a sound check. Groups alternate between the two stages so that they start after the last group with minimal delay. Although the schedule is not strictly kept, the two stages help to minimize greater delays.

All day I witness the passion for dancing. Though there are not a lot of people in the early afternoon, the *tarima* is full to capacity by 8 pm. People dance to groups performing the most varied Mexican regional musics: *sones* from the isthmus of Tehuantepec, Tixtla, Michoacán, Guerrero, Jalisco, Oaxaca, and the Huasteca and Jarocho regions. Regions and localities are represented. I listen to traditional mariachi groups and new and eclectic arrangements of traditional and urban musics, as well as brass bands. Tradition and modernity, children, youth and middle-aged people, rural and urban Mexico, Mexico City, past and present (see figure 74). Non-stop.

Figure 74. Tradition and modernity



There is intensity in the air from the moment the music begins and the dancers come onto the *tarima*. The dancing body reproduces and creates movement, displays personal and social meaning, and performs regional and cultural belonging. To the viewer, the individual becomes part of the group on the dance floor. In the middle of the *tarima*, the intensity of the *zapateado* danced by many is a pounding heart that moves you from the inside.

There are friends, acquaintances, people chatting, laughing, smiling. There is color everywhere, dancing shoes, beautiful costumes, hand-embroidered blouses and skirts, tapping shoes (see figure 75 and figure 76). Hats. Many hats, worn mostly by men (see figure 77). Several musicians can be spotted in the crowd as they wear distinctive regional attire or custom-made outfits to set their group apart.

Figure 75. Women wearing blouse from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (Oaxaca)

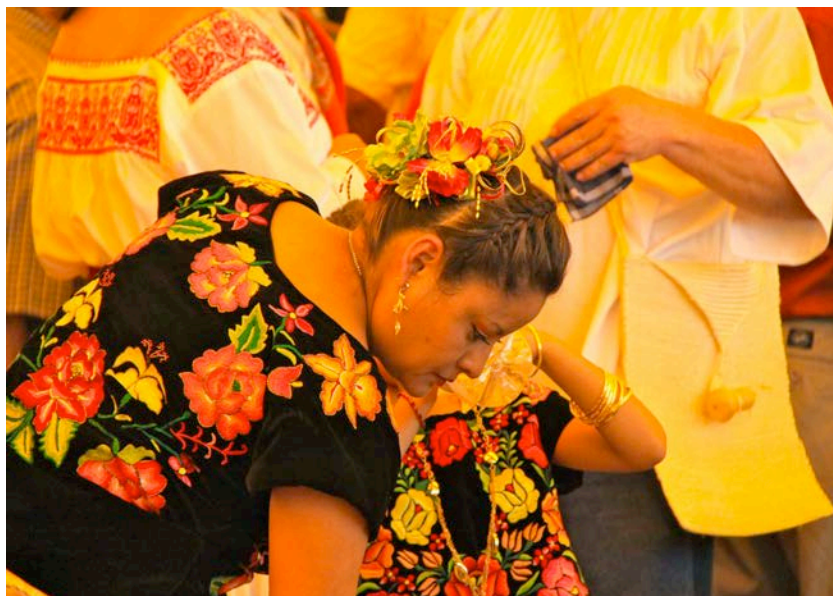


Figure 76. Tapping shoes



Figure 77. Dancers wearing hats



For many participants, this festival facilitates solidarity and teamwork around traditional music. More than other festivals I have attended, Son para Milo seems to be driven by the people, a people's festival. On one hand, organizers listen to the attendees' requests for beloved groups in the future programming. For their part, attendees not only

dance and experience music, but make a point of contributing financially by buying food, crafts, CDs, and other goods sold at the festival grounds. Through the years, Son para Milo (see figure 78) has grown as an expression of community and cultural exchange. Musicians and attendees come from Mexico City and from various Mexican regions. It is a space for community building.

Figure 78. Son para Milo poster

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Encuentro de Música Tradicional Mexicana

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Artists listed on the poster:
 Tío Apacapan
 Tío Los Molepapas
 Tejuco Cuicatlan
 Malintzin
 Califoneo de Huasteca
 Los Hijos de la Maraca
 Alma Caliente
 Folia Huasteca
 El Nohol
 Los Tiburones
 Pájaros de Guadalupe
 Amalinda Guevara "Maracón"
 Margarita Chaves
 Emmanuel Mora y Rocasandri "Son del Yabogochi"
 Los Chinos
 Los Cuernos de Cheche del Ermita Anaya "Nopompanchi"
 Nue Dadi
 In Cece Xochiquil
 Hermanos Tzila
 Resaca
 Propositos de Hidalgo
 Pañuelos de Playa Vicente
 Bataji
 Kuuuuh
 Montañas Huastecas
 Fuentes Boratillas
 Tío Atlapexca
 Bolson Volcano y los Chismos de la Costa
 Banda Clásica de Coahuila
 Sergio Campos "Sancito"
 Cocoteros de Colima
 Banda Huasteca
 Tío Chocoyaco
 Los Solimanes
 La Similla
 Tío Tambovancachi
 Ay del Bar
 Brío de Huasteca
 Aire Huasteco
 Recordo a Hidalgo
 Cuatrimé
 Antiguas Huastecas
 Adela
 Maribela Alma de las Américas
 La Zafra
 Los Tres Akabranes
 Nahuatl
 Nahuatl
 Son del Pueblo
 Chocoyaco
 Tropa Mexicana de Adolfo López
 Estampas Huastecas
 Son de Fabela
 Yabogochi
 Los Nahuatl
 Jóvenes Orquesta

Son para Milo: Timeline and Financial Support

For many years, dancer, researcher, and teacher Hermilo (Milo) Rojas Aragón taught folkloric dance at the School of Education and worked on various dance research and educational projects. One of those projects was to bring awareness of the rich variety of Mexican regional dances to children in elementary and secondary schools in Mexico City and other parts of the country. From the mid-1990s Rojas Aragón worked side by

side with a group of musicians bringing live music to schools and inviting children to dance. Realizing how easily dance seemed to come for people and how people only needed to feel the music to start dancing (Virginia Aguilar Mendoza, Personal communication, June 3, 2011), he worked on incorporating music and dance into the curriculum, and finding ways for people to know regional dances.

In 2000 and 2001, Hermilo took the first steps toward organizing a musical gathering through which to showcase the rich variety of Mexican traditional dance for a wider audience and provide an opportunity for future dance teachers to dance alongside many others. As the idea was taking shape, Hermilo passed away in 2002. Teachers Consuelo Martínez Sánchez and Rodrigo Rojas Aragón, along with a group of Hermilo's students, continued with Hermilo's project, and three months after his passing, the first Encuentro de Música Tradicional Mexicana Son para Milo took place. This group of students was part of the folkloric dance troupe Taller de Danza Tezcatlipoca, which Hermilo Rojas Aragón directed for several years. For such a team of organizers to continue with Milo's project was the best tribute they could pay to their teacher. Musical groups participating in that first Son para Milo were those who had collaborated with Hermilo in the past bringing music to schools: Son del Pueblo (coastal music from Oaxaca), Palabra de Escándalo (ballads), Trío Aguacero (*sones huastecos*), Yndios Verdes (*sones jarochos*), and Ñu Daavi (contemporary arrangements of Mexican *sones*) (Virginia Aguilar Mendoza, Personal communication, June 3, 2011).

What started as a small gathering with a few groups performing grew very quickly over the years. When I attended the festival in 2011, sixty groups performed representing a majority of Mexican regions: soloists, trios, and groups of various sizes

(up to a thirty-piece brass band).

At the end of each Son para Milo, many of the performing groups request to participate again the following year. Followers of the various groups ask organizers for their favorite ensembles to remain in the program as well. Thus, in planning the programming, organizers make room for well-known and beloved groups as well as new ones. By January, invitations to perform at the upcoming festival are sent to groups. All groups play for free. For most, to play at Son para Milo is a way to contribute to the idea of supporting both traditional music and the idea of the festival as a resource for community building.

In 2011 organizers were struggling to keep the event alive because of lack of funds. Up until that year, funds were provided by the Secretaría de Cultura (Ministry of Culture), the Dirección General de Normales (Schools Authority), the Normal de Maestros (School of Education), and a percentage of the revenue from craft and food stalls. These funds covered basic expenses such as the sound system, sound engineer, marquee, chairs, stage rental, electricity, and food for musicians. In 2011, though, all three of the organizations funds were cut and only a third of the crafts and food revenue was returned to the festival. The other two-thirds were for the artisans and food sellers themselves and for the School of Education to cover the rental of the space (Filiberto Ramírez, Personal communication, June 3, 2011). Despite the shortfall, the festival's basic expenses ended up being covered by donations by attendees. To date, Son para Milo has continued and is under the same model of relying on attendee donations and a cut of the market stalls.

A Meeting Point through the Power of Dance

My analysis of Son para Milo is based on the idea of urban youth and a middle-aged population together claiming a collective identity through the embracing of traditional music as banner of cultural identity. As we have seen in Son Raíz, this collective identity involves “shared representations of the group” (Brewer 2001:119) based on the experience of traditional music, which in the case of this festival takes place mostly through dance.

Son para Milo functions as a meeting point for musicians, dancers, and traditional music lovers. The great diversity of music and dance in evidence at the festival as well as the cultural exchange is an attraction for many attendees (see figures 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, and 86).

Figure 79. Group Fuentes Brotantes (*sones de arpa grande*, Michoacán)



Figure 80. Trova Mexicana de Adolfo Lugo (*sones jaliscienses*)



Figure 81. Hermanos Tavira (*sones de tamborita del Balsas*)



Figure 82. Los Cocoteros de Colima (Traditional mariachi from Colima)



Figure 83. Group As del Sur (sones de Tixtla, Guerrero)



Figure 84. Alma Calentana (*sones de tamborita del Balsas*)



Figure 85. Tiburones (*sones jarochos*)



Figure 86. Los Brujos de Huejutla (*sones huastecos*)



According to the festival’s web page,¹⁹⁷ Son para Milo is a broad-based project that seeks solidarity and volunteer work from students (at the School of Education), former students, teachers, and citizens who align themselves with the festival’s goals. Moreover,

Son para Milo es (el espacio) una fiesta donde se encuentran y reencuentran los músicos, los amigos, los bailadores, versadores y todos aquellos que se sienten identificados y atraídos por nuestras costumbres y tradiciones (ibid.)

(Son Milo is [the space] a fiesta where musicians, friends, dancers, poetry improvisers, and anyone who identifies with and is attracted to our customs and traditions can meet and reunite).

The fact that Son para Milo takes place at this location—a space within the School of Education made public for the festival—gave the event general appeal: many people respect teachers, value their work as educators, and consider them to be part of the “common people.” The design of the space itself (with its low-rise stages and big *tarima*

¹⁹⁷ www.sonparamilo.org

under the marquee) is also meaningful: performers and dancers create a horizontal space, welcoming to all, that allows for participation and interaction. This design echoes that typical of a community fiesta and facilitates the sharing and the feeling of “being together.”

Several people I talked to feel this festival belongs to them. Dancer Javier Santiago Martínez, “El negro costeño,” tells me that Son para Milo “es nuestra cultura madre. Es para convivir” (It is our mother culture. It is for experiencing together) (Personal communication, June 3, 2011). When I asked him how this event makes him feel, he replied:

Sí, claro, me hace sentir vivo. Esto es mío, esto es nuestro, es de mis abuelos. Mis abuelos bailaban, mi abuela bailaba, mis primos tocan. Entonces, esto es parte de uno, parte de la herencia familiar (ibid.)

(Yes, of course, it makes me feel alive. It is mine, it is ours, it belongs to my grandparents. My grandfathers danced, my grandmother danced, my cousins play. Therefore, this is part of me, part of my heritage).

Dance bridges past and present through sonorous, visual, and physical indexes. Dance, which according to Novack involves an image of a person in relation to others and in relation to ideas (1990:14), draws on collective memory to recreate a cultural identity expressed through physical movement. At Son para Milo, this cultural identity is pan-regional: this festival gathers a variety of regional *son* genres and traditional musics that many view as their own and situates them in an urban setting. Thus, Son para Milo gives people the opportunity to experience the cultural past as they dance.

As in the case of other dance musics, for example as Hutchinson has demonstrated for *quebradita*, musicians and dancers make strong social statements “through their use and support of an aesthetic system that [...] insists on strong ties to

roots” (Hutchinson 2009a:49). The passion and intensity with which music and dance are felt and experienced at Son para Milo sets this festival apart: for three days, people experience music and dance for both sheer enjoyment and to claim traditional music as cultural roots (see figure 87).

Figure 87. Dancers under the marquee



The eclectic collective that participates at Son para Milo both discerns regional identity and delivers an image of pan-regional identity. Issues of regionalism are dealt with and symbolized in the dancing of *sones* through movement and attire. Such regionalism, though, yields a collective dancing body that dialogues with the broader regional cultural identity.

While regional musics are displayed and, as they do at Son Raíz, audiences identify with one or another region, at Son para Milo, a supra-regional identity crosses over ethnic and regional differences, which also are strengthening and reifying, and to some extent, even reinvented. Javier Santiago Martínez, for example, tells me that his

favorite music is that of the coast of Guerrero and Oaxaca. Yet he likes and dances most *son* subgenres:

Sí, todos tratamos de copiar, tratamos de imitar a una región, aunque no sea nuestra región. Pero sí queremos ser parte o estar ahí arriba de esta tarima que emocionalmente te quema los pies estando aquí arriba. Entonces te llena, te emociona y siempre hay alguien que sabe cómo se baila y lo vas siguiendo, lo vas imitando, lo vas mirando de reojo. Entonces, cuando más o menos ya sabes cómo va, pues ya te sueltas. Y aquí nadie te va estar viendo y criticando si sabes, no sabes (ibid.)

(Yes, we all try to copy, try to imitate a region, whether or not it is our region. But we want to be part of or up there on this *tarima* that emotionally burns your feet when you are on it. Then, it fills you up, you get excited and there is always someone who knows how to dance and you go along, you imitate this person, looking at him/her out of the corner of your eye. Then, when you more or less know how it goes, you let yourself go. Here no one watches and judges whether you know or don't know how [to dance]).

Around the *tarima*, *sones* are played, sung, watched, and danced. As is the case with other dance genres, *son* dancing is an experience that negotiates cultural and regional identity while constructing a space of visual and sensorial enjoyment. Minds and bodies speak a language that is revealing of cultural and ideological significance. The dancing connects people from various locations and creates a symbolic sense of solidarity, networking, and community. It is a collective by voluntary association and made real by the performance. Thus, as Dorothy Noyes argues, “the community exists in its collective performances: they are the locus of its imagining in their content and of its realization in their performance” (1995:460). Through their performance, attendees “feel together” by virtue of their common experience, a confluence of feelings that, in turn, generates action.

The dancing of regional *sones* is signified by the different steps and body language (gestures, overall posture, and physical presence): the elegant and controlled

sensual movements representing courtship—mostly the man pursuing the woman who flirts with him—and the precise *zapateado* in Jarocho *sones*; the solid rhythmic drive and energetic steps in *sones* from Tierra Caliente of Michoacán and Guerrero; the contained movements for both male and female dancers in Huasteco *sones*; the smooth and easy waltz-like swinging in *sones* from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; the complicated steps in *sones* from Tabasco; and the handkerchief and *rebozo* gestures signaling moves and turns in *sones* from Tixtla. Dancers not only know the basic steps for many of the *son* subgenres, they deliver variations and complicated improvisation patterns. Dancers do not touch their partners, focusing their bodies on the production of sound on the wooden platform as well as the spatial relationship with the partner. Gender differentiation, clearly defined on the dance floor, is present in most of the *son* subgenres. Sensuality and courtship are displayed through gestures and movement, as well as a constant negotiation of wit, courtesy, sexual desire, submissiveness, and determination through body languages.

The dancing of *sones* cuts across generations and age groups. On the dance floor, young, middle-aged, and older dancers construct the scene both acoustically and visually: the patterns created by their steps sounding on the wooden floor are an essential element of the soundscape and their dancing bodies and beautiful attire appeal to the visual senses in a way that a musical performance alone cannot.

A Note on Clothing

As mentioned above, the dancing taps into a cultural memory that creates a meaning, a feeling, and a sense of belonging. The collective at Son para Milo also uses other symbols as a statement of such belonging, attire being one of the most powerful

ones. Dancers, musicians, and attendees choose their clothing carefully. Huasteco singer

Esperanza Zumaya tells me:

siempre vengo [a los encuentros] vestida de huasteca. Me identifica mucho. Me gusta mucho y me siento muy bien vestida de huasteca, y como ya me conoce la gente, pues me piden hacerme foto con ellos y pues, para salir más bonita (Personal communication, November 14, 2010)

(I always come [to the festivals] dressed in Huasteco clothing. I identify with it a lot. I like it and I feel great dressed that way. Since people know me, they ask me if I can pose in their photo, and so, [I dress up] to come up nicer [in the photo]).

For Mexican indigenous groups, traditional clothing remains a powerful ethnic identity marker. Mestizo women and men who deliberately choose to wear traditional clothing do so as a statement of cultural identity and belonging. Thus, there is no straightforward link between dress and ethnicity among young and middle-aged attendees at Son para Milo. Rather, dress is a politicized statement of self-ascription to a particular cultural affiliation. Composer, guitarist, and singer Anastasia (“Sonaranda”) Guzmán Vázquez¹⁹⁸ comments:

Como mi maestro El Negro Ojeda solía decir, el son hay que comerlo, vestirlo, vivirlo... es un todo. Hay todo un compromiso en ser músico tradicional (independientemente de que tengas otras herramientas formativas), es volverte parte de una familia “sonera” que te incluirá dependiendo de lo que realmente te vuelvas parte de ellos. Muchos viven de la música mexicana sin haber tenido contacto profundo con ella nunca y se nota. Hay tantos secretos que solo se aprenden de boca a oído y tocando con ellos. Y sí, parte de eso es la ropa, que se vuelve como la piel, identidad y sobre todo amor, porque amas todo lo que conforma una cultura (Personal communication, June 4, 2010)

(As my teacher El Negro Ojeda used to say, the [Mexican] *son* is to be eaten, worn, lived... It is a whole. There is a full commitment when it comes to be a traditional musician (whether or not one has other kinds of

¹⁹⁸ Guzmán Vázquez is a classically trained musician who performs her own arrangements of Mexican *sones* and strongly identifies with traditional music and aesthetic values.

training), it is becoming part of the “sonera” family,¹⁹⁹ who will include you as much as you want to be involved in it. Many people live Mexican music without ever having had deep contact with it, which is something one notices. There are so many secrets that can only be learned orally and by playing with them [traditional musicians]. And yes, part of it is clothing, which becomes your skin, your identity, and especially love, because you love everything that makes up a culture.)

Colorful embroidered Huastecan blouses and skirts, velvet blouses and skirts with floral patterns from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca, crocheted blouses and skirts for the Jarocho woman, white *guayaberas* and pants for the Jarocho men, *paliacates*, *huipiles*, *rebozos* (see figure 88), regional hats, handbags, cowboy boots, and tapping shoes get mixed with everyday outfits of jeans and T-shirts on the festival scene (figure 89). Everyone wearing traditional or neo-traditional clothing is proud to have put on their best outfits to come to the dance. Clothing functions as a shared symbol easily grasped by the audience.

Figure 88. Women with *rebozo* and *huasteca* blouse



¹⁹⁹ *Familia “sonera”* or “sonera” family refers to the ensemble of those who perform Mexican *son* in both urban and rural contexts.

Figure 89. Traditional outfits and jeans on the dancing floor



Moreover, clothing is significantly relevant as a statement that connects the clothing with the body and, therefore, expresses social significance as it reveals the “the wearer’s embodied identity” (Jackson 2004:173).

Ramírez Castilla et al. comment on how Huastecan embroideries are Huastecan codices in which ideas and beliefs are drawn with thread (2008:164) (see figure 90 and figure 91). This idea could be applied to other regional embroidered textiles. During my fieldwork research, I have witnessed how both men and women attending festivals wear stunning traditional outfits. Dress—the traditional costume—binds, entwines, and connects an individual with a group. Meanings in dress are constituted and imbued with signification by both users and viewers.

Figure 90. Woman wearing a Huasteca blouse



Figure 91. Woman wearing a Huasteca blouse



In her study of the Herero dress, Deborah Durham argues that the dress is “a ‘technique of the body,’ a set of attitudes and dispositions to the self and world, a habitus” (1999:391). Indeed, traditional dress and body disposition add new meanings to

the physical space and the aesthetic world of the dance. Clichéd gender roles are also expressed through dress and body disposition, from men's shows of gallantry and bravery, to women's demureness. Since clothing cannot be conceptually separated from the body itself, dress is a powerful tool to construct the body and its representation (Hansen 2004:370), which in this case is connected to traditional culture aesthetics.

As in other festivals in Mexico, at Son Raíz and Son para Milo, there is significant emphasis on shared cultural, social, and even political tastes, explicitly or implicitly expressed. Even if not formally, the community of musicians, dancers, cultural promoters, and music lovers attending the events feel united by “a sense of belonging and connection that arises from informal voluntary and affective ties” (Brown-Saracino 2011:362). That is, their ties come not only from “hard” identity attributes such as ethnicity, but also “softer” ones, such as shared ideas and activities (ibid., 362). Music provides a sense of belonging for participants; it elicits a space for interaction, and a social and cultural setting that emphasize regionalisms while also conveying an image of pan-regional identity. Furthermore, the musical experience constructs a mobile community in performative environments that travel with the community itself.

The arrangement of the space in both Son Raíz and Son para Milo is meaningful as it reinforces sociability and connection among attendees and between audience and performers. Low-rise stages, for example, symbolically bring performing musicians closer to the audience and the big *tarima* facilitates the feeling of the dance as a communal experience. Dancing bodies dressed in traditional or neo-traditional clothing mark regional and cultural identities, a sense of belonging.

CHAPTER 8. CLOSING

The craze for organizing music festivals and *encuentros* in Mexico in the 1990s as a means to preserve and bring back musical traditions from the past fostered conversations on issues of identity and tradition within academic, institutional, and non-institutional cultural associations and musicians' circles. That trend coincided with academic and public conversations about and preoccupations with globalization, which articulated notions of cultural power, manipulation, and control over local and global scenarios. At the time, the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan, Veracruz functioned as a catalyst to bring together musicians from different parts of Veracruz, inspire young musicians to play Jarocho *son*—music perceived as traditional and outside the globalized, mediated music industry—and revitalize a musical tradition neglected in previous decades. It also functioned as a roundtable on identity, tradition, and globalization issues on-line.

These very ideas of bringing back and (re)creating musical practices and social contexts were behind not only the aforementioned *encuentro* but other festivals and cultural projects I have discussed above in the previous chapters. A common thread in several of these was the idea of a social movement mobilized around traditional music, practices, and aesthetics which were revitalized and re-contextualized by re-signifying and relocating them into the present (see chapter 6). The “rescuing” of the traditions happened not only in the Jarocho region, but the Huasteca and Tierra Caliente regions as well. Although social contexts and historical processes in the various regions were different, aims were similar: recovering traditional music and culture as a way to

rediscover local cultural values lost over time partly due to globalization processes and changes in social conditions (see chapter 3).

The revival of these musical traditions also benefited from interest on the part of an intellectual elite that was invested in researching the traditions from both musicological and socio-anthropological points of view. This intellectual elite was key in the construction of re-significations of musical traditions, and of a particular intellectual discourse about musical traditions—which affected performative and non-performative aspects of musical expressions.

According to Julie Brown, “hybridization happens throughout history through all manner of cultural confrontation” (2000:129). The *son* was born as a hybrid genre out of the cultural and social confrontations that took place in Mexican music and culture from 1519 onward—particularly since the 1700s. Over time, it became a marker of a pan-Mexican identity as well as of regional identities within Mexico. In the preceding chapters, I have demonstrated how within this revival scene, the performance of identity at festivals featuring Mexican *sones* is shaped by larger cultural politics, issues, and trends. Each region, each festival, and each cultural center has particular characteristics.

Within the Huasteca region, ethnic identity is particularly relevant among indigenous groups participating at the Festival de la Huasteca while mestizo groups perform mostly cultural and regional identity. As we saw in chapter 4, differentiation in the festival is performed through symbolic and performative aspects embedded in the music scene. Most of the music performed by indigenous Huasteco groups consists of *sones de costumbre* and dances the groups choose to project as representative of themselves to the out-group. They do not seek audience approval, nor they perform for

the entertainment of others. On the other hand, Huasteco *tríos* stress the importance of the audience liking their performances and repertoire choices. Cultural and regional identity among mestizos is produced and consumed through music, clothing, food, crafts, and other cultural artifacts that account for the social power that binds participants together, which is sought in the festival scene.

Within the Jarocho, Huasteca, and Tierra Caliente regions, identity is understood as an all-encompassing notion in which shared beliefs, perceptions, experiences, and values inform cultural practices. This identity feeds from an idea of a past that is recreated to fit present needs, the tradition, an entity that goes through constant readjustments and enlightens present-day practices. Organizers, musicians, and attendees engage in conversations about continuity and preservation as well as innovation and transformation of the musical genre, its contexts, and the music-making experience.

Group agency is particularly relevant in the Jarocho discourse (chapter 5) as many feel that *son jarocho* belongs to them: the music is one of the expressions of traditional culture, which is passed on from generation to generation and therefore belongs to everyone. Moreover, adherence to a Jarocho collective has been strengthened by a discourse of Jarocho music and culture as a statement of social solidarity among practitioners at state, national, and transnational levels.

A collective identity created around traditional music underscores cultural heritage as something that is deliberately chosen in the various Mexican regions. Customs, beliefs, and ideologies informed by traditional music and culture have shaped this collective that understands traditional music practices and experiences as social action. This is particularly true for Tierra Caliente (see chapter 6), a region historically

marked by a lack of institutions working on the development of regional culture.

Although the *son*'s revival in the region did not take off until the beginning of the 21st century and Terracalenteño *sones* do not have the wide projection and numerous followers and practitioners that *son jarocho* and *son huasteco* have, efforts to re-contextualize the musical tradition (musical and extra-musical aspects) are underway.

In general terms, regional, cultural, and ethnic identities are performed in all the festivals I cover in my dissertation. Although such identities are more localized and nuanced in festivals that focus on a particular *son* subgenre (*son huasteco* in the Festival de la Huasteca, *son jarocho* at the Encuentro de Jaraneros and Encuentro Jardín Kojima, and *son terracalenteño* in the *fandango* in Huetamo and the Festival de Tierra Caliente), festivals that feature a variety of *son* subgenres, such as Son para Milo and Son Raíz (chapter 7), evoke a wider pan-Mexican identity to which cultural and ethnic diversity is fundamental.

Reflecting on the overall efforts in the revival process—including redefining notions such as identity and tradition—I keep coming back to a point that scholar and friend Jorge Amós Martínez Ayala once made: “la única manera de que esto [música tradicional] viva es que se vuelva otra vez parte de la fiesta” (November 26, 2010) (the only way for this [traditional music] to live is that it returns to being part of the fiesta). That is what cultural promoters, musicians, and festival organizers have been trying to accomplish. As I have discussed in this dissertation, festivals are musical gatherings that attempt to showcase *sones* as part of a fiesta. At most of these festivals, there is a space after the programmed performances for a *fandango* or *huapangueada*—the physical and symbolic occasion for the binding together of the people, community sharing and

exchange, and deep socialization. Implicit in Martínez Ayala's statement is the concept of transmission, which is inherent to the very notion of tradition. Both at festivals and in cultural centers, the transmission of culture is fundamental to the very idea of these cultural projects.

In addition, fundamental in the planning and outcome of the majority of festivals I have dealt with is the idea of community building. Festivals such as Son Raíz and Son para Milo, for example, have helped prompt the formation and shaping of new collectivities. Noyes comments that since "individual acts of identification create the reality of social categories, the reality of a community with which to identify comes from collective acts" (1995:468). Noyes also comments that "acting in common makes community" (ibid), which is exactly what these festivals and cultural projects are about: sharing music and culture while experiencing and exploring collectively the emotions and socialization processes within oneself. The interaction and bonding reinforces the sense of belonging to the collective, and the sense of community transcends regional borders. While cultural differences are acknowledged, the pre-eminence of the border diminishes under the umbrella of a wider Mexican identity signified by traditional music. Although practitioners may feel a strong connection to a particular region, at Son Raíz and Son para Milo the sense of being part of a wider community that is formed around traditional music, which does not exclude individual attachment to a region, prevails. The musical occasion both nuances the connection musicians have to regional cultures and forges a wider collective of people who, for the most part on these particular occasions, do not seek remuneration other than the sharing the musical experience with others—*convivir*.

As we have seen, tradition is both a legacy from the past and an all-encompassing practice that allows for continuity and informs contemporary music practices. Thus, cultural heritage is considered to be a conduit between past and present whereby the past informs and validates present-day cultural practices. At any rate, the communities at the cultural centers and events I have discussed are entities in constant transformation with shared memories and practices. Within these communities, cultural traditions are fluid, selected, and constantly reinvented by the groups through changing historical contexts.

No doubt many of the goals musicians, cultural promoters, and intellectuals had back at the end of the 1980s when they created groups, cultural projects, and musical gatherings in order to revitalize traditional music have been achieved: workshops to learn and play Huasteco, Jarocho, and Terracalenteño *sones* take place weekly at cultural centers and public spaces such as gardens and central *plazas*, elder musicians have been included as part of educative and performative projects, local variants of regional *sones* have gained visibility, the construction of musical instruments has taken off, and publication of printed, audio, and visual materials has helped to expand the reach of the *son* cultures. Learning and performing opportunities have dramatically increased. Jarocho people have demonstrated that the *son jarocho* staged by folkloric ballets in the 1950s was a far cry from the more rural and community-oriented forms of *son jarocho* they have been reclaiming over the last thirty years. Huasteco people have reaffirmed their connection to the region and to Huastecan aesthetics through the music, a key marker of Huastecan identity. Terracalenteños are working to bring visibility to their regional *sones*, the many variants and performers, and the idea of cultivating traditional music as a

way to both minimize the impact of foreign musical trends and create a stronger connection with local cultures.

While some of the old styles of playing and performance contexts have been “rescued,” they have also been profoundly transformed to adjust to new scenarios and needs. Whereas this is more obvious within Jarocho practices due to the massive number of practitioners, Huasteco and Terracalenteño practices are undergoing the same processes. New and old coexist. New stereotypes (e.g., standardization of repertoire, tuning of instruments, playing and dancing styles, and particular ways of dressing) have been created and new contexts for the music are being specifically designed to resemble past contexts from which the music originated. In the re-contextualization process, some elements make it into present practices and some do not, a process of selection that happens at all levels in the new phase the *son* is experiencing. Only time will tell what will be retained and what will not. Thus, massification has generated stereotypes, but also assured generational transmission and exchange.

The issue of agency in the creation of cultural identity and community is a multilayered one and, in the case of Mexican *sones*, one that merits further scholarly attention. To what degree do interventions on the part of institutions and others who wield official political power have an impact on cultural discourses and the molding of musical experience to fit such discourses? In my experience, institutions such as CONACULTA play a key role in the production, understanding, and negotiation of ideas of musical practices in contemporary festivals of *sones* in Mexico (e.g., inclusion of indigenous music in Festival de la Huasteca and inclusion of theoretical discussions in Son Raíz). The planning and outcome of a festival greatly depends on the person(s) in

charge and their ability to negotiate with the community where the festival is sited and with the cultural promoters operating in that community. Thus, power relations and control over values are part of the festival.

Within non-profit projects such as El Tecolote, El Huerto, and Jardín Kojima, cultural agents such as founding members and project organizers exercise particular views on music-making as well as on the local and regional cultures represented. Identity, meanings, and symbolic elements linked to the cognitive system provided by culture are negotiated (e.g., sacrificing a goat and making tortillas on a clay *comal* over a pit fire during the Festival de Tierra Caliente, as discussed in chapter 6). Identities constructed and negotiated in and through the musical experience of *son* involve features of re-contextualization practices through which the musical experience is reframed. Just as traditions are reinvented, re-contextualizing processes select prior discourses and reinterpret them to fit new needs, contexts, audiences, and scenarios. The focus may change, and thus, the experience of *son* reflects society and change on the cusp between tradition and modernity, a malleable past and an emerging present.

Although issues of identity and tradition are recurring themes in conversations among friends, musicians, and audience members and at stage presentations; although preserving, bringing back from the past, finding, recovering, and rediscovering tradition, identity, and roots often resonate in these conversations; although one may question: What and whose tradition? What identity? What aspects of it? What and whose past? What was there to be (re)discovered? Why do people perceive traditions as disappearing?; and although audience members, musicians, and practitioners who voluntarily participate at these festivals are aware of the importance these events have in

the construction of the selves, in the end the most enduring part of attending a festival is the shared experience and the strengthening of the group's identity through music.

The rethinking of *son* festivals that I have done fills a gap within studies of such festivals, connecting notions of identity, tradition, innovation, the production of heritage, and musical processes to historical factors in the conceptualization of the nation, region, and locality, and proving that in fact, festivals negotiate tradition and innovation and that one of the main motivations for people in attending such events is *convivir*. I have collected theoretical and historical data as well as my informants' opinions. These are revealing of current ideas about music-making in Mexico and, in particular, *son* music-making, which I have argued grows as a response to state policies of the past and present-day mediated cultural expressions, as well as being a reflection of people's agency and their own role in creating their own musical events.

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