

El Festival de la Huasteca: space for the construction and performance of identity and culture

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Social changes in Mexico during the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century – such as rapid population growth, migration to urban centers and the United States, and changes in general living conditions – contributed to a deterioration of social contexts and conditions for the performance of traditional music. By the 1980s, governmental institutions, musicians and cultural promoters started to organize music festivals in different regions as a way to promote and revitalize regional culture and musical practices. Drawing on ethnographic material, I examine the Festival de la Huasteca as a yearly cultural event in which music is experienced as entertainment as well as performance of group identity (ethnic, cultural, and regional) in Northeastern Mexico. The festival also serves as a means of reinforcing Huasteca identity and culture through music, dance, and other cultural expressions.

Music festivals; Identity; Music and Place; Traditional Music; Mexican Son.

In this paper, I study the Festival de la Huasteca as an example of the festivals organized in Mexico since the end of the 1980s as a tool to promote and revitalize regional culture and musical practices.

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Before delving into the festival itself, I briefly describe the Huasteca region. More than in other regions of Mexico, in the Huasteca region the intermixing of, and interaction between, indigenous and mestizo populations are reflected in cultural practices. Through the construction of Huasteca¹ identity and culture, the festival addresses ethnic boundaries, which are negotiated and produced through social interaction. Central to this negotiation is the function of culture to authenticate ethnic boundaries and providing a system of meaning to the group (Nagel 1994:162). Moreover, the notion of tradition as an all-encompassing concept and the production of heritage are ever-present in this festival's music scene, in which past and present coexist and give meaning to each other. After presenting the history of the festival and the thematic lines around which it is organized, I draw on ethnographic material to take a closer look at the XVI edition of the Festival de la Huasteca I attended in 2011.

The Huasteca region

West of the Mexican Gulf and east of the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains, the cultural region known as the Huasteca occupies a territory that includes parts of the states of Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, Puebla, Querétaro, and Veracruz (see figures 1 and 2, in which the colors highlight state boundaries).



Figure 1. The Huasteca region. (Copyright: CONACULTA²)



Figure 2. The Huasteca region close-up. (Copyright: CONACULTA. Regionalization [2007] by Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de la Huasteca)

Cultural interaction and diversity are notions often used to describe the multiethnic Huasteca region. The presence of a large indigenous population³ and the constant interaction between indigenous and mestizos have historically contributed to the region's idiosyncrasies. In spite of the profound transformations suffered over the centuries (first the Mexica [Aztec] and then the Spanish conquests), over time Huasteca people reorganized an enduring continuity that has sustained ethnic identities (Ariel de Vidas 2009:16). Huasteca aesthetics are embedded in the social and cultural make-up of the region.

Teenek (or Huastec), Otomí, Tepehua, Totonaco, Nahuatl, and Chichimeca people have shared this multiethnic area since pre-Hispanic times. Forever in flux, the region, which was once broader than it is now, has evolved over time through historical processes in which the various groups in the area coexisted and interrelated at social, political, and economic levels. Today, people from the various indig-

enous groups live alongside a mestizo population as they have since colonial times. According to Jurado Barranco and Camacho Jurado (2009:272), and Trejo Barrientos *et al.* (2014:40), the various groups shared a space with a common cultural matrix, which allowed them to interact on various levels, particularly that of ritual. Notwithstanding cultural and social complexities at the local level, this multicultural and multiethnic region shares historical and cultural traits with indigenous Mesoamerica.⁴ Religious and socio-cultural characteristics specific to Mesoamerica developed among peoples in what is now known as the Huasteca region by 700 A.D, and fully developed with the gradual rise of the Mexica (900–1521 A.D.), whose language, Náhuatl, became dominant in the region (Jurado Barranco 2001:25).

After Spanish settlers and African slaves arrived 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* system⁵ 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 newly 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 eighteenth 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.

Although the different ethnic groups speak distinct languages (Teenek, Náhuatl, Otomí, Chichimeco, and Tepehua), 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 this region in which shared cultural and social traits permeate both indigenous and mestizo practices and lifestyles. Mestizo

people, however, often use their cultural exchanges with indigenous people to ideologically establish their own position of power and control over them.⁶

As scholars such as Brandes (1998), Pérez Martínez (1998), and Turino (2008) have demonstrated, cultural practices in general, and musical practices in particular, bring a sense of social cohesion and solidarity. Particularly among the indigenous population, music in the region is conceived of as an essential part of agricultural, religious, and life-cycle ceremonies and celebrations. Music is central to indigenous people's traditional ceremonies. In general, fiestas and festivals in the region are particular occasions to celebrate life and culture. Along with music and dance, food (heavily based on corn), traditional clothing and crafts, a connection with nature, respect for the elders, ancestor worship, a distinct sense of community, a hefty amount of rituals and ceremonies, and a sense of space in accordance with nature are all part of the celebration as well.

Notions of culture and identity at play

Generally speaking, in the Festival de la Huasteca and other festivals I have attended, 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” (Giménez 2009:8).⁷

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). A

sense of belonging and self understanding as a group is recreated and reproduced through the aesthetic experience that takes place through music and dance, as well as other activities that are part of the festival and contribute to the creating of a meaningful cultural and social space. Musicians, dancers, organizers, performers, and attendees produce and experience culture collectively, reaffirming a worldview shared by the group.

In the context of the Festival de la Huasteca, a yearly cultural event anticipated by many, music is experienced as entertainment as well as a reinforcement and affirmation of group identities – such as ethnic, cultural, and regional – which Tim Rice refers to as “collective self-understanding as represented by various characteristics, activities, and customs, including music” (2007:23). Group identities are basic to social life, to forming social groups. Public expressive cultural practices such as music, dance, and festivals are a primary way for people to articulate such group identities (Turino 2008:187).

In the multi-ethnic Huasteca region, the boundaries of cultural and ethnic identity often get blurred, and the regional interplay of ethnic identities is embedded within a wider Huasteca identity. It is through collective celebrations such as the Festival de la Huasteca that ethnic identities gathered under the wider umbrella of Huasteca identity are made distinct for those both within and outside Huasteco groups. Ethnic differentiation is constructed through music, clothing, and language, which is particularly obvious among indigenous groups participating in festivals. Mestizo groups perform their micro-regional Huasteca identity through music repertoire, language – Spanish or Náhuatl – and/or improvisation of lyrics, which often praise the region and the culture.

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). 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" (p. 15). 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" (Nagel 1994:161).

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 contrasted with other groups. While ethnic identity is constructed through a selection of some of the "cultural stuff," cultural identity is more inclusive. It can be described as "a group's self-image" (Mageo 2002:493), which is constructed in contrast to and in comparison with other cultures.⁸

Regional identity is ever-present in the Festival de la Huasteca. Paasi argues that 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 Festival de la Huasteca, these elements are significant for both mestizo and indigenous people and attend to multiple categories such as ideas about nature, culture/ethnicity, and images of people/community, among others.

The exploration of identity at the festival takes place as Huasteca culture is experienced and recreated within the festival scene. Mestizo and indigenous people from the six different states within the Huasteca region display cultural practices (e.g., particular playing and dancing styles) and artifacts particular to each state (e.g., clothing, food, and crafts). It is through the choosing, display, and performance of specific 'cultural stuff' that attendees establish boundaries and make a statement of membership to a particular group or locality. Indigenous groups in particular wear traditional clothing, speak indigenous languages, and perform traditional dances to represent themselves to the outside world. Thus, although a discursive 'Huasteca identity' overarches the event, ethnic and cultural identities are ever present. In fact, for many, the concept of 'Huasteca identity' is inclusive and cannot be understood without the notion of multiculturalism and the various ethnicities that make up such a concept.

Music at play

The Festival de la Huasteca is a music festival that gathers musicians and other attendees in a space in which Huasteca culture is produced, consumed, exchanged, recreated, and performed. It is one of the most important festivals featuring *son huasteco* (or *huapango*), one of many subgenres of Mexican *son* (or *sones*).⁹ 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 various traditional dances from the rich musical repertoire performed by indigenous groups in the region.

Son (or *sones*) is a generic term that describes a complex of musical genres, the various regional subgenres that make up that complex, and the musical style itself, which is performed by small ensembles (consisting primarily of chordophones), with or without singing, and danced. It serves to entertain but is also performed at celebratory occasions and in rituals.

The *son* appears throughout Mexico. Though marked by regional differences in both instrumentation and performance styles, the sub-genres of *son* share common characteristics that define the genre as a whole, musically (i.e. their rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic structures), lyrically, and choreographically. The *son* is a vibrant musical tradition considered by many to be a way of understanding life and an integral and vital part of their regional cultures. It is an individual and collective musical and social experience that shares particular ways of production and circulation, ideologies, and affections.

Born as a hybrid genre out of the intermixing of European, indigenous, African, and Afro-Caribbean musical elements and contexts, the *son* emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century as a musical style that reflected a “new consciousness of regional cultures,” and as a “meaningful expression of cultural values, identities, and needs” (Sheehy 1999:39). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the *son* spread in popularity in Mexican rural areas and flourished as a regional style that synthesized 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 (and even locality) than with the nation as a whole. At the beginning of the twentieth century, *sones* reached their peak, serving as a means of musical and political expression for the masses and conveying the nationalistic feelings inspired by the Mexican Revolution. A great number of popular musicians bestowed the genre with specific regional and local stylistic nuances.¹⁰

Son huasteco in particular is performed with violin, *jarana huasteca* (small five-stringed lute), *huapanguera* or *quinta* (large five-course lute with eight or ten strings), and alternates the singing of stanzas with improvisatory violin sections in the instrumental interludes between sung stanzas. The use of high-pitched falsetto sections in the singing is central to the musical style. Numerous local nuances in terms of performing styles and repertoire exist.

By the late 1950s, many of the original rural contexts in which *sones* used to be performed had partially disappeared and the genre was in serious decline. Since the end of the 1980s, *sones* have been gaining social and cultural relevance as they are consciously embraced as an embodiment of identity and community. Since then, the organizing of music festivals in Mexico has been one of the private and official initiatives that have contributed to the revitalization of traditional culture as well as the *son*.¹¹

Festivals were designed to share and reclaim the aesthetics and traditional contexts of the music. For this community of musicians, cultural promoters, and music lovers, music provided a sense of belonging, creating a space for interaction and connection. Among others, López (1997) and Mendoza (1998) argue that festivals can serve as vehicles for processes of identity formation, construction, maintenance, and contestation. This is the case for Festival de la Huasteca, which has created a space for interconnection and has served as a site to create and reinforce identity as well as to represent and share traditional Huasteca music and culture.

Music festivals in Mexico since the 1980s: notions and meanings

Broadly speaking, festivals are annual events organized around a specific activity or type(s) of music. They are sought-after by music lovers and professional, amateur, and semi-professional musicians and dancers, among others, as these cultural events bring together music performances as well as individual and group experiences different from the structures of everyday life.

In Mexico, since the end of the 1980s, in response to the scarcity of traditional culture and the deterioration of social spaces for traditional music in both urban and rural areas, some official and private institutions, researchers, musicians, and cultural promoters began to organize music festivals that served as vehicles to share and revitalize traditional music cultures. Moreover, they brought together and gave

visibility to musical traditions and musicians scattered throughout rural areas of Mexico. Several of these festivals were called *encuentros* – or ‘musical gatherings’ – to emphasize the idea of sharing and connecting through musical and personal experiences.

Festivals of *son* gather performers and audiences in a cultural space in which tradition and innovation are represented, experienced, contested, talked about, and experimented with. Here, musicians overtly articulate their sense of identity and belonging as they come into contact with other musicians and audiences. While they bring forward main aspects and symbolic representations of culture, festivals do not celebrate life-cycle markers or cyclical celebrations as do fiestas (Brandes 1988:9), which allows for a space where innovation and experimentation is possible.¹²

Driving forces within the organizing of and participating in these music festivals in various Mexican cultural regions have been the need to reconnect with a past that informs the present, the will to move away from de-contextualizing processes of traditional music that took place in the past, and the desire to share the musical experience with others. Festivals created in the last twenty-five years serve as a medium for community-building, cultural transmission, and inter-generational communication. Many young musicians have 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.

These festivals do not involve competitions. Nor are they designed as purely presentational events, closer in structure to a 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 festivals is an inclusive, participatory approach to the music in which collective participation and social interaction are key for the experience to have a positive outcome.

These festivals encapsulate the idea of articulating group identities through music, dance, and other cultural expressions, reinforcing the importance of these expressive cultural practices in identity formation processes. In them, music functions as a way to provide a sense of belonging to both particular places of origin and a cultural community, and is key as a means of rebuilding social and cultural practices.

Festival de la Huasteca: origins

Along with the Encuentro de las Huastecas in Amatlán, Veracruz, the Festival de la Huasteca is one of the most important festivals in the region. It features mostly *son huasteco*¹³ as well as traditional dances performed by indigenous groups in the region.

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 CONACULTA¹⁴ and state-level cultural institutions in the Huasteca region.¹⁵ 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)¹⁶.

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 that they would 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. Thus, the Festival de la Huasteca was launched in 1996. The executive director of Vinculación Cultural at CONACULTA, Eudoro Fonseca Llerena, comments on the opening day of the fourth edition of the festival (1999):

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. (Eudoro Fonseca Llerena, Radio program 'Viva la Huasteca y Viva el Huapango', October 2012).

Fonseca Llerena's comment is an apt description of the festival. Crafts such as clothing, jewelry, hats, and handmaid hay bags, as well as wooden utensils, food, and cultural artifacts are displayed in stands at plazas or street corridors on 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 vehicle to promote Huasteca culture and traditional music. 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 *son huasteco*, as well as dance and poetic improvisation¹⁷ 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. 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 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. Thus, the display of material and non-material culture at the Festival de la Huasteca is central to the rescuing and handing over of tradition.

Understanding tradition within the Festival context

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*¹⁸ 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 was not '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 indigenousness have been invoked in the construction of a national discourse for Mexico, that discourse locates indigenousness 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 the Mexican Constitution recognize the rights of Mexico's indigenous population.¹⁹ 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 stated earlier, since the end of the 1980s, faced with a deterioration of the social space for traditional music, researchers, musicians, and cultural promoters, among others, set about organizing festivals, workshops, and other cultural events as a way to 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 Mexican *son* has been experiencing since 1990. Festivals, cultural centers, workshops, book publications, and recordings releases are but a few of the projects that have contributed to this renewal of interest.²⁰ These cultural events do not mean a return to the past but a recasting of the festive occasion in a new, more self-conscious performative and participative context with a different set of motivations and underlying logic.

The pioneering Festival de Amatlán, which first started in 1990, preceded the Festival de la Huasteca and set the example for the latter as well as other festivals and *encuentros* that came after. Both Amatlán and Huasteca festivals have played significant roles in bringing back some aspects of *son huasteco* musical practices (e.g., improvisation of

poetry) as well as the fiesta itself, taking the form of the festival: the gathering of musicians and the exchange of music and crafts.

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, who link together personal and social identities, and share a notion of tradition and cultural heritage as key components underlying the structure of the festival. Thus, the notion of tradition becomes a key component in the group's pool of cultural symbols (Anderson, [1983] 2006; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). Tradition refers to customs and beliefs that are transmitted and handed down. 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 and, as Handler and Linnekin argue, such an interpretative process "embodies both continuity and discontinuity" (1984:274). Such arguments let us grasp some of the ambiguities inherent in a difficult concept like tradition and how to understand it in the context of the festival.

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 need to 'preserve' traditional culture is expressed by many. Thus, 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.

The idea of sharing is key in 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). Many musicians, music lovers, and attendees participate in it 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 handmade

instruments are for sale. Like other attendees I interviewed, for *jarana* player and singer Isabel Salinas, sharing with friends is one of the most enriching experiences at the festival:

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's 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. (Personal communication, Mexico City, October 15, 2010).

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 group identity.

Participation in the Festival

Performing groups are chosen by CONACULTA and by the state's cultural institutions that are 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*;²¹ (3) are *tríos*,²² who perform *son huasteco* in one of the indigenous languages spoken in the Huasteca region; (4) have performed extensively in the region and nationwide; and (5) exhibit a polished performance and strong musicianship (Clara Patricia Olalde Tejo,²³ 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.

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 this, 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 and researcher César Hernández Azuara comments on the need to reconsider economic compensation for musicians because of their essential role in the success of the 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.

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, which is not well-received by local organizers and cultural promoters who claim that state and regional funds for cultural events often are not distributed evenly.²⁴

Among those who attend the festival without an official invitation to participate are musicians, artists, researchers, cultural promoters, music lovers, artisans, 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 replied:

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 (Personal communication, November 13, 2010).

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 of Lake Pazcuaro, Michoacán, or La Candelaria in Tlacotalpan, Veracruz—the event does contribute 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. 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. Dates also vary. The festival usually takes place 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, 10 to 20 organized musical and dance activities may take place: concerts, book and CD presentations, video showings, roundtables 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).

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.²⁵

Even though 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 commu-

nity, 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.

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 the community in general, which is an aspect of the fiesta sought by participants. As we have seen, ‘sharing’ is very important for many 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.

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. Musician Jacobo Castillo voices the importance of the communities’ involvement in the outcome of the festival and places a call to organizers to seek such involvement:

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 [organizers] 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 (Personal Communication, October 6, 2012).

To carry out my research for the Festival de las Huastecas, I attended the festival in 2011 and 2012. On both occasions, music was significant in the articulation of notions of community and of cultural

and collective identity. Yet, the emphasis on food and flavors from the Huasteca (2011) and musics at risk (2012) served as vehicles for the exploration of different aspects of Huasteca culture. In both 2011 and 2012, music functioned as a connective tissue for a collective of people with a shared sense of community. Allow me to delve into the 2011 edition of the festival through my fieldwork notes to look more closely at the importance of place and guiding theme, as well as to note the various activities that took place during the festival.

XVI Festival de la Huasteca– sones y sabores (october 26–30, 2011)

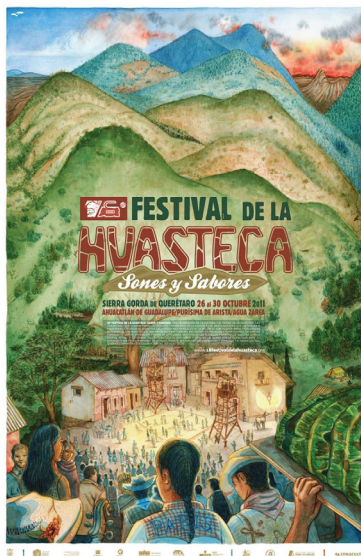


Figure 3. XVI Festival de la Huasteca Poster

. Fieldnotes

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 in the mid-eighteenth 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.

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: Encuentro de versadores y bailadores de la Huasteca (Encuentro for Huasteca singers and dancers), Son arribeño y poesía decimal campesina (Son arribeño²⁶ 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 Genuina; 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*²⁷ (see figure 4) 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* such as 'La petenera', 'La rosa', 'El caimán', 'El aguanieve', 'La pasión', and 'El cielito lindo', beloved *sones* that might be played six to eight times on a given night accompanied by the energetic and percussive *zapateado* of the dancers on the *tarima*. 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 *ambianca* or if the occasion suits and demands it, more stanzas are sung for dancers to continue striking their percussive sounds on the *tarima*. 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, Cenizontle, Secundino Rivera y su *Trío Ruiseños*, Los Huastecos, Los Gallitos de Bernal, and *Trío Colatlán* (see figure 5 and figure 6) keep audiences dancing.



Figure 4. Dancers



Figure 5. Trío Colatlán (don Eraclio Alvarado, ‘don Laco’, violin, Osiris Caballero León, *jarana*, and Nicasio Domingo Cruz, *huapanguera*)



Figure 6. Don Laco

. Reflecting on...

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 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.

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 Huasteca behavioral codes to openly express negative verbal responses to something they dislike. In the case of the music, the *tari-ma* 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 create 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, for 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 7), and dinner from 8pm on, for everyone attending the festival.



Figure 7. 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 8 and figure 9), where a few friends just gather, and after the scheduled performances. This is why it is called an *encuentro*: it is not only a gathering of musicians performing on a stage but also a reunion of friends and colleagues in a space that facilitates inclusiveness, participation, and interaction.



Figure 8. Musician Rodolfo González greets Soraima Galindo Linares.
Soon after, music begins at the cantina



Figure 9. Santiago Fajardo Hernández playing the huapanguera at the cantina

. Fieldnotes

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 10): zacahuil, enchiladas rojas, adobo de puerco, tamales (see figure 11), pipian, carteras de queso, chocolate (see figure 12), alfajores (dulces de masa seca con pilón), rosquitas de piloncillo (see figure 13), café de olla, atole de tamarindo, empanadas, etc.



Figure 10. Huasteco dishes



Figure 11. *Tamales*



Figure 12. Hot chocolate



Figure 13. 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, 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. Then, a group of Teenek and Nahua children from El Coyotito (Veracruz) open the evening concert in which mestizo groups Trío Nacimiento Hidalguense, Hueytlalpan, Los Venaditos, Cazador de la Sierra, and Alba Huasteca are showcased.

. Reflecting on...

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 music²⁸ 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 adjustments to please the audience.

. Fieldnotes

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 14). 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 15), each on opposite sides of the giant tarima. A topada is to son arribeño 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 topada duel. 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 poet-singers in the ensemble.



Figure 14. Arribeño poets and musicians



Figure 15. 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.

. Reflecting on...

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 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. No doubt, music is significant in the articulation of both notions of community and identity.

Final Thoughts

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 to themselves. Social identities depend on context (Reicher et al. 2006:249) and in this particular festival scene, cultural and ethnic identities are salient. Musician Soraima Galindo Linares, for example, comments on the importance of attending musical gatherings such as The Festival de la Huasteca and how she identifies herself as Huasteca through music and the use of particular Huasteca clothing. She tells me: “El huapango es lo que más me identifica como huasteca” (*Huapango* is what most identifies me as Huasteca), and continues:

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 16] 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 falsetto and put on my *cuera tamaulipeca*,²⁹ I stand as a Huasteca).



Figure 16. Trio Alba Huasteca wearing *cueras*

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 to establish such boundaries between them and the other. In general, indigenous groups keep to themselves before, during, and after the performances. 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 or be entertained, but rather for the group to deliver an image of themselves as they wish to be represented to both insiders and outsiders. In the context of the festival, indigenous groups emphasize their cultural beliefs and practices, as well as their social origins.

Traditional music and dance are considered and represented as one of the strongest expressions of culture, as they are 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, the transmission of culture and cultural heritage is key in the overall design of the Festival de la Huasteca, which is a shared experience that can allow us to understand changing processes in the formation of culture and the continually changing cultural forms.

Notes

¹ Throughout this work, I use adjectives such as Huasteco and Huasteca in concordance with the words they accompany.

² Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes / National Council for Culture and the Arts.

³ According to statistics from the CDI (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas / National Commission for the Development of the Indigenous Population) in 2000, the Huasteca region is one of the most populated, with nearly 1.6 million inhabitants, out of which about 950,000 are indigenous people. It is the region with the highest density of indigenous population, Huastec (182,883), Tepehua (11,057), Pame (10,714), Totonaco (3,640) Otomi (56,107) and Nahuatl (674,007). The Nahuatl is the most numerous group, representing 27.6 per cent of the total Nahuatl population of the country (CDI, 2006:42).

⁴ '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).

⁵ *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.

⁶ For further reading of the region and the complexity of historical and social processes past and present see Ariel de Vidas (2009) and Ruvalcaba Mercado *et al.* (2004), among others.

⁷ "The 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" (Giménez 2009:8). This and all other translations are my own.

⁸ Other authors (Poyer, 1998; Thomas, 1992; Turino, 2008:95) share this view and equally stress the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural identity.

⁹ Throughout this work, 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, semantic and contextual meaning does not change. As mentioned earlier, I use adjectives such as Huasteco and Huasteca 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. 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).

¹⁰ The main regional *sones* include *sones huastecos* (or *huapangos huastecos*) from the states of Veracruz, San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo, Querétaro, Tamaulipas, and Puebla; *sones jarocho*s from Veracruz; *sones jaliscienses* from the states of Jalisco and Colima; *sones terracalienteños 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 Guanajuato, and Querétaro. Other *sones* include *sones de marimba* from Chiapas and *sones de Tabasco* from Tabasco State.

¹¹ For further historical discussion on the *son*, see González-Paraíso (2014, particularly 39–74), Sheehy (1998), and Standford (1972). For the different regional variations see Chamorro Escalante (1994, 1995); García de León (2006), González-Paraíso (2004), Hernández Azuara (2003), Pérez Fernández (1990), Sheehy (1979), Chávez (2012), and Ruiz Rodríguez (2004, 2007), among others.

¹² Although various works exist on music and fiesta in Mexico (see, for example, Brandes, 1988; Nájera-Ramírez, 1997; and Nájera-Ramírez et al., 2009), my own work (González-Paraíso, 2014) is one of the few dealing directly with music festivals in Mexico in general, and festivals of *son* in particular.

¹³ Like other *sones*, *sones huastecos* involve playing, singing, and dancing. Particular characteristics of *sones huastecos* are (1) the instrumental ensemble made up of violin, *jarana huasteca* (small five-stringed lute), and *huapanguera* or *quinta* (large five-course lute with eight or ten strings); (2) the use of high-pitched falsetto sections in the singing of stanzas; and (3) the violin improvisation in the instrumental interludes between sung stanzas.

¹⁴ 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 and encompassed various institutions.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Trying to address the lack of cultural infrastructure in regions with a great cultural heritage such as the Huasteca, anthropologist Lucina Jiménez was the master mind behind both the festival and the Huasteca Cultural Development Program. The idea was to create “a festival of festivals to strengthen new musical production, the confluence of all regions, but also as an incentive to other festivals in different regions” (Lucina Jiménez, written communication, October 15, 2015).

¹⁷ Improvising with poetic stanzas used in *sones huastecos*, such as *cuartetos*, *quintillas*, *sextillas*, and *décimas*, is an aspect of music performance and practice that went into decline by the 1950s.

¹⁸ *Huapangueadas* or *huapangos* are popular fiestas where *son huasteco* (or *huapango*) is performed. There is no sound system, elaborate attire, or any of the other formalities of staged performances.

¹⁹ 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).

²⁰ As noted by Tamara Livingston, these activities, among others, are part of music revivals that seek to restore and preserve a musical tradition that is believed to be disappearing or relegated to the past (1999:68).

²¹ Music and dance that usually are part of the rituals of traditional ceremonies known as *el Costumbre*. *El Costumbre* is 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 Villalobos, 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, *sones de costumbre* lose their ritual function.

²² Often people refer to the Huasteco ensemble as *trío huasteco* (plural, *tríos huastecos*) since there are three performers (a.k.a., *trío*) in the group.

²³ Clara Patricia Olalde Trejo is Vice-Director of Eastern Regional Programs, Dirección de Culturas Populares, CONACULTA.

²⁴ Once federal funds are received, state politicians may make arbitrary decisions in terms of how much money to give to any particular community.

²⁵ To date, three *encuentros* of traditional Huasteca dances have been included in the festival. They included 'Danzas de conquista' (Conquest dances), 'Danzas agrícolas' (Agricultural dances), and 'Danzas de carnaval a xantolo' (dances from Carnaval to Xantolo).

²⁶ The *son* subgenre from the Río Verde region: San Luís Potosí and Xichú, Guanajuato, and Querétaro State (Sierra Gorda region). Poetic stanzas use *décimas*, or ten-line verses, which are improvised during the *topadas* or musical and poetic competitions that showcase the *son arribeño*.

²⁷ The *tarima* is a wooden platform atop which *sones* are danced. Through the dancers' footwork, the *tarima* becomes one more instrument within the ensemble. *Tarima* sizes vary among *son* subgenres according to dancing codes and customs. In the Huasteca regions, many couples can dance at a time on the *tarima*.

²⁸ 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, religious festivities, and the agriculture cycle.

²⁹ *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 *flecós* and *arabescos* (fringes and arabesques) (see figure 16). *Tamaulipeco* is both the demonym and the adjective denoting belonging to Tamaulipas State.

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Resumo: As mudanças sociais no México, no início da segunda metade do século XX – devidas, entre outras razões, a uma alta taxa de crescimento da população, à migração para os centros urbanos e para os Estados Unidos e a alterações nas condições gerais de vida – contribuíram para a deterioração dos contextos sociais e das condições em que se desenvolvia a música tradicional. Por volta da década de 1980, instituições governamentais, músicos e promotores culturais começaram a organizar festivais de música em diferentes regiões, como forma de promover e revitalizar a cultura regional e as práticas musicais. Baseando-me em material etnográfico, examino o Festival de la Huasteca como um evento cultural anual em que a música é experienciada como entretenimento, mas também como via de expressão da identidade de grupo (étnica, cultural e regional). O festival é um meio de reforçar a identidade e a cultura Huasteca através da música, dança e outras expressões culturais.

Palavras-chave: Festivais Musicais; Identidade; Música e Lugar; Música Tradicional; Son Mexicano

Recebido em maio de 2015.

Aprovado em maio de 2015.