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Performing with the Sacred:
Exploring Indigenous Ritual Music in the Nahuatl Towns of Chicontepec, Veracruz, Mexico

Dissertation

by

Veronica Sofia Pacheco

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Performing with the Sacred:

Exploring Indigenous Ritual Music in the Nahuatl Towns of Chicontepec, Veracruz, Mexico

by

Veronica Sofia Pacheco

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Anthony Seeger, Chair

This dissertation explores the active roles of ritual music known as *xochitl sones* (flower-musical pieces) or *sones de costumbre* (musical pieces of the tradition), in the context of *la costumbre* Nahuatl religion of eastern Mexico. This multi-sited research is based on twelve months of ethnomusicological research conducted in 2010-2011 among several Nahuatl towns in the municipality of Chicontepec, Veracruz. The main focus of research is the town of Ixcacuatitla located at the foothill of the Postectli Mountain, an active ceremonial center for Nahuatl, Otomi, and Tepehua ethnic groups. By primarily looking at conceptualizations concerning the chicomexochitl ceremony offered to mountains, this study shows how ritual music articulates participation and emotional engagement in order to bring the rainfall that is essential for agricultural production. The musical repertoire consists of about 150 musical

pieces that are arranged according to the events, actions, and deities represented in the ceremony. The characteristics of the musical elements and the large structure of pieces paralleling the events configures the engagement of the participating audiences in the performance of the ceremony. Over a period of days, congregations and dedicated ritual specialists gather to prepare and present large amounts of offerings including food and animal sacrifices. While all engage in the different activities, dancing together to the rhythm of the violin, *jarana* and *huapanguera* is one of the most representative aspects of participation, where emotions such as weeping and joy are offered to the Chicomexochitl deity. This dissertation argues that the relevance of music and dance in articulating such emotional involvement directly corresponds to the value attributed to participation in the system of communal reciprocity, which is a basic principle of socialization in these Nahua towns and further enables an interaction with the sacred landscape.

The dissertation of Veronica Sofia Pacheco is approved.

Tamara Levitz

Steven Loza

Timothy Rice

Anthony Seeger, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles
2014

...to my family

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Note on the Language

I have avoided the used of Nahuatl words except for the names of towns, ceremonies, and deities, or where the translation to English or Spanish would have changed the meaning of the word. Pluralization in Nahuatl has been maintained, where the suffix *meb* stands for plural nouns. A glossary is included in Appendix 1. As I began my Nahuatl studies at the IDIEZ (The Zacatecas Institute for Teaching and Researching in Ethnology), the spelling in this work follows the one used by the Institute. Additionally, I have used the spelling of *h* instead of *j* (in the Spanish alphabet) in some cases, as this is phonetically closer to the one used in the Nahua towns of Chicontepec.

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Vita

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- 2013 “Cultura de Agua: Música y Rituales para la Virgen de la Candelaria en San Mateo del Mar.” In *Representando el Pasado y el Presente del Istmo Oaxaqueño: Perspectivas Arqueológicas, Históricas y Antropológicas*, edited by Laura Machuca Gallegos and Judith Zeitlin. Mexico: CIESAS.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This dissertation concentrates on the study of *xochitl sones* (flower-musical pieces) or *sones de costumbre* (musical pieces of the tradition), the ritual music of *la costumbre* (literally, 'the tradition'), the oldest existing religion in the Nahuatl towns of Chicontepec, Veracruz, Mexico.¹ The instrumentation used for this music is the Huastecan trio: violin, *jarana* (small guitar), and *huapanguera* (large guitar). There are no lyrics. The sections that follow are organized according to main themes that run in the dissertation. Each section of this chapter provides information about the approaches taken, the main sources, and the contributions of this work. This study is based on fieldwork research I conducted during 2010 and 2011.

The ritual music of the Nahuatl towns in Chicontepec

Among the variety of religious expressions that coexist in the Nahuatl towns of Chicontepec, this study concentrates on one ceremony named Chicomexochitl (seven flower), which belongs to the Nahuatl religion known as *la costumbre* (literally, 'the tradition'). It is characterized by a combination of Christian and non-Christian beliefs, as well as a religious calendar associated with the natural landscape and the corn and rain cycles. My approach to the study of *la costumbre* in the Nahuatl towns in Chicontepec incorporates music as the central inquiry. This approach highlights experiential aspects of participation in the performances of

¹ The term *son* is assigned to a variety of regional music found throughout Mexico of Spanish, African, and indigenous musical influences. While some of the characteristics including rhythmic patterns and instrumentation of the *xochitl sones* are similar to other regional *sones*, cyclical forms and absence of lyrics differ. These characteristics of the musical form make this type of *son* particular to the Nahuatl towns of eastern Mexico. For details on the musical form of *xochitl sones* see Chapter Five.

the ceremonies that further revealed the value attributed to music and emotions in the dynamics of the ritual. Both emotions and communal reciprocity are discussed within the local context, where values are attributed to emotions and communal reciprocity is a characteristic of the social organization.

The chicomexochitl ceremony takes place over a period of several days ranging between four and twelve. The main feature of this ceremony is to prepare offerings that congregations place in different altars located in the *xochicalli* temple (flower house), in mountains, and in springs. The ultimate goal of the performance of this ceremony is to bring the rain. Most of the chicomexochitl ceremonies described in this dissertation took place on Postectli Mountain (see map in Chapter Two), an active ceremonial center for Nahuas, Otomi, and Tepehua indigenous groups. In the reciprocal system of cooperation, where offerings are exchanged for rain, a successful exchange is secured by establishing the right interactions not only among the individuals within the congregations but also with the natural landscape. In this context, music, dancing, and emotions are highly prized in establishing such interactions. I argue, therefore, that music articulates emotional engagement and social participation in the successful ceremony, which ultimately brings the rain.

The Nahua religious ceremonies of *la costumbre* in the towns of Chicontepec maintain many similarities described in studies of other Nahua towns (Sandstrom 1991; Signorini 1989) as well as Otomi and Tepehua towns (Boiles 1969; 1967; Galiner 2004; Dow 1986). Among these similarities are the pantheon of deities, the centrality of the natural landscape, and the religious calendar following dates associated with the corn and rain cycles. These

studies have considerably contributed to this work and have addressed music in religious and healing contexts. While some have incorporated music into the dynamics of the ritual or healing systems, others have described the music. However, none has addressed the relevance of the ritual musical performances, which is the contribution of this study.

Furthermore, since the Nahuatl language spoken in the towns is a Uto-Aztecan language, several studies draw direct parallels between the Nahua religion and the Aztec mythology (Gomez Martinez 2001; Broada 2004). While these studies trace the historical continuity of the Nahua people as a language group, in my ethnographic fieldwork I saw common characteristics with other neighboring indigenous groups, suggesting some cross-influence. In the case of *la costumbre* of the Nahua towns in Chicontepec, associations with the Aztec religion concern names of deities and the sacredness of mountains and springs. However, the dynamics of the religious practices also present many similarities with the religion of the Otomi, a neighboring indigenous group.

In the Nahua towns in Chicontepec, in fact, many recognized the lineages of Otomi ritual specialists as powerful celebrants who have arrived to perform ceremonies on Postectli Mountain for many decades. On one occasion, I witnessed a ceremony performed by a female ritual specialist who was the daughter of a well-known Otomi celebrant. While some differences exist between the Nahua *chicomexochitl* ceremony and the one celebrated by the Otomi, most of the elements were similar. Tracing direct analysis with the Aztec religion might provide evidence of historical continuity. However, my fieldwork suggests that the religious practices of *la costumbre* also respond to the interactions that exist with other neighboring indigenous groups, such as the Otomi.

The Huasteca area: further contributions

The Nahua towns of this region have been subject to several anthropological, linguistic, and historical studies (Bonfil Batalla 1969; Briseño Guerrero 1993, 1990; Huber 1990; Limón Olvera 2001; Ochoa 1979; Ruvalcaba Mercado and Zevallos 1996; Sandstrom 1978, 1991; Valle Esquivel et al. 2003). These studies have provided ample background information for this work. At the same time, the ritual musical tradition of the Nahua towns, and its religious context, represents a notable lacuna. Studies of Huastecan music have primarily focused on the Huastecan *son* (Angeles Contreras 1994; Azuara 2003; Florencia Pullido 1994; Sheehy 2000) while neglecting the autochthonous Nahua ritual music. Gonzalo Camacho is one of the few scholars who have researched indigenous music among the Nahua in the Huasteca region (Camacho 2000). Camacho (2002, 2004) has further worked on the symbolic manifestations of Huastecan indigenous music, but I believe he has underestimated the importance of musical performances for social participation.

Music and emotions

Emotional associations related to the experience of music in religious rituals have been widely explored (Basso 1981; Becker 2004; Feld 1982; Friedson 1996; Racy 2003; Rouget 1985). Even though there are different approaches to the research, a common observation has been the emotional engagement of the practitioners during the performance of music. The authors of these works are concerned not only with the social meaning but also with the individual experience of music. In many cases the focus of the analysis is the emotional engagement of people with the music.

My study follows these premises of emotional engagement and examines both social meaning and individual experience. However, my analysis of music and emotion emphasizes the local values attributed to emotions and the relevance of communal participation, both in the context of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony and in everyday life of the Nahua towns. Congregations attribute musicians and musical elements with meaningful attributes that articulate emotional engagements and social performances. As such, the central analysis of the relationships of music and ritual revealed a structure of about 150 musical pieces arranged according to the events that interplay in the ceremony. This structure, I argue, is the main context where congregations engage in dancing and performing emotions. Therefore, the music reflects the creative process of designing a repertoire of characteristics that allow the Nahua congregations to act and emotionally engage in the performance of the ceremony. The value placed on emotions and communal reciprocity further suggests that music articulates emotional engagement and social performance as a “kind of aesthetic

technology and instrument of social ordering" which becomes a medium for interactions (DeNora 2010: 166).

In the Nahua towns the musical sensibility is embedded in the particular history, where the centrality of corn and rain cycles and the interaction with the natural landscape have informed emotional engagement throughout time. In public rituals such as the *chicomexochitl*, these elements that constitute the social bonds of the Nahua congregations are performed, with individuals responding to their social organization and their history as a town. It has been widely observed that the parallels between religions systems and social organization are eminent (Durkheim 1995; Geertz 1973a, 1973b, 1975; Lévi-Strauss 1963, 1966, 1978; Myerhoff 1992; Seeger 2004; Turner 1967, 1977, 1984). This centrality suggests that all the elements that constitute social bonds are performed in the public sphere.

Ethnomusicologists have widely explored the ability of societies to create a sense of socialization through musical performances (Rice 1994; Sugarman 1997; Seeger 2004; Turino 1993, 2008). Thomas Turino (2008) argues that the formal qualities of 'participatory music' enable synchronization in performances. This synchronization creates a sense of belonging among groups actively engaged in music-making. Such a concept is particularly applicable to the performances of Nahua ritual music, where open-ended structures and ostinato melodic and rhythmic patterns are similar to the active integrative characteristics of 'participatory music' described by Turino (2008). Even though the context of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony contains multiple integrated elements, music is the most pronounced medium that brings people together to dance. This participation is required as part of a principle of

communal reciprocity that enables interaction with the natural landscape in the process of presenting the offerings.

The Nahua towns are diverse. As small as they can be, social fragmentation follows political affiliations, different religions, and economic stratification, among other features. However, as the oldest religion, *el costumbre* still highlights many particularities of the history of the towns, where the sacredness of corn and the interactions with the mythical landscape shape many of the religious celebrations. As diverse as Nahua towns are, the celebrations of *la costumbre* still play a relevant role for societies who still depend on the natural resources and the rain cycles for their subsistence. Therefore, this study brings into consideration the relevance of cultural practices for minority social groups in the 21st century. In particular, it illustrates the Nahua towns in Chicontepec balancing their lives among traditions and interactions with other cultural groups, in the context of mainstream Mexican society and the globe.

Further contributions

I was able to record and produce two CD compilations of ritual and secular music by the local *trio* 'Nuevo Amanecer' (New Dawn) from the community of Tepeco. I have left several copies of these compilations with the musicians and other community members

Some considerations

The social and cultural characteristics of the Nahua towns are indications of their locality and the history of these societies. Even though a common history has determined the social traits of this Nahua society, the towns are diverse. To avoid association with the idea that the Nahua form one single community, I have identified the participants as congregations, indicating the group that participated in the ceremony at the time of observation. I have omitted names of the individuals who collaborated in the project to protect their identities. While I identify the towns' names, I use pseudonyms to refer to all participants.

The use of the ethnographic present has been widely criticized (Fabian 1983; Stocking 1983). While I acknowledge the a-temporality that the ethnographic present creates, I have maintained the present tense in this dissertation to provide an active voice for all descriptions, including events that took place while I was in the field, such as the ceremony. The past tense is used to indicate situations such as personal encounters or descriptions of what the collaborators said.

Chapter summaries

Chapter Two provides information on the Nahua municipality of Chicontepec including location, history, and a detailed description of the town of Ixcacuatitla, where I conducted most of the fieldwork.² This description includes the economy, political organization, and religion. The historical section stresses the role of music in the establishment of the Spanish colonies, highlighting the introduction of musical instrumentation by the Catholic Church to the Huasteca region and tracing the origins of the Huastecan trio—violin, *jarana* (small guitar), and *huapanguera* (large guitar). This is the instrumentation utilized for religious music in the context of the chicomexochitl ceremony.

Chapter Three provides the methodological framework I used to conduct fieldwork. Approaching a reflexive interpretative model, I positioned myself as a student of ritual music in the context of *la costumbre* as well as a participant. This approach determined my personal interactions in the towns and attendance at the religious events, as well as the reasons that the project developed in multiple Nahua towns. The descriptions of particular cases of musicians and ritual specialists illustrate larger issues concerning the dynamics of other religions in their attempts to eradicate *la costumbre*. Furthermore, descriptions of religious events also include personal stories that illustrate aspects of social life, such as the centrality of the corn field for the household economy and the roles that women and men occupy to maintain a balance life and secure their subsistence. Approaching ritual music in the study of *la costumbre* highlighted experiential aspects of the ceremony and the relevance of music and emotions. This chapter also contains the ethnographic details that enable this exploration,

² Municipality is roughly equivalent to a county but the term is used differently in the U.S. government than in Mexico.

including the local relevance of emotions and communal reciprocity, the relationships of the religious and healing systems, and a consideration of the qualities of the 150 musical pieces that interplay in the *chicomexochitl* ceremony.

Chapter Four explores the *chicomexochitl* ceremony in the context of the relationships the Nahua congregations have established with the natural landscape. The exploration of these relationships further revealed the tangible and intangible characteristics of the natural landscape, where music and the words of the ritual specialist bridge these realities. To illustrate the particularities of the uses of Nahua ritual music in relationship to the natural landscape, the analysis includes depictions of the natural landscape in a selection of pieces of Huastecan *son*. While in the former ritual music illustrates the direct interactions with it, in the latter descriptions of the landscape provide a contextual image of the place where music has been produced.

Chapter Five contains a detailed description of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony, including the participants, the events, location, and the ritual elements used in the celebration. It also places the ceremony in the context of the religious calendar of *la costumbre*, and it presents the relevance of the ceremony in the context of the towns, the centrality of the Postectli Mountain as a ceremonial center, the dynamics of the celebration in relationship with other religious dates, and the contrast of generational gaps in the participation.

Chapter Six examines the active role of ritual music in *la costumbre*. It provides an analysis of the musical elements of the ritual music repertoire. Since the repertoire contains 150 pieces, a selection has been chosen to illustrate different dynamics in the pieces and their relationships to the events that take place in the chicomexochitl ceremony. A partial list of the names of the pieces is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Seven closely examines the dynamics of a particular conceptualization of emotions and music and their relevance to the performance of the chicomexochitl ceremony. For the examination, two analytical concepts are established to denote the action of the performance, 'emotional engagement' and 'social performance'. The local value attributed to emotions and music in the system of communal reciprocity enables me to examine the role that the large structure of musical pieces plays in articulating emotional engagement and participation. Music articulation, therefore, responds to the desire to bring emotional engagement and social participation into the performance of the ceremony, in order to enable interaction among the congregations and with the natural landscape. The ultimate goal of establishing successful interactions in the performance of the ceremony is to bring the rain.

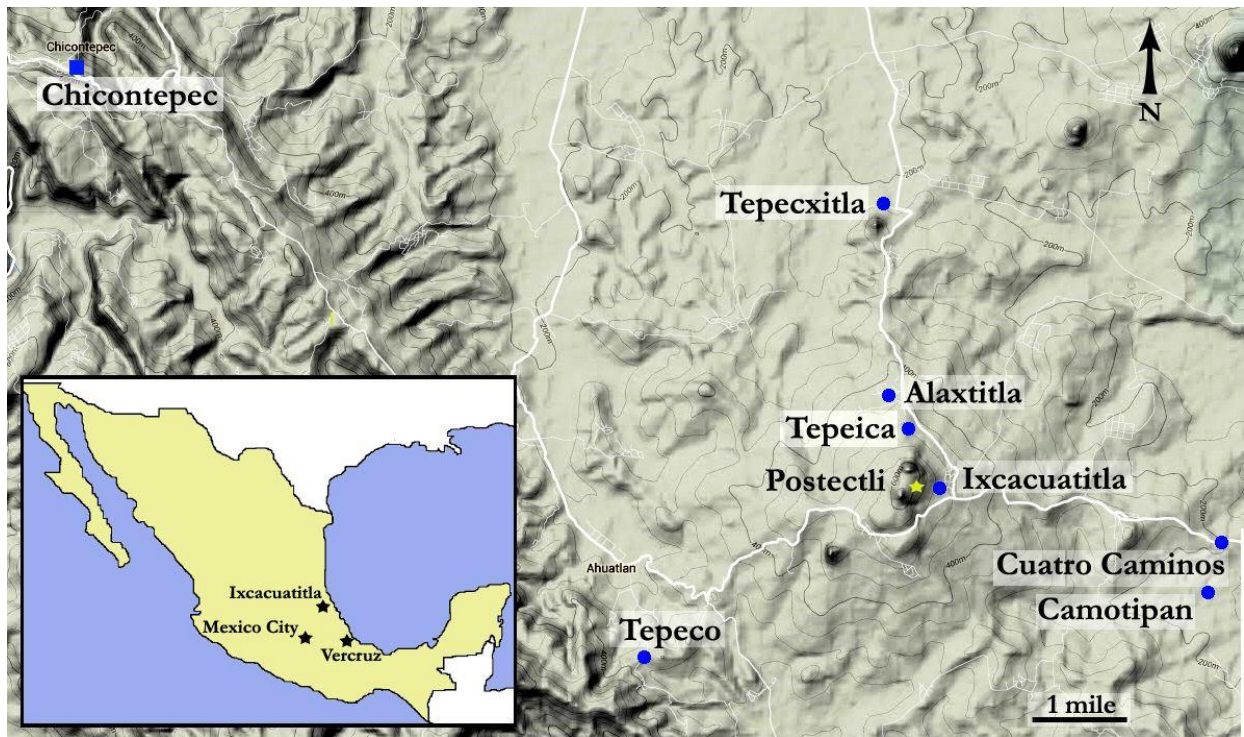
Chapter Eight reviews the major results of the study, stressing the historical relevance of cultural practices for indigenous groups in the context of mainstream Mexican society. Moreover, this study reveals the integral and active role that ritual music has in the context of *la costumbre*. This inner relationship unfolds issues for future ethnomusicological

research considering musicians as bearers of ritual music, who are the center of contestations between tradition and change.

CHAPTER 2

The Nahuas of Chicontepec

This chapter provides background information on the Nahuatl towns of Chicontepec, Veracruz, Mexico. There are three main sections that correspond to location, history, and the ways of life. Since Chicontepec is one of the Nahuatl speaking municipalities, the section on the historical background examines migrations into the Huasteca region and further the interaction with the Aztec empire. A section on the colonial period illustrates the role that the Catholic Church had during the establishment of the Spanish political power highlighting the role of music in the process of evangelization. Furthermore, most of the fieldwork season during 2010 and 2011 was conducted in the town of Ixcacuatitla, located on the foothills of the Postectli Mountain, a ceremonial center important for many indigenous groups in the area. The descriptions corresponding to governance, economy, education, and religion are centered in this particular town to illustrate characteristics of the local life.






-  Chicontepec's Head City
-  Nahua towns in Chicontepec, Veracruz
-  Postectli Mountain

Figure 1. Map of Mexico showing the location of the Nahua towns in Chicontepec, Veracruz where the fieldwork developed. The towns are located in relationship to Mexico City and the City of Veracruz.

Location

Chicontepec de Tejeda is a municipality located in Northern Veracruz in the Lower Huasteca region, within the Latitude 20°59'00" N and Longitude 098°10' 00" W (Servicio Meteorológico 2010). Bordering Chicontepec on the north are the municipalities of Ixcatepec, Tantoyuca, and Tepetzintla; on the south the municipalities of Benito Juárez and Ixhuatlan de Madero; on the east the municipality of Alamo de Temapache; and on the west the State of Hidalgo (SEDESOL 2013). The mountain chain of Sierra Madre Oriental shapes the landscape with varying elevations.³

Chicontepec's landscape includes mountains, lowlands, rivers, and evergreen vegetation. There are 332 three hundred thirty two Nahua settlements, mostly rural with populations that vary between one hundred and a thousand people. The municipality's head city—also named Chicontepec de Tejeda with a population of over 4,000 people—is the only urban center in the municipality (INEGI 2010). An eighteenth century Franciscan church located on one side of the central plaza is among the few remaining examples of colonial architecture in the municipality.⁴

The different altitudes in Chicontepec contribute to the presence of mountain mesophyll forest in the higher elevations, and sub-perennifolio tropical forest in the lower (Puig 2004). Deforestation due to agricultural activity and cattle farming, together with climate changes, have contributed to the decline of the natural environment affecting species

³ The Huasteca region extends throughout the states of Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosi, Veracruz, Hidalgo, Querétaro, and Puebla.

⁴ Andrés Pérez Pardavé, the local chronicler, identified different dates for the construction of the church in his writings, from as early as 1592 to the 18th century. However, the church's features resemble those of Franciscan churches of the eighteenth century.

to the point of near extinction. Still, according to Puig and Lacaze (2004) the Huastecan flora is unique, and maintains the highest percentage of perennifolio and mesophyll forests in Mexico. The water resources that characterize this area are comprised of riverine system, groundwater flows, lagoons and lakes. Crossing lowlands and creeks, wide rivers such as Panuco and Tuxpan are some of the main flows in the tributary river system; other smaller systems are the Viñazco to the south, and Hueycuatitla to the west of Chicontepepec.

The Huasteca region ecosystem includes different species of birds, felines, rodents, reptiles and boars, among others. Large numbers of insects are common due to the amount of precipitation and high temperatures, which populate the air to unbearable degree during the rainy season. Within the communities in Chicontepepec, there are still memories of animals such as spider monkeys, deer, and big felines such as jaguars but none of these remain today. The possum marsupials are commonly responsible for eating chickens and destroying cornfields, and are therefore considered highly dangerous and often associated with evil forces. Healers, while treating their patients, often search in dreams animals such as snakes or possums to reveal the origins of the afflictions.

This area is characterized by two main seasons: *xopamitl* (rainy) between June and January, and *tonalmitl* (dry) between February and May. The presence of the evergreen tropical vegetation and the high temperatures contribute to a high level of rainfall precipitation, with an annual average rainfall between 1971 and 2000 was 1,595.2 mm. (Servicio Meteorológico Nacional 2010). This heavy rainfall enables farmers to cultivate the land twice a year. In a society that still bases its economic income on agricultural production and cattle ranches, the rain cycles are vital. In fact, the balance between the seasons secures

the maintenance of the corn cycle. While rain is expected to appear at the beginning of June, the overflow of precipitation due to the tropical storms brings hurricanes and heavy rain producing floods that destroys the crops. The people in these towns actively perform ceremonies believing that they can influence the natural agents for their wellbeing. In Ixcacuatitla, for example, the *chicomexochitl* is often performed at the end of the dry season, which takes place in April but no later than the end of May (see Chapter Five for a description of the ceremony). This ceremony is offered to the Postectli Mountain, hoping that the mountain will provide enough water for the sowing. With the dry and rainy seasons the corn cycle is divided as follows:

xopamitl (rainy season): June-January

tonalmitl (dry): February-May

Sowing: a) June-July (best between 1-24 of June)

b) December

Harvest: a) October-Nov.

b) May

History

Nahuatl is one of the Uto-Aztecan languages that originated in what is now California and spread south as far as El Salvador and Nicaragua around the twelfth century (Canger 1988). Approximately 1.5 million people speak Nahuatl today, comprising the largest indigenous population in Mexico (INEGI 2010). The Huastecan Nahuatl is one of the eastern variants spoken in more than fifty municipalities in the states of San Luis Potosi, Hidalgo, and Veracruz (Valle Esquivel 2003). Among these, Chicontepec is one of the municipalities with the highest Nahua population (INEGI 2010).

More than any other indigenous language in Mexico, Nahuatl shares numerous sources of documentation, of which two categories are prominent: the existence of a large corpus of colonial documents in Nahuatl on the one hand, and the study of modern dialects that have produced numerous grammars, dictionaries, and other documents on the other. Since the sixteenth century and during the Spanish colonization, the majority of colonial documents produced in Nahuatl is the result of the interaction between the Spanish and Aztecs (or Mexicas) in central Mexico. The Aztecs—one of the Uto-Aztecan migrations--held the political power in Central Mexico during the Post-classic period (1325-1521). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Nahuatl was the main indigenous language spoken in this area. Many Spanish missionaries documented the language and produced grammars and dictionaries (i. e. Molina 1571; Carochi 1983 [1645]). This is known as Classical Nahuatl and sources for the study of this variant comprise a large corpus, among which are documents that describe transactions of goods, land, houses; rites of passage; birth

and death certificates, which contribute to the understanding of the language itself and this society during the colonial period (Lockhart 2001).

These Nahuatl documents have been used in comparative analysis with the existing Nahuatl dialects, which in some cases have aided to propose a time frame for the different Uto-Aztec migrations. Canger proposes that the Huastecan Nahuatl corresponds to one of the earliest migrations that arrived to the Huasteca around the late eleventh century. This might suggest that the Huastecan Nahua population might have been contemporary to the Toltecs, and preceding the migrations of the Aztecs to central Mexico (Canger 1988: 64-65).⁵

Totonacos, Tepehuas, and Huastecos occupied the Huasteca region long before the Nahuas, and remains of ancient cities and archaeological vestiges illustrate the complexity of these societies—Tamuin, Tamtok (Huastecan), and Cempoala (Totonac), are some examples. During the fifteenth century the area of Chicontepec belonged to Tzicoac, one of the outer provinces of the Aztec empire⁶ (Berdan 1996). It was considered a place of eternal providence—the source of food, cotton, rocks, and feathers (Gomez 2002; Tobey Evans 2004). The name Ixcacuatitla derives from *ichcatl* (cotton) and *cuatitlan* (forest) that translates into English as forest-of-cotton. In the towns, some described previous production of cotton and sheep, which do not remain today. The name of Ixcacuatitla might suggest that this town was a provider of cotton or wool as tribute to the Aztec Empire. Stresser-Péan

⁵ There is no clear evidence to establish the time of the Uto-Aztec migrations, but the dialects from the Huasteca region are considered the earliest in Canger's studies. Also, Stresser-Péan referred to the Huastecan Nahuas as originally being a Tenek population (Huastecan), that later became Nahua speakers (Stresser-Péan 2008). This might also suggest that the Nahua population in this area correspond to an early occupation.

⁶ The Teayo Castle, for example, presents influences of Aztec architecture from the Postclassic period (Toby Evans 2004). Still, it seems that some of the features are not precisely typical for Aztec architecture, and in particular, the shrine on top of the pyramid (Umberger 1996). There is also a circular structure in the site of Cacahuatenco that is similar to the temple of Ehecatl—the Wind God—located in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan (today Mexico City).

(2008) argues that the widespread Nahuatl presence in the region cannot be attributed to the Aztecs, considering the late expansion date of the empire into the Huasteca.

Colonial Period—the Transition

In 1519, the Spaniards arrived at the coast of what is today Veracruz, Mexico, expanding and establishing what 300 years of Spanish domination in Mexico became. To a large extent, their initial success corresponded to the political situation at the time of their arrival, where many of the ethnic groups were unsatisfied giving tribute to the Aztec empire. With the aid of Tlaxcaltecas and Totonacs the Spanish defeated the Aztecs in 1521, thus becoming the new political power (Smith 1996). In the process of establishing the new empire in Mexico, the Catholic Church with its clerical or mendicant orders played an important role in the interaction of the Spanish crown and the local populations. The mendicant orders, who worked independently from the episcopate, were responsible for creating most of the early colonial documents that contain descriptions of the pre-Columbian society, grammars and dictionaries of the indigenous languages, and descriptions of ritual and healing practices. Franciscan and Augustinians were the main mendicant orders present in the Huasteca region, and of which many colonial churches and monasteries still remain.

While the Spanish colonies expanded in the sixteenth century, the political organization established by the Aztecs was used to implement and give shape to the new tribute system (Gibson 1964). The *encomienda* was one of the most efficient apparatus for the Spanish colonies to collect tribute and exercise power. By assigning an *encomendero*, a Spaniard entitled with the *encomienda*, the Spanish crown provided grants for celebrations of festivities

and also to purchase seeds when needed, especially in time of draughts. This system of grants created an economic dependence of the population who in exchange provided tribute and labor to the *encomienda*. Rather than attributing political jurisdiction or property, the *encomendero* had the power to administrate the funds that resulted from these grants. This system of grants was exploitative, allowing the *encomendero* and the Spanish crown to abuse their power over the indigenous population. The indigenous elites that used to collect the tributes during the Aztec empire became the new collectors of the tribute for the Spanish crown (Gibson 1964).

The *encomiendas* administration generated centralization, which architecture still remains as evidence of colonial centers.⁷ As the colony progressively expanded its scope, the *encomiendas* started to decline amid confrontation of indigenous population with the crown (Gibson 1964). A new system known as *corregimiento* emerged. It presented some similar characteristics but additionally it also ensured official authority to the *corregidor* (Gibson 1964). The *encomienda* and *corregimiento* worked directly through the structure of the Catholic Church, being an emblematic characteristic of Spanish domination. While the festivities for patron saints or other celebrations of the canonical calendar were gradually incorporated in the practice of the new religion, there was an interest in finding coalition throughout the appropriate investment in events to bring people together, thus, festivals were of special importance (Galinier 1997). The Spaniards maintained the *cabecera-sujeto* (head town-subject) system that functioned at the time of their arrival, with a *cacique* indigenous ruler as the main

⁷ One of the *encomienda*'s centers was Huayacocotla, where a large cathedral still remains as the vestiges of the Augustinians *encomienda*.

authority.⁸ With the incorporation of the new system, the church became a dominant structure that served as the institution for administrations in which the *cabecera* became the parish and the *sujeto* the adjacent towns recognized as *visitas* (Gibson 1964). The Catholic Church played an important role in the establishment of the new political power, first converting the caciques to facilitate the conversion of the rest of population in the hierarchy. In the process of colonization, however, the crown and the mendicant orders were not always in agreement concerning the administration of the colonies.

The tribute was drawing from the agricultural production of local farmers, mostly corn, as well as the revenues of labor produced in enterprises such as mines. Although the Aztec Empire previously also collected tribute, the Spanish system stripped the local economy. Alonso de Zorita, one of the judges in the administration—known as *oidor* or listener of the *Real Consejo de Indias*, closely followed the development of the colonial enterprise in the period of the transition that shifted the political and economic power.

⁸ There are no direct English translations for *cabecera/sujeto* and *cacique*, but it refers to governance over territory where a *cacique* held the political power and controlled over the center (*cabecera*) and other towns which were under the same jurisdiction (*sujetos*).

In the sixteenth century, Alonso de Zorita wrote:

“Los indios son para poco trabajo, como está dicho, y así lo que siembran es tan poco que apenas les basta lo que cogen para su año, porque no tienen posibilidad para sembrar y labrar más que aquella miseria que cada uno y su mujer e hijuelos, si los tienen, pueden labrar, y como de lo poco que cogen les llevan media fanega para el tributo, que suceda bien o mal el año, aunque V. M. tiene proveído que los años estériles no paguen tributo, es gran agravio que reciben;” (Zorita 1942: 176).

“The Indians are not used to work, as it is, and so what they sow is so meager that it is barely enough to last them for a year, because they have no possibility to sow and cultivate more than that misery that each man and his wife and little children, if they have it, can cultivate. And of the little that they sow, half a bushel goes to tribute regardless if the year was good or bad. Although the V.M. had granted that in the sterile years they would not pay tribute, it is with great grievance that they receive” (Zorita 1942: 176; my translation).

The above passage illustrates the system of tribute where the population, producing crops for own consumption, was forced to give tribute to the crown albeit much of these goods were hardly enough to sustain the household economy. Following, in the same document Zorita describes how farmers possessed no coin for tribute; still, they were forced to provide it.

By the 1550s, most the *encomiendas* have divided the Huasteca area, wherein the Catholic Church served as the institution to organize the tribute. Thus, Augustinians founded the parish in Huayacocotla, Franciscans in Tulancingo, and it seems that Chicontepec was divided into four congregations (Galinier 1997). In the process of evangelization, many of the friars were responsible for articulating the Christian religion, for which they learned and documented local languages and many of the local religious practices.

During the first centuries of interaction between the Spanish and the societies in Mexico, the Catholic Church played a central role in articulating and exercising power of the

Spanish crown. For this, the mendicant orders were trained as ethnographers and linguists, and in fact, much of the large corpus of documents were a result of the systematized documentation of what they encountered in their arrival to the Americas such as governance, religion, and languages. The Franciscan friar Andres de Olmos, who preached in the Huasteca area, wrote some of the *Relaciones Geográficas* of the Huasteca region and largely documented the language and social cultural practices. Olmos is credited with the authorship of one of the earliest grammars of Nahuatl from Central Mexico, as well as of Totonac and Huastecan languages—the last two apparently lost (Baudot 1990). Unfortunately, it seems that none of the documents from the Huasteca survived (Gómez 2002; Stresser-Peán 2008).

Christianization was an important strategic process for the Spanish domination and it started as early as 1524 when twelve Franciscans friars known as the ‘apostolic twelve’ arrived to Mexico to begin the process of Christianization of the local populations (Gibson 1964). For this, many of the friars learned the languages and translated many of the canonical texts to ease the Christianization process. Thus, sources such as canonical treatises, catechisms, mass services, etc., were translated into the indigenous languages. Also, in the early colonial period, the friars produced ethnographic narratives and many of the reports for the *Relaciones Geográficas*.⁹ By the end of the Spanish domination in the nineteenth century,

⁹ In the establishment of the Spanish colonies in the sixteenth century, as part of the colonial agenda Phillip II ordered to collect information about the colonies to estimate their scope in the Americas and Philippines. The compilations, known as the *Relaciones Geográficas*, were structured as a questionnaire inquiring on social political organization and descriptions of the localities. These compilations included detailed descriptions, maps, and documentation of native languages, hence, the invaluable relevance of these documents for the understanding of aspects of the societies in the Americas in time of the contact and before (Cline 1964).

the Catholic Church—mendicant orders and episcopate—was one of the most powerful and wealthy institutions.

In the process of Christianization, music was one of the resources that successfully aided the teaching process of the Catholic doctrine to the indigenous congregations (Stevenson 1968). Turrent (1996) explains that the Spaniards allowed indigenous populations to maintain music of religious worship, which was incorporated in the Catholic practice. Thus, music—a combination of the indigenous practices together with the canonical chants and dances, was one of the strategies where collective singing and dancing successfully brought people together (Turrent 1996 [1993]). Considering the large population that existed in times of the Spanish arrival, this attempt of bringing people together was a decisive move for the successful establishment and maintenance of the Spanish colonies.

While imparting the doctrine, the orders—Franciscans in particular, created institutions to introduce the Catholic practices. The education, however, comprehended not only the canonical texts but also Latin, music, sculpture, and painting; the last two served to create the paintings and sculptures in churches and monasteries. Also, theater was strongly connected to the process of learning, where commonly the stories of the bible were recreated (Ricard 1947). Since music was used in festivals of saints, the Virgin, and the canonical services, the instruction comprehended not only vocal training but also instrumentation. A large variety of instruments shaped the orchestra, including brass, wood, and string instruments.

Ricard (1947) quotes, based on colonial chronicles—mainly Motolinia, a list to exemplify the numerous instruments used in an orchestra:

“Las ceremonias del culto eran casi siempre acompañadas de música y canto. Los indios cantaban generalmente canto llano, ya con acompañamiento de órgano, ya con acompañamiento de diversos instrumentos, y sus coros, dicen los cronistas, hubieran podido competir con ventaja con los coros de las Iglesias de España. La orquesta debía ser muy rica, pues nos pasma la extrema variedad de instrumentos que se mencionan: flautas, clarines, cornetines, trompetas, real y bastarda, pífanos, trombones; la *jabela*, o flauta morisca, la *chirimía*, el *sacabuche*, especie de trombón, el *orlo*, el *rabel*, la *vihuela de arco*, y finalmente, el *atabal*.” (Ricard 1947: 330)

"The ceremonies of this worship were almost always accompanied by music and song. The Indians usually sang with an organ accompaniment, with the accompaniment of various instruments, with their choirs, and the chroniclers say that they were able to easily compete with the choirs of the churches of Spain. The orchestra had to be very rich, because of the surprising rich variety of mentioned instruments: flutes, bugles, cornets, trumpets, *real* and *bastarda*, fifes, trombones; the *jabela* or Moorish flute, shawm, sackbut (sort of a trombone), *orlo*, the *rabel*, the *vihuela de arco*, and finally, the kettledrum" (Ricard 1947: 330; my translation).

The above description shows that for religious purposes early in the colonial period, many European instruments were introduced to the Americas. Some of the original instruments such as organs still remain in cathedrals, while others underwent transformations. Examples of these are the variations of the renaissance and baroque Spanish guitars—*huapanguera* and *jarana*, that together with a violin are the instrumentation of the popular Huastecan trio, the instrumental ensemble commonly used in popular and ritual music in the Huasteca area. Also, *chirimias* are still used in patronal festivities in Puebla and Michoacan (Chamorro 1986); while *rabels* are still the instrumentation for some ritual music of the Nahuatl and Tenek of San Luis Potosí.¹⁰

¹⁰ I have encountered *rabel* performers in the municipalities of Xilitla, Matlapa and Aquismon.

For the Nahuas of Chicontepec, the Huastecan trio is often used in religious, public, and family events. César Hernández Azuara (2003) in his study of the Huastecan *son*, traces the origins of *huapanguera* to renaissance and baroque guitars and *vibuela*, wherein the construction, string order, and intonation show similarity with these stringed instruments that arrived with the Spaniards. However, it seems that the intonation of the *jarana* in thirds, differs from many renaissance and baroque guitars. According to Hernández Azuara, this particular characteristic might be the adaptation of the baroque guitar to the local intonation belonging to other local instruments. In fact, according to his ethnographic research, the Huastecan *jarana* might have originated in Tamaulipas in the first half of the twentieth century. This example illustrates the adaptation of an instrument, which arrived with the Spanish during the early establishment of the colonies and continued to be transformed throughout the twentieth century.

During the colonial period, with the Catholic Church central to the interaction of the indigenous population and the Spanish crown, many of the musical practices were related to the Christian calendar and church services. Still, the music not only represented an adaptation of the Spanish practices brought mainly by the mendicant orders, but was also the production and solidification of new one. The printing press played an important role for the dissemination of music. While the colonial documents lack registers of pre-Columbian music systems, intonation, or musical notation, monodies and polyphonies used in the Catholic celebrations comprise a large corpus of documents, which remain in large cathedrals' archives in Mexico City and Puebla, as well as other places. These documents contain good

examples of parallels of musical practices, considering monodic and polyphonic compositions produced equally in Mexico and Spain (Stevenson 1952).

Republic

After the expulsion of the Spanish from Mexico in 1821, the New Mexican Republic established new political institutions with centralized governments. In this process the indigenous populations of the Huasteca area, similar to other parts of Mexico, took part in the establishment of the New Mexican state only marginally. Considering this dichotomy of mainstream and minority groups, Bonfil Batalla (2005) opposes the ‘imaginary Mexico’ that historically has been looking towards the Western enterprise of modernism, to the ‘deep Mexico’ rooted in the pre-Colonial societies. This dichotomy presumes that indigenous populations have preserved socio-cultural traits inherited from the pre-Columbian societies. The mestizo population, on the other hand, is the outcome of elites drawn from the system of domination with a direct relationship to the Spanish colonies.

In the vast Mexican territory, the project of modernization of the Mexican society, often has been asymmetrical between urban and rural settings. In some cases, the project of modernism, in fact, never took place (Canclini 1989). Since the Mexican revolution in 1910, elements of rural life became symbols in the representation of the Mexican national identity. In many cases this was represented, on one hand by the ideal *charro* as the image of the Mexican mestizo, and on the other, by the indigenous populations with distinctive language and socio cultural characteristics. With the communist ideals that drew from the revolution, indigenous life became an emblem of national identity and often it was painted in impressive murals that covered many governmental institutions in various cities. Moreover: “in the

music, in the dance, in the literature, and the plastic arts, the indigenous theme provided the elements to build a vast national ideology under governmental sponsorship.” (Bonfil Batalla 2005: 89).¹¹ This continues today, where many of the elements used to represent Mexican national identity, among other things, are largely characterized by performances of folk dances from different states. The rural is still a symbol of Mexican national identity wherein commonly indigenous traits are taken to represent colorful stereotypes of rural societies.

Today

Today, indigenous groups in Mexico constitute 6.5% of the populations classified in 89 language groups (INEGI 2010). The language classification hardly represents a socio-cultural indication, since many social groups might portray similar socio-cultural characteristics even though they belong to different indigenous language groups or they are part of the mestizo population, especially in areas of interaction with indigenous groups. Regarding the language groups, by recognizing the multicultural characteristics of this society the Mexican State attempted to incorporate the indigenous societies into the economic system of the country as well as to protect their sociocultural characteristics.¹²

In the Mexican Constitution, for example, Article No. 2 recognizes ‘*pueblos indígenas*’ as the populations who have descended from those that inhabited Mexico before the Spanish conquest, and who have the right to maintain their system of governance, cultural practices, religion, language, and sovereignty over the land they have inherited from previous generations. This Article also articulates the will of the State to protect the socio-cultural

¹¹ “...en la música en la danza, en la literatura y las artes plásticas, la temática de lo indio proporcionó los elementos para configurar una vasta corriente nacionalista bajo el patrocinio gubernamental.” (Bonfil Batalla 2005: 89).

¹² These attempts exclude African-Mexicans populations that arrived during the colonial period.

traits of the indigenous people as well as to facilitate access to services such as education, health, constructions of roads and schools (Mexicanos 2013). In this attempt, the Mexican State has also established governmental institutions with the purpose of providing support for cultural and linguistic programs such as INALI, CONACULTA, and INI, and others that facilitate programs for economic growth like Oportunidades¹³, PACMYC, etc.

However, as much as these attempts might have contributed to incorporating the indigenous groups into the Mexican economy, the indigenous populations constantly confront hardship while attempting to participate in the enterprises of modern Mexico.

Today, Nahuas, Tenek, Otomi, Tepehua, Totonaco and mestizos populate the lower Huasteca. While particular traits exist in each ethnolinguistic group, there are also many similarities resulting out of their interactions (Valle Esquivel 2003). For example, the indigenous languages are well differentiated. Except for Totonaco and Tepehua, all the languages belong to different family trees. The interaction of the groups, however, have contributed to the shaping of many similarities in cultural practices, and in several areas some indigenous groups have adopted words of their neighbors, as the presence of Tenek or Huastecan language in some definitions of plants and animals in Nahuatl from San Luis Potosi (Kaufman 2001; Stresser-Péan 2008).

In the lower Huasteca where Chicontepec is located, the proximity to Otomi communities in the neighboring municipalities has contributed to shaping similarities in ritual and healing practices, such as the use of cut-paper images in rituals offered to

¹³ *Oportunidades* is a governmental program effective in all the communities in Chicontepec, which targets low income families with monetary support to ease their economic struggle. In retribution, the families have to support and supervise the schooling of their children, participate in training offered by the clinics, and incorporate their knowledge back into their homes.

mountains and springs. Moreover, people around the Nahuatl towns consider Otomi *buehuetlacameh* (master of ceremonies) and *tepahtiquemeh* (healers) as powerful celebrants. Considering all the references to the Otomi skillful celebrants, it is not hard to consider the possibility that the ceremonies for mountains and healing rituals have originated with this group. In San Luis Potosí, Stresser-Péan (2008) proposes that the interaction of Tenek and Nahuatl have contributed to common cultural traits such as different ritual dances, different from Otomies, Totonacos and Tepehuas.

Chicontepec is a municipality that consists of only Nahuatl speakers and mestizos, although commonly other municipalities include different language groups such as Ixhuatlán de Madero with Nahuas, Otomies, Tepehuas, and mestizos. A striking commonality, however, is that most of the mestizo population generally lives in the municipality's head cities and often constitute the municipality's authorities.¹⁴

According to the Mexican national census (INEGI 2010) 71.36% of the population in Chicontepec over five years old speaks the Eastern variant of the Huastecan Nahuatl. There are many Nahuatl monolinguals among women, elders, and children, but most of the population is bilingual in Nahuatl and Spanish. Those who speak only Spanish are either mestizos who mostly live in the municipality's head city, couples that have intermarried with other indigenous groups, or young generations who might not speak Nahuatl but fully understand it as the result of the close interaction with their grandparents.

¹⁴ The mestizo population comprises emigrants from urban centers or generations of indigenous populations that migrated from the municipality's towns to the head city. Considering the latter, by inter-marrying or searching for job opportunities, some people have moved to the municipality's head city and have lost the language of their families in one or two generations. In other cases, the mixing happens between inter-marriages of different indigenous language groups, in which case the descendants speak only Spanish.

The ways of life in Ixcacuatitla

The town of Ixcacuatitla illustrates some particularities of the local life in the area concerning economy, political organization and religion. Ixcacuatitla is located on the south side of the municipality in the eastern foothills and slope of the Postectli Mountain. At the time of my visit in 2010 and 2011, the population consisted of 677 people.¹⁵ Even though the community possesses extensive lands, all the houses are located together and divided into neighborhoods. There is no colonial architecture, and most of the houses are constructed with the wattle-and-daub technique, which consists of wet soil extended on a bundle of wooden strips, which are made of a local reed.¹⁶ Although woven palm roofs are still common in this region, most of the roofs in the town are made of tiles or tin sheets. The houses attached to each other on the side of the Postectli Mountain give to Ixcacuatitla a particular picturesque image. Inside the settlement none of the roads are paved but rather contain a series of arranged stones that facilitate cars' traffic. During the rainy season, however, walking on the pathways is a challenging task since one stumbles on rocks while the swamped streets become irregular displays of holes and bumps.

Ixcacuatitla still maintains communal land and the members have autonomy from the municipality while administrating it. Long ago the land was divided between the families, but between 1995-2000 SEDESOL made new divisions and assigned the land for each owner, which divisions remain today. In Ixcacuatitla, as a patrilineal society each family inherits the

¹⁵ The information about the population in Ixcacuatitla was provided by the local health clinic, which maintains registers of the population of each house in town.

¹⁶ In Mexican Spanish this technique is known as *bajareque*, and has been the main domestic construction technique since pre-Hispanic times.

land from the family's property through the male descendants. In the case the heir has migrated or passed away, it is likely that the female descendants and their families will become the next owners. The inheritance of land is not transferable to non-family members and it cannot be sold. Originally the divisions were equal, but with the different number of family members, some of the land divisions are larger than others. There are cases where land has served as the payment for debts among the members of the community, and in those cases the land is transferred to the new owner and his family only if these are members of the community. Other towns have transformed their land tenure to Ejidots such as in Camotipan, where land is own individually.¹⁷

The houses are perhaps one of the most remarkable contrasts between tradition and modernity, where the house's construction varies between local materials and imported ones such as cement and tin. The majority of the houses are placed in close proximity to each other, varying in sizes according to the number of family members. Although there are many cement constructions, the majority of the houses are still made of adobe, including the floor. The space is divided into the kitchen that usually includes a dining room, and a bedroom consisting of one room often shared by the children and their parents. The majority of the houses still have adobe floors and often seats and benches are located outside the house's main entrance for the family to gather together at the end of a busy hot day and enjoy the fresh air of the early evening in the company of relatives and neighbors. There are very

¹⁷ The *ejidos* are communal lands that allow private property. The Mexican government created *ejidos* after the Mexican Revolution as institutions that enable rural societies to appropriate land. In the Nahuatl towns of Chicontepec, the *ejidos* differ from other communal lands as the owners are more independent in managing properties, which stresses the individual rather than communal decisions (Perramond 2008).

distinctive cement houses, which mostly belong to local teachers, cattle owners, and some others who have migrated to urban centers and the United States and have sent money to build the houses. In a society that based the majority of the household income on agriculture production, the presence of cement constructions is not only a sign of modernity but also a strong indicator of social status.

Construction with cement, in fact, is one of the efforts that this society constantly intends to achieve as a sign of improving their status, even though in many cases the adaptation of some of these models become inappropriate to the ways of life of these communities. In 2010, for example, a State-supported project called *'piso firme'* (hard floor) replaced traditional adobe floors with cement in many houses in Ixcacuatitla and other towns in Chicontepec. In many cases, this modernization project has not been entirely successful, especially with regard to cement floors put in kitchens, where large meals are prepared and traditional dirt floors readily accommodate easy disposal of food scraps, since anything dropped on them eventually decomposes and becomes part of the dirt floor. By contrast, food dropped on cement floors accumulates and becomes trash. Certainly, this adaptation might bring some benefits to the houses but that might represent different conditions that at the moment have not been incorporated.

The households often consist of large extended families. In fact, once a couple marries, the new family moves to the groom parent's house, where the bride becomes a new member of the family and integrates into the house's labor. Commonly young couples build their new house as an extension of the house of the groom's parents. These joint families in many cases work together either in plowing the fields, harvesting corn, or taking care of the

children and other household duties. However, a quite common situation has been that both parents migrated to work in the urban centers such as Mexico City, Morelia, Reynosa, or to the United States. The parents leave their children in the town under the care of their grandparents while they send money for their subsistence and education.

Economy

There are two main sources for household economic income: agriculture and cattle farming. Agriculture is mostly centered on the corn field, which supplies the necessary amount for family consumption. The corn field is, in fact, the oldest form of agricultural production in Mexico and many ceremonial connotations, which will be discussed in the following chapters, surround the corn field and the corn cycle. Additionally, small plantations of beans, pumpkins, and other vegetables and roots are grown together with corn for the families' own consumption. Flowers for altars and ceremonies, especially the marigold (*cempobualxochitl*), often grow throughout the corn fields. Some small agricultural production of local vegetables and fruits is traded in *tianguis* (local markets), while a few towns such as Camotipan have developed industrial production of citric fruits, mainly oranges and mandarins, selling each season's harvest to pickers who arrive in big trucks. The semi-tropical conditions of this area facilitate the production of citric fruits without an irrigation system; however, it is unfeasible for the smaller communities to dedicate their land to this end and rather they maintain the corn field as a central agricultural system for internal consumption.

Cattle Owners and Teachers: Economic Stratification

Cattle are raised mostly for beef production and large amount of land is dedicated to this end. Owners keep the cattle mostly in open-field ranches to take advantage of natural pasture and rainwater for drink, which is collected in large artificial pools. Calves are kept with their mothers for one or two years before selling them to other ranchers. Some of the cattle, lacking strong security fences, wander around roads and cornfields, sometimes causing damage to crops to even destroying whole harvests. Additionally, the consecutive droughts of this area have motivated many farmers to raise large grass to maintain the basic needs to feed the cattle.

Some cattle are for raised for local consumption while others for commercial purposes. In many cases this production creates good revenues so many owners became extremely wealthy and drastically changed their social status. Often cattle producers own large houses and several cars, mostly trucks, which contrasts with the economy of farmers who make no revenue from their crops. Moreover, the economic power of cattle owners has opened spaces for successful political careers and some have even been elected for Municipal Presidents, the highest political position in the entire municipality. This is the case of Martín Nicolas Cruz from Tepeco, one of the biggest cattle owners, who despite receiving very little formal education—he is almost illiterate and mostly communicates in Nahuatl—successfully occupied the presidency position that is traditionally dominated by mestizos who hold a university degree.¹⁸

¹⁸ Cattle owners have organized systems of cooperative production and even have unions. Ixcacuatitla holds one of the centers for the cattle ranchers union, which enables trade, health information, and transportation.

Another distinctive feature of the economic stratification are teaching positions in different educational institutions inside and outside Ixcacuatitla. In a society based mainly on agricultural production, monetary income is either inconsistent or completely absent, since the corn fields hardly provide monetary revenue. In fact, many men leave for work outside the towns while the corn grows and return for the harvest. In this system, teachers hold unique positions with monthly salaries that facilitate them to build cement houses, have medical insurance, and other privileges that most of the population lacks. Other professionals such as doctors, nurses, or accountants live in the town; however, teachers still hold the most recognized and highly valued profession of all, even though lately opportunities have decreased inside the towns, forcing teachers to migrate to other towns and cities.

Political Organization

Two forms of governance exist in the municipality: the centralized Municipality institution that represents all the towns, and the local institution that allows political autonomy for each town. The jurisdiction of Chicontepec's municipality includes 332 Nahua towns, with a central responsibility of articulating the necessities of these communities with the State in terms of public services, annual funding, and constructions of roads, schools, and so forth. All towns have the right to elect their municipal authorities. The authorities occupy positions in the municipality with salaries according to the department to where they belong, with the municipal president the highest and best paid position in the system. Elections take place every three years. The political parties such as PRI, PAN, or PRD take a decisive role, where members of each party organize the campaigns to reach every town and

secure votes. In many cases volunteers participate in the campaigns expecting goods, money, or even jobs. As mentioned above, educated mestizos have often occupied the highest positions in the municipality, mainly because education represents a path to a better economic status, with monthly salaries. Teachers have often occupied the positions of presidents in the municipality.

Andrés Pérez Pardavé is a renowned teacher who occupied the municipality presidency for many terms. Now retired, he lives in the municipality's head city and among other engagements he dedicates his time to writing historical accounts about Chicontepec and has become the local *cronista* (chronicler) and an authority on the history of Chicontepec. In his chronicles Pérez Pardavé narrates that the state recognized Chicontepec as the head city in 1910 and inaugurated the municipality building together with Hidalgo's statue located in the central plaza. This event marked the institutionalization of Chicontepec as a municipality and its head city, the only urban center in the municipality (Pérez Pardavé 2006).¹⁹

¹⁹ Commonly, the accounts of local chroniclers lack reference to sources making it difficult to trace their writings and differentiate between oral and written information. This is also the case for Pérez Pardavé, although due to his political career and the interaction with local and State authorities, his writings have developed within a unique context and are worth considering. The majority of Pérez Pardavé writings are located at the municipality archive with no codification numbers.

Local Political Institutions and Factionalism

Ixcacuatitla's local political system is divided into three entities, also common in other towns: *Agencia Municipal*, *Juzgado*, and *Comisariado*.²⁰ Each provides different functions from administrative services to moral and land supervision, and have political autonomy from the centralized municipality jurisdiction. Even though each fulfills specific responsibilities, the *agente* is the main authority in town who deals with different issues that range from personal disputes to more general ones such as the administration of funds and expenses of the whole town.

Due to political disputes and funds management, Ixcacuatitla divided their political organization into two different *agencias*: Ixcacuatitla and Los Pinos²¹. This division comprehends the local market (*tianguis*), schools, and the well. The management of funds and municipal services concerning schools or the clinic is handled directly by the municipality to Ixcacuatitla, hence the participation of Los Pinos in the assembly held by Ixcacuatitla. In this separation, the only religious divisions are the *xochicalli* temple celebrations, including the *chicomexochitl* and *tlamana* ceremonies (celebration for the sweet corn). See further details in Chapter Five.

In Ixcacuatitla, differently from the municipality-head-city's political structure, the local political organization resembles a form of the *usos y costumbres* system (uses and traditions), where the authorities of each entity consist of male members who occupy non-

²⁰ These entities are very specific to the local political system in Mexico, and have no direct translations into English. Therefore, it is pertinent here to maintain the Spanish terminology.

²¹ Even though these are two towns, when referring here to 'Ixcacuatitla' both towns are considered unless indicated otherwise.

paid positions in the hierarchical system. The younger occupy positions such as a *topiles* (policemen) while older men become *agentes* or judges who are responsible for many complex duties and have served throughout all the positions in the system. The concept of providing this civil duty with no salary is known as a *tequio*. Similarly to the Municipality, elections for the local authorities take place also every three years, wherein the whole community congregates to vote by raising a hand, a duty traditionally done only by men although now in Ixcacuatitla women also seldom participate. The *Consejo de Ancianos* (council of elders), highly praised in the civil duties structure of the community, is still central for decision-making or conflict resolution. Another feature of the local governance are organized committees in charge of different aspects of cooperative work, such as committees for water, clinic and health, *Oportunidades* economic aid, cattle, etc.

The civil duties system traditionally incorporates men rather than women as representatives of each family and, in fact, for many women the duties of the household are heavy enough so they are unable to commit to any position. Some exceptions include professional women such as teachers, who were willing to nominate themselves for political duties but none have occupied high political positions. However, women participation is visible in the organization and leadership of the committees, particularly those regarding cleaning, clinic, or *Oportunidades*. This form of governance reflects many of the characteristics present in most of the social interactions, where the roles of women and men are separated and rarely combined. In fact, when the assembly takes place women see to their partners to act as the spokesperson of the house, and I often witnessed dialogues between partners to bring the family concerns to the assembly or support the election of an authority. Perhaps

this manner of political participation responds to functionality rather than hierarchy between genders, which I believe is maintained since the positions require many responsibilities but carries no salary. Thus, the work of the authorities as *tequio* in the local government still functions according to the needs of the community. This is perhaps a major difference with the municipality, since there each candidate competes individually to improve his or her economic status.

Additionally, in the assemblies there is a representative of each neighborhood who voices the needs and concerns of the group, although in the case of land dispute or personal and family conflicts, the parties involved deal directly with the authorities of the town. This representative facilitates communication between the neighborhoods and the authorities, thus enabling a more productive meeting.

Education

Ixcacuatitla holds the main educational institutions of the municipality's southern region including kindergarten, elementary school, and regular and technical high schools. Today, most communities have kindergarten and elementary schools in town, but the young travel to Ixcacuatitla, Chicontepec's head city, or Alamo, to attend higher levels of education. Ixcacuatitla, therefore, brings many students from the area, and in fact, this has been a characteristic that goes back a couple of decades. Around 1962 the authorities fought to establish a complete elementary school to provide education to all the communities of the Municipality's south. Being the first and only one in the area, the school congregated seven

hundred students from all communities (personal interview, September 2010).²²

Progressively, in Ixcacuatitla all education levels were institutionalized from kindergarten to high school and even there was an unsuccessful attempt to establish a university. The building of the institution still remains.

In Chicontepec, education is bilingual as a result of governmental policies that have been applied to preserve indigenous languages in Mexico. While in kindergarten and elementary school several classes are taught in Nahuatl, in the middle and high school the language becomes only a subject in the curriculum. To incorporate Nahuatl in the classrooms, the SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública) has provided a series of books such as grammars and vocabularies to aid teachers. Additionally, teachers are required to undertake bilingual training and attend workshops to acquire methodologies to impart classes in both languages: Spanish and Nahuatl. In many cases both training and workshops aid in developing the teacher's language skills, but in other cases these are ineffective particularly with teachers that lack previous exposure to Nahuatl. Despite all efforts to support the use of Nahuatl in the formal education system, teachers constantly face challenges concerning the lack of standardization of written Nahuatl or the different variants used in textbooks. Despite these challenges, Nahuatl is still part of the curriculum at schools in Chicontepec. During my stay in Chicontepec I witnessed how some supported students that spoke Nahuatl by encouraging poetry and song-writing to further present their work in organized performances and competitions.

²² Pedro mentioned that among the communities involved were: both Alaxtitlas, both Teacatls, Xochicualtepetl, Soltepec, Postetictla, Cuaxiloapan, both Sapoyos, Ixtle Flores Magon, Ixtle, Sacahuixtitla, Tepenahuac, Xococatl, and Teposteco, all of which located in the south (personal interview, 2010).

Among the population that attends these schools, the level of Nahuatl varies according to each family and town. Even though INEGI census shows that 71.36 % of the population are Nahuatl speakers (INEGI 2010), the level of proficiency varies according to age and uses of the language. For instance, in Ixcacuatitla, in the age of kindergarten and elementary school, while some speak little or no Nahuatl at all, others are fluent because they have been under the supervision of their grandparents while their parents migrated to work. In smaller towns such as Las Silletas, most of the population are monolinguals who speak only Nahuatl, and some children only encounter Spanish for the first time when entering school. One of the elementary school teachers that has been working for more than a year in the community of Las Silletas mentioned the challenges of imparting her classes to children who speak only Nahuatl, while she possessed no knowledge of the language. This teacher is an example of some of the challenges of imparting Nahuatl in the attempt to establish bilingual education.

In tandem with the institutionalization of formal education, much of the knowledge concerning the ceremonial rituals and local medicine is still transmitted orally. *Tepabtiquetl* (healer), midwives, or orthopedic healers learn, in an oral system of teacher/pupil relationship, about treatments and herbarium throughout many years. In all medical treatments plants are central, and often the healer maintains a household garden or explores a nearby forest to collect for his or hers treatments. Variety of plants, mostly dried, also arrive to local markets from local farmers or the urban centers such as Alamo or even Mexico City, and sellers fill their stocks according to local demands. All this knowledge is embodied by healers and transmitted orally to their pupils. In this, language is absolutely

indispensable since much of this knowledge is, and has been, transmitted in Nahuatl without translations into Spanish. In the context of the local religion, ritual music is transmitted orally. The interested participants accompany the ceremonies to acquire the repertoire, while closely following a teacher. Due to the length and complexity of the repertoire, guidance from knowledgeable musicians is fundamental to undertake the responsibilities that ritual celebration requires. Chapter Six contains detailed information on musicians of ritual music.

Religion

Similar to other regions in Mexico, the religious practices in Chicontepec are a combination of Christian and non-Christian beliefs. The distribution of the Christian Churches in the town from the majority to the minority corresponds to: Catholics, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Jehovah Witnesses—the latter just started to appear in Ixcacuatitla at the end of my fieldwork season in 2011. The Catholic Church consists of two different institutions: one often identified in the towns as the ‘Old’, which seems to refer to the colonial Christian practices and its association with *la costumbre* (see below); and the other identified as the ‘New’, which corresponds to the Catholic Church that arrived to the Nahua towns in recent decades. While the presence of the former seems small since most of the communities lack colonial architecture (particularly those located in the south side of the municipality), the arrival of the latter is more pronounced. In Ixcacuatitla, it was only as late as the 1980s that a chapel and a large cross on top of the Postectli Mountain were raised.²³

²³ In this dissertation, I maintain the local distinction made between the ‘Old’ and the ‘New’ Catholic Church as a means to clarify that *la costumbre* and the current organization of the Catholic Church differ. While several similarities exist, this separation is evident in the organization of ceremonies and other religious events; the roles of ritual specialists and priests; and the centrality of certain dates in the religious calendar. Therefore, the Catholic Church denotes the ‘New’ and *la costumbre* refers to the ‘Old’.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the descriptions in this section pertain mainly to *la costumbre*, while leaving details of other religious communities aside. References to the Catholic Church or the other Christian Churches are mainly made to illustrate contrasts, similarities, or interactions.

La costumbre (the tradition) is the oldest religion in the Nahua towns and is rooted in pre-Columbian practices (Gomez Martinez 2001; Sandstrom 1991). It incorporates Christian and non-Christian elements, where celebrations mainly follow the Christian calendar where the prominent festivities include the Carnival, the Day of the Dead, and commemorations of saints' days. Also in the calendar there are other religious ceremonies explicitly associated with the agriculture and rain cycles, which are offered in petition for the rain. There are two rain ceremonies named *tlatlacualtia* (to feed) or *tlatlacualtilistli* (banquet), which denote the action to feed: the *chicomexochitl* (offered to mountains at the beginning of the corn and rain cycles) and *atlatlacualtia* (offered to the water sources).²⁴ These celebrations take place in dates that commemorate saint's days including the patron saints of the towns. Different rites known as '*costumbre de semilla*' (tradition of the seed) take place during the cycle of the corn, and entail offerings that are placed in the fields and the household altars. Furthermore, the local healing practices are intertwined with these traditional religious beliefs.

The temple for the celebrations is the *xochicalli* (literally 'house of the flower'). The organization of the temple still follows the *cargo* system where the authorities consist of:

²⁴ The concept of feeding is also actively present in the Day of the Dead, when the deceased are believed to arrive to the houses. To receive the dead, the families place food in the household altars to feed the visitors. In these dates, also large tamales of a whole chicken are brought to the cemetery so the family members can share a meal with the dead. Even though the concept of feeding is present in the Day of the Dead with similar characteristics of offerings and marigold flowers, the denomination *tlatlacualtia* belongs only to the ceremonies associated with the natural landscape.

president, treasurer, secretary, *mayordomo*, and *comandante* (a major or captain).²⁵ These authorities take care of the temple, including cleaning and changing flowers or other needs as well as organizing religious ceremonies and events. The *xochicalli* contains three altars, locally referred to as *mesas* (literally meaning ‘tables’). The main altar holds in the center the image of the corn deity named Chicomexochitl (literally ‘seven flower’) in a wooden box (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Chicomexochitl deity represented with paper-cut images inside the wooden box. Las Silletas, June, 2011. Photo by the author.

²⁵ The ‘cargo system’ is a pan-Mesoamerican hierarchical organization of religious positions (cargos) occupied by men and women to fulfill obligations as their civil duty. This type of civil-religious organization is commonly found among indigenous societies in Mexico and other countries in Latin America. In Ixcacuaitla a semblance to the cargo system is only found in the hierarchical organization of the *xochicalli*.

A similar image of the Chicomexochitl to Figure 2 is located in the main table in the *xochicalli* in Ixcacuatitla. The deity is represented with seven cut-paper images of different colors and depicted with dual characteristics of being both a boy and a girl. The image is dressed in the traditional clothing of the Nahuatl towns. The number seven represents seeds.²⁶ Surrounding the wooden box are the images of various saints, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary, *cempobualxochitl* flowers (marigold), candles, batons, copal burners, among other sacred items.²⁷ Roberto Williams, who conducted research in the town of Ixcacuatitla in the 1950s, observed that the *xochicalli* temple holds the image of the Chicomexochitl in the center of the main altar, as it does today. This centrality, according to Williams (1966), commemorated a mythical story of how the people from Ixcacuatitla encountered a single grain of corn and planted it. This grain became a plant that fruitfully gave seven cobs in a deserted field.

The above description of the main altar in the *xochicalli* temple in Ixcacuatitla is perhaps the best example of the significance that the non-Christian pantheon of deities occupies in *la costumbre*. While Jesus and the Virgin are present in the celebrations and many associations exist, deities represented with cut-paper images and Christian saints have more active roles.²⁸ The non-Christian pantheon consists of numerous deities and spirits

²⁶ See Chapter Five for details concerning the Chicomexochitl deity.

²⁷ In the sixteenth century, the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún and his Nahuatl collaborators documented the Aztec culture in twelve volumes, which included among other things their religious practices. In Sahagún's accounts the *cempobualxochitl* flowers (marigold; literally 'twenty-flower') were commonly used in Aztec ceremonies in a variety of contexts during the religious calendar. For example, in the *tecuilhuitontli* feast, Sahagún writes: "And all who were present at the dance held in their hands those flowers which are called *cempobualxochitl*. Thus dancing, they took many captives to the Pyramid of Tlaloc, and, with them the woman who was to die, who was the likeness of the goddess Uixtociuatl. There they slew first the captives and then her" (Sahagún 1951: 13). The use of the *cempobualxochitl* flower in the rituals in *la costumbre* might represent a historical continuity of the Aztecs' religious calendar. An additional aspect that can support this assumption is the Aztec twenty-day calendar, which is also represented in the name of the flower.

²⁸ Alan Sandstrom further observed an association with Jesus and the sun in the Nahuatl town where he conducted his research in the 1970s (Sandstrom 1991: 236).

represented with images made of different types of paper. These paper representations are known in Nahuatl as *tlatecmeh*—plural of *tlatectli*, or in Spanish as *recortes* (literally ‘cuttings’).²⁹ Each image portrays specific attributes and are classified according to their functions, divided into a dual categorization between the polarities of good and bad.³⁰ In contrast to the Christian notion of good and evil, this dichotomy represents polarities that constantly interact. To maintain the balance between these polarities, offerings of food, *cempobualxochitl* flowers, candles, and other things are placed in altars located in the *xochicalli* temple, houses, and other places in the landscape which are designated to the specific deity. These altars often consist of two levels, a cross and an arch. Most of the houses in the town contain an altar for private offerings. The offerings and deities are placed in both levels of the altar, often indicating that above is for God, and below is for the earth.

The majority of the paper representations portray humanoid characteristics, which are mostly arranged in couples: female and male. Each has distinctive features to identify the gender. Other representations have geometrical shapes, which mostly include squares. Among many, the humanoid paper-cut images represent deities such as water, cross, sun, earth, and fire as well as the Madam and Sir of the Mountain (Señor y Señora de la Montaña), lighting, baton, crown and water tap. Some of the deities appear in both sides of the good and bad dichotomy, but their attributes differ according to the polarities where

²⁹ The distinction between ‘deities’ and ‘spirits’ is hard to define. In some cases a living entity correspond to mountains and water sources, while in others they have the characteristics of a spirit-type such as the *ebecameh* (winds), which are used in a cleansing rite. These categorization, however, fail to encapsulate the complex characteristics and interactions of the different entities. Hence, the denomination ‘deity’ in this dissertation refers to all entities that partake in the non-Christian pantheon of *la costumbre*.

³⁰ This dual principle of good and bad was often explained to me by ritual specialists while discussing the role of deities in the ceremonies and healing practices. In some interviews, some ritual specialist suggested that the representation of deities is to teach us about the interaction of these polarities in our lives.

they belong. In Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5 are some illustrations of the deities and their polarities:



Figure 3. The Sir (left) and Madam (right) of the Mountain from the good polarity.

These deities are used in healing practices, in offerings for particular petitions, for protection, and during the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies (rain ceremonies offered to the natural landscape). Tepeco, 2010. Photo by the author.



Figure 4. *Tlahueliloc*, The Sacred Dead, and the *ehcameh* deities from the bad polarity.

In the front row of the cut-paper images is the *tlahueliloc* (big white paper-cut image in the center) and his partner The Sacred Dead (on his left side). The other images in the same row are the companions, sometimes associated with the *mecos* (characters that appear in the

Carnival). The *tlabueliloc* is the deity for the Carnival and is associated with the devil. In the photograph other deities are placed underneath the food offerings represented with white newspaper. The color-paper images are the *ehcameh* (bad-winds). All deities belong to the bad polarity. The photograph corresponds to the event known as *tlaochpantli* or cleansing rite performed in the *chicomexochitl* ceremony. The offerings are presented to the *ehcameh* (bad-winds). Cuatro Caminos, 2011. Photo by the author.



Figure 5. *Tlil* (fire) female and male from the good polarity.

This deity is also represented in the bad polarity with attributes such as skeletons faces or ribs, which are associated with the death. Tepeco, 2010. Photo by the author.

Ceremonial paper representing a pantheon of deities similar to the images in Figures 3, 4 and 5 belong to an old tradition that is still common in the area among Nahua and Otomi towns (Dow 1986; Galinier 1997; and Sandstrom 1991). In the Nahua towns of Chicontepec the cut-paper images are widely used in multiple contexts. Some of the context that illustrate their uses are the *tlatlacualtia*, the two rain ceremonies offered to the natural landscape; in the New Year square images of paper known as *ventanas* (windows) are placed to protect the house from the *ehcameh* (bad-winds). Also in the healing practices a group of deities are used in a cleansing rite to clean the bodies from afflictions. In extreme cases, healers often use different deities such as the *tlabueliloc* (deity from the Carnival associated

with the devil) and the Sacred Dead (the female companion of the *tlabueliloc*) to treat dramatic situations such as a deadly sickness or accidents. The ritual specialist is the only person to give shape to the images with his special pair of scissors, which are given to him in a ceremony. For more details on the role of the ritual specialist in *la costumbre* see Chapter Four; for his role in the chicomexochitl ceremony see Chapter Five. In the context of *la costumbre*, therefore, the deities from both polarities are actively used for multiple purposes. In such a context, ritual music known as *xochitl sones* (flower-musical pieces) or *sones de costumbre* (musical pieces of the tradition), is an integral element that partakes with both polarities. Thus, musical pieces in the repertoire are performed to interact with the polarities of the pantheon of deities. See Chapter Six for a description of the place that ritual music occupies in *la costumbre* in relationship to balancing these polarities.

The Christian saints are also kept in altars located in the *xochicalli* temple and in the private houses. The saints are never represented with cut-paper but rather with Christian statutes and framed reproductions of pictures and drawings. Offerings of food and flowers are similarly placed for different purposes, which vary according to the story of the saints' lives or attributes that identify them. All saints' names are in Spanish. A common image found in the altars corresponds to Santiago (St. James), who is often depicted in his horse fighting against the Moors. In the towns this saint is considered strong and the owner of animals. The offerings for this saint are placed for protection especially concerning cattle and horses. Others such as San Martin de Porres, a black saint from Peru, is associated with witchcraft; while San Antonio (St. Anthony) as the keeper of St. James animals is associated

also with cattle. Santa Cecilia is the saint of music. The commemoration of her day is Nov. 19th, where musicians often put offerings asking the saint to protect their work.

Despite of the presence of different Christian churches, the majority of the population still follows traditions associated with *la costumbre*. In these traditions, *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies occupy a special place in the context of the public celebrations, where mountains, springs, and caves are the foci for worship. Mountains in particular are considered powerful entities that provide rain and among many, the Postectli Mountain is a ceremonial center for many indigenous groups in the area. Annually many pilgrims from Otomi, Tepehua, and Nahuatl towns arrive at the Postectli Mountain to make offerings asking for rain, other needs, and for personal, family, and communal wellbeing.

In some cases, the two *tlatlacualtia* are celebrated together with the commemorations of saints' days. For example, in Ixcacuatitla the *chicomexochitl* often takes place on May 15th, commemorating the town's patron saint San Isidro Labrador (St. Isidore the Laborer). In the town of Las Silletas the *atlatlacualtia* (ceremony for the water sources), celebrated for the water well, takes place in the rainy season on June 24th in commemoration of San Juan's day (St. John). In this town, the well is named after the saint. For other towns these parallels might occur only in the case the patron saint's day falls in the months that correspond either to the beginning or during the rainy season.

The *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies are perhaps the most complex ceremonies in the calendar. They entail offerings in multiple altars, which mostly consist of food. Numerous cut-paper images are produced, and which number varies according to the purpose of the ceremony and the degree of severity as in the case of a ceremony taking place during a long draught.

The centrality of particular mountains, water sources, and caves as foci for worship in the ceremonies further elucidates the relationship that the Nahua towns have with the natural landscape. The following Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven contain detailed descriptions of the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies with a particular emphasis on the chicomexochitl ceremony celebrated in Ixcacuatitla. The descriptions illustrate the interaction of the congregations with the natural landscape, highlighting in particular water sources and mountains, the pantheon of deities, and the centrality of the Chicomexochitl deity in the celebration. The description further contributes to understanding the role that music plays in the realization of the ceremony, while the congregations attempt to bring the rain.

Additionally, other traditions are interrelated with *la costumbre*. Some of these are rites of passage such as *lava manos* (literary ‘washing hands’; godparents’ commitment ceremony), weddings, or funerals. The ritual specialist, who is often a healer also officiates the rites of passage as well as public rituals. Furthermore, a common strategy used by ritual specialists and healers is the cleansing rite or *tlaochpantli* (sweeping). The rite belongs to a system of divination, where ritual specialists utilize it to foresee affliction in patients, consult dates for the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies, and further the results after the congregations have made the offerings. In the chicomexochitl ceremony the cleansing rite drives away the *ehcameh* from the ceremony (Figure 4). These and other parallels demonstrate that the ceremonial life, rites of passage, and healing practices, are still interrelated even though the influence of other Christian practices are prominent.

The participation in the religious life of *la costumbre*, however, has created different connotations of these public rituals and that have resulted out of generational gaps.

Traditionally, the religious calendar served to maintain a balance between natural agents, life, and death. In this, the good/bad polarity are used to maintain balance with public rituals such as the *chicomexochitl*, *atlatlacualtia* (celebration for the water resources), the Carnival, and *tlamana* (celebration for the sweet corn); as well as with private ones such as the New Year or the Day of the Dead. These celebrations bring many elements equally important throughout the year that are utilized to maintain a balanced life. A striking representation of these polarities is illustrated between the *chicomexochitl*, dedicated to the corn deity, and the Carnival, celebrated in honor of the *tlabueliloc* (the deity of the Carnival also associated with the devil). While the former consists of sacrifices, offerings, restraint and good conduct further associated with the corn field and the sacred landscape; the latter represents excess and the disruption of the social code, associated with carnal pleasures and freedom. Both celebrations equally embrace the good and bad polarity, which are equally important for a balanced and a peaceful existence. The interaction with these polarities is illustrated in a phrase that Pedro, a collaborator from Ixcacuatitla, expressed: “you give food to the mountain in the *chicomexochitl* as well as the *tlabueliloc* deity during the carnival” (personal interview, May 2010). These two extremes never represent a contrast of good/evil as in the Christian doctrine, but rather represent poles of existence, bringing harmony to individuals and the community at large. Still, a generational gap exists in the performance of both celebrations. While in the *chicomexochitl* the congregations consist of adults and elders with little participation of children and youth, the Carnival is one of the main celebrations that congregate the youth.

The high involvement of the youth in the Carnival results from the competitions of parades that educational institutions organize. The competitions take place inside and between institutions with students mostly of middle and high schools. Thus, carnival parades include young and adult men and young women. The participation of women is an unusual characteristic since traditionally always men dress up as women in the parades. For the young generations, the time dedicated to education and the changes in the economic income have created a distance from the corn field and the ceremonies associated with its cycle. Therefore, the Carnival and the *chicomexochitl* are a good example of generational gaps, where formal education, new and old forms of local economy, and the little participation in the agricultural process have contributed to the decrease of participation in ceremonies directly related to corn and rain cycles but stimulated the participation in others such as the Carnival.

The majority of the population in the Nahua towns is aware of the elements that belong to the different forms of worship and identify the non-Christian practices as local. In most cases the Christian Churches attempt to distance themselves from *la costumbre* practices in different levels. For example, the Evangelical Church disassociates completely from *la costumbre*, avoiding any element that might resemble the practices; the priests of the Catholic Church also attempt to eliminate those particular practices associated with the natural landscape, but they also incorporate elements into *la costumbre*. In this endeavor, a bishop placed a large cross on the Postectli Mountain's summit in the 1980s. Several remember the intention of the bishop to establish a sanctuary for pilgrimage in the name of Jesus and the cross as the emblem of the Catholic belief. Today, the cross represents a sacred element and

a center of devotion, completely integrated into the chicomexochitl ceremony, where many Nahuas, Otomis, and Tepehuas among other indigenous groups still make pilgrimages each year to ask the mountain for rain, protection, and good fortune.

Often people engaged with the ceremonial life of *la costumbre* also participate in events of the Catholic Church such as celebrations for the Virgin of Guadalupe or masses. Furthermore, interactions of catechists in rites of passages are common. I witnessed a funeral where a catechist directed prayers and chants. This catechist returned every day during the nine days after a burial, where the family and neighbors gathered in front of the household altar, which contained the clothes of the deceased, candles, and food. The participation of the catechists in the context of traditional funerals represents an example of the different combinations that resulted out of the interaction between the religious practices, in particular between the Catholic Church and *la costumbre*.

With economic changes and influences from different Christian practices, the Nahua towns are still actively engaged with the ceremonial life of *la costumbre*, in particular with the participation in the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies. Since most of the economy is still based on agriculture and cattle ranches, without a system of irrigation the Nahua towns are fully dependent on the rain for their subsistence. This necessity is probably the reason behind for the active engagement with the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies, where the natural landscape—mountains, springs and caves—are the foci for worship and the providers of the rain. In this context, the sacredness of corn is evident in the worship to the corn deity, the chicomexochitl, as the central character of the rain ceremony. In fact, several rites take place, which mark the process of the corn grain from germination to maturation in the plant. This

group of rites is known as ‘*costumbre de semilla*’ (‘seed tradition’), which mostly entails offerings of food and *cempobualxochitl* flowers, which are placed in household altars and corn fields. The concept of feeding (*tlatlacnaltia* or *tlatlacualtilistli*) is present in each denomination of the ‘seed tradition’ rites. The offerings are placed in the following stages in the corn fields and household altars:

Xinachtlacutia (germination) *xinachtli* (seed), corresponds to the offering for the sowing.

Milltlacuaultilistli (plant growth), follows the process where the grain pushes out of the soil and starts to grow.

Miahuacalaquia (maturation), corresponds to the stage after the plant has gained enough height, and tassels-ears start to appear on top of the plant. In this time the *tlamana* ceremonies are celebrated and some of the sweet corn known as *elote* is harvested for the ceremonies and for immediate consumption. Still, most of the corn will be left on the plants for maturation.

Cintlacualtilistli; *Pixca* (harvest). The dried corn is completely collected from the fields and piled up in the houses. The families use this corn as the basic food until the next harvest.

Conclusion

The Nahua towns of Chicontepec are complex societies in constant interaction with tradition and modernity. The population, which in its majority comprises of Nahuatl speakers who also speak Spanish, maintains the cargo system and *usos y costumbres* of independent governance, interacts with local and foreign economy, and celebrate public and private rituals that bring together large congregations. The natural landscape, despite its gradual erosion due to agricultural practices and cattle farming, is still an impressive resource for the subsistence of these towns. In fact, the high levels of rain that this area enjoys enable farmers to cultivate the land twice a year. For the Nahua towns that still base their household

economy on agriculture and cattle farming, rain and corn cycles occupy a central place in the religious imagery. Therefore, the towns actively engage in ceremonies dedicated to the natural landscape, where congregations gather to give offerings on different altars located in the *xochicalli* temples, springs, and mountains in different dates throughout the year. For details on the ceremonies dedicated to the natural landscape see Chapter Four and Five.

Such religious life reflects a long tradition of worship that is pan-Mesoamerican and predates centuries before the Spaniards arrived to the area in the sixteenth century. Catholicism has influenced the religious and political organization. In this context, the town of Ixcacuatitla as located at the foothills of the Postectli Mountain is an interesting case of a society with a high percentage of Nahuatl speakers, actively engaged in the ritual life, interacting with the natural landscape, and constantly participating with the mainstream Mexican society. This musical ethnography, therefore, explores some of the interactions that people of these Nahua towns have developed among congregations and the natural landscape, by exploring ritual music in the context of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the methodological framework I used to conduct fieldwork research following an interpretative-reflexive model. The methodology consisted of observational and participatory methods that included attending events in the religious and secular life between 2010 and 2011. I primarily followed ceremonies that marked the rain and corn cycles and other activities related to *la costumbre* (the tradition) religion. In order to answer the open-ended question: ‘what are the relationships between music and religious rituals?’, the field strategies included the identification of musicians and ritual specialists as main interlocutors; as well as attendance to different public and private rituals, rites of passage, and participation in everyday life activities. Following these strategies, the project incorporated multiple Nahua towns.

The descriptions below include the interpersonal interactions I developed with the musicians and ritual specialist, where particular cases are incorporated to illustrate aspects of the social life. An example examining the contested position that musicians occupy as bearers of ritual music from *la costumbre* is presented to illustrate the dynamics between *la costumbre* and the Evangelical church. Furthermore, the section also includes a case that shows division of labor in the household and subsistence in the Nahua towns.

For the analysis I have chosen the chicomexochitl ceremony that marks the beginning of corn and rain cycles over other religious events. Approaching the ceremony through the study of music highlighted experiential aspects more than others. The section ‘the religious experience a complex matter’ therefore illustrates how approaching music served to explore associations of music and emotions and the relevance of this relation to ritual and everyday life.

Documentation: audio, video, and photographs

The techniques employed to collect data included distant and participant observation, field notes, formal and informal interviews, photography and audio and video recordings. I collected fifty hours of interviews with musicians, ritual specialists, and other members of the communities, and video, audio, and photographic documentation of several public and private rituals, rites of passage, and everyday life activities.

I documented several chicomexochitl ceremonies, *tlamana* (ceremony for the sweet corn), rites of passage, the Carnival, and the Day of the Dead, as well as other religious activities of the ‘New-Catholicism’ such as the celebration of the day for the Guadalupe Virgin.³¹ Among the variety of religious events, the chicomexochitl was the most prominent celebration associated with the rain, corn cycles, and the natural landscape. Considering these characteristics, it became the center of the analysis in this dissertation. The location of Ixcacuatitla on the foothill of the Postectli Mountain allowed me to participate in various chicomexochitl ceremonies during two seasons in 2010 and 2011.

³¹ The ‘New-Catholic Church’ is a local distinction that refers to the Catholic Church that arrived in the Nahua towns during the last decades to separate it from the ‘Old-Catholic Church’, which is associated with *la costumbre*. See details of this local distinction in the section on religion in Chapter Two.

Library and archival research and other relevant activities

I conducted archival research primarily at UNAM (the Autonomous National University, Mexico City); CIESAS (Research Center for Higher Education in Social Anthropology) in Mexico City and Xalapa; and the local library located at the head city of municipality in Chicontepec, Veracruz. As a visiting student at CIESAS I also attended seminars offered by anthropologist Francois Lartigue.

Furthermore I spent time in Xalapa city where I learned son Jarocho, a musical genre from Southern Veracruz. Son Jarocho has many similarities with the ritual music of the Nahua towns. These similarities consist of structures such as ostinato rhythmic patterns and repetitive short melodies. My participation in these Son Jarocho gatherings usually ranged from one hour to over six hours in each session. This characteristic of musical engagement provided me with a comparative perspective to consider the performance of music in the ritual of the Nahua towns, where musicians often play for several days in a row.

An interpretative methodology

As with any interpretative reflexive methodology, the main challenge concerns the establishment of a clear line between data and interpretation (Nettl 1994; Rice 2008). In this work, this challenge has been a back-and-forth reflexive process that developed throughout the formulation of the research question, data collection, and interpretation for the later formation of this dissertation. The reflexive process hardly solves the subjective nature of the ethnographic research. Rather it contributes to the validation of the story being told here since it incorporates the ethnographer's experience as an integral part that informs the research. In this the *etic* and the *emic* perspectives are essential, while two aspects of the ethnographer's experience are fundamental, personal interest and learning experiences. These two aspects are addressed below.

Academic inquiry demands a necessary frame to develop the research, in order for the outcome to serve as a contribution. In such an inquiry, the personal interest while conducting fieldwork largely contributes to framing the research. In this work, this frame was a result of understanding the area of study, the fieldwork methodology and techniques, and acquired experience while conducting previous research. However, my motivation behind focusing on the Nahua area was an individual interest in exploring the precepts of a society that maintains a direct interaction with the natural landscape, in which musical practices are some of the expressions that would allow me to explore such interactions. The more I learned about the ways-of-life in these towns while in the field, the more I re-evaluated the research question.

Identifying the scope for the development of this work, therefore, is far from consisting a single step but is rather a process that takes place according to the academic and individual inquiries and the experiences in the field. The process of interpretation, the selection of the ceremony for the analysis, and other description resulting in this dissertation, illustrate some aspects of the religious life of the Nahua towns of Northern Veracruz. It also includes particular characteristics of my experiences while researching on music and religious rituals.

Despite the challenges that subjectivity brings into ethnographic work, the relevance of its contributions are highly valuable. As an ethnographer, the matter of ‘being there’ provides access to the context for understanding social phenomena. This information draws from observation and interaction with the *emic* perspectives in the field, in which descriptions are strategically used to bring into the ethnography the frame used while conducting fieldwork research. Therefore, I provide descriptions of life in the Nahua towns, to highlight local and political organizations, education systems, and daily activities. These descriptions further illustrate gender roles, age gaps, and division of work concerning families and economic income.

Even though my descriptions mainly concern Ixcacuatitla—the town located on the foothill of the Postectli Mountain where I conducted most of the fieldwork research—I also attended other ceremonies and rites of passage in several other towns. These participations allowed me to witness comparative cases of social interaction, uses of the Nahuatl language, and religious and political systems. Therefore, this study developed through time from a site-based research into a multi-sited project. I engaged with religious and secular events in the

following towns: Ixcacuatitla, Tepeco, Tepeica, Alaxtitla and Alaxtitla-Ixcacuatitla, Camotipan, Cuatro Caminos, and Tepecxitla. Moreover, direct quotations from interviews and photographs have been incorporated here to illustrate the context.

The host society's collaboration was essential in the process of learning, and its development throughout the whole period of research, and undoubtedly it represents the greatest contribution to this work. The *emic* perspective and evidence in the collected data has been the base for any interpretations, hence the importance of the series of documentation and the interviews. Furthermore, my individual experience is an integral part of the methodology and represents, on an experiential level, another source of information in the construction of this dissertation.

Data collection in the field developed through a process to establish the scope of formal and informal interviews with key collaborators, and the identification and documentation of the religious ceremonies and rites of passage. The interaction in daily activities was mainly in spaces shared by women, which mostly consisted of kitchens and particularly the water well. In Ixcacuatitla the latter was the space for women's socialization while they washed clothes, bathed their children, and fetched water. Regarding the complexity of the ceremonial life, I documented the ceremonies so to identify the main elements by closely following ritual specialists. Also, I conducted informal interviews in situ, arranged individual visits outside the ceremonial days, and established a more concise relationship with one particular ritual specialist in Tepeco, who I often visited to corroborate my assumptions.

The field

Definition

‘The field’ is the socio-cultural settings delimited by a frame designed to develop the study over a period of time. In this work, the field consists of the Nahua towns where I conducted my research between 2010 and 2011, looking at the relationships between music and religious ceremonies. This dissertation, however, includes only partial instances to demonstrate the main issues explored in this study. Here I present some considerations to show how my personal experiences have shaped data collections and interpretation. Moreover, the individual perspectives of collaborators and their life stories have provided larger perspectives on historical and local relevance. These further contributed to design better strategies in collecting the data. In the section below, the use of first-person and the past tense narrative have been chosen to illustrate my experiences in the field, and interactions with collaborators following a chronological sequence.

Entering the field

To begin with, the natural setting and the incredible views of mountains and water sources represented an excellent introduction to the life in Ixcacuatitla. This Nahua town is located on the slope of the Postectli Mountain, an active ceremonial center for many indigenous groups in the area. The host family with whom I stayed familiarized me with many of the social codes in the towns, to which I gradually adapted. These initial experiences represent some of the most enjoyable moments of wandering around Ixcacuatitla on the

uneven paths that crossed the town up and down the hills. The Postectli Mountain was a magnificent assurance that the fieldwork will be an engaging exploration.

Often ethnographers identify the first experiences while entering the field as enjoyable and engaging. However, the pleasant feeling of a new place soon transforms into more complex periods of adjustment, often accompanied by cultural shock. My case was not different. After a few months of participating in the local activities and familiarizing myself with the surrounding towns, I struggled with the process of adaptation. The constant necessity to understand the local codes and follow leads for the research eventually turned into an overwhelming situation. In such cases, I used to distance myself from the Nahua towns and retreat to more familiar urban centers. Returning to the field, however, was always pleasant and in between struggles and adaptation, I developed relationships that significantly contributed to finding the appropriate path for this study.

Positionality and collaboration

The section below describes some issues I considered while adapting to the life in the Nahua towns. Identifying my position as a student facilitated my personal interactions and provided the context that informed the research as well as to establish a collaborative approach with the host society.

During this study, I consistently maintained a reflexive approach (Babiracki 2008; Rice 2008; Titon 2008). The reflexive model, in fact, was the framework utilized here to identify the means of data collection. In this study, this model has proved effective while positioning myself in the field as a student and a participant. While the process of learning represents a collaborative endeavor with the interlocutors, participation also informs and

enables the process of documentation, observation, and experience (Nketia 1990). In addition to the interaction of *emic* and *etic* perspectives in the process of collecting data, positionality primarily informs the outcome. Every ethnographer is positioned in the field according to gender, age, nationality, or academic background, among other references (Alcoff 1988). As explained above, the active interaction in the field together with personal and academic interests played an integral part in the process of data collection and interpretation. Therefore, acknowledging positionality in the field informs on the context of data collection.

My position as a female ethnomusicologist defined the access to towns and the spaces where I conducted participant observation in daily life activities and religious events. This positionality was established from the onset of the fieldwork period. The Mexican anthropologist Francois Lartigue recommended to me that I visit the Nahuatl town of Chicontepec. I met Francois in the 'Festival de la Huasteca,' one of the annual music festivals that convey many performers of Huastecan *son*; in 2008, the festival took place in Xilitla, San Luis Potosi. Francois has conducted research in Chicontepec and closely worked with a healer from a Nahuatl town in Veracruz. Following Francois' recommendation, I arrived at the town of Ixcacuatitla and lived with a family that has hosted other ethnographers. This instance marked the beginning of a long journey where I not only developed a close professional and friendly relationship with my host family, but also with Francois. Considering the remote location of Ixcacuatitla, living with a host family was a great introduction to the society while allowing me to be in a protected environment.

As a foreigner in a town with a population of little over 600 inhabitants, I was very conspicuous and soon my presence was noticed. Having previously worked with other indigenous communities in Mexico, I informed the local authorities on my research plan and objectives. In this context, my position as a researcher and student eased my acceptance, which mainly resulted from the local familiarity with ethnographic research. With the collaborative approach, I hoped also to benefit the host community. Furthermore, aware of the implication of conducting research with indigenous societies, I distanced myself from perspectives that stressed the ‘otherness’ or ‘exoticism.’ To follow this plan, I was intentionally careful to distance the analysis from connotations that challenged concepts of representation and avoid positioning the study as an authoritative piece that would represent all the Nahuatl towns of Northern Veracruz.

In this work, the separation between ‘self’ and ‘other’ denotes an interaction that reflects on my position as a learner. This approach enabled me to establish a collaborative relationship in personal and group interactions. Therefore, the host community represents a collaborative element of this study. Identifying the differences of my background, however, allowed me to adapt better. To facilitate the process I actively participated in the local life activities, mostly engaging with cooking, washing clothes, taking care of children, and accompanying farmers to their corn fields.

As part of the learning process I took Nahuatl lessons. While I maintained a private tutor in town, I also enrolled in an intensive summer course in 2009 at IDIEZ (The Zacatecas Institute for Teaching and Research in Ethnology) in the town of Zacatecas. Even though I reached a semi-fluent communication level only at the last months of the fieldwork

period, learning Nahuatl allowed me to interview monolingual speakers without the need for a translator. In addition, it enabled me to discuss with ritual specialists Nahuatl terminology that has no equivalent translation in Spanish. An example is the word *tlatlacualtia* (to feed). This term denominates the ceremonies that are offered to the natural landscape, and also implies the concept of 'feeding'. Feeding is in fact present in different religious contexts such as the ceremonies for the natural landscape, rites that mark the corn cycle, as well as private rituals such as the Dead of the Dead. The word *tlatlacualtia* was introduced early on in my research where I often asked for the meaning in Spanish and the answer referred to the ceremony itself. Only after understanding the meaning it became relevant for a comparative analysis that I later used while looking at the relationship of music and emotions within the system of reciprocity.

Gradually my participation in the public and private ceremonies and rites of passage shifted from rarely being invited, to occupying a role in the realization of the gatherings. For example, I became the person entrusted to document the events and provide photographs and audio recordings to musicians and other participants in the congregations. My interactions with some musicians further expanded into other projects, as was the case with the Trio Nuevo Amanecer. This musical ensemble from Tepeco is one of the renowned *trios* among the Nahua towns. With them I recorded and produced compilations of ritual and secular music.

Acknowledging my position as a student in the Nahua towns, the fieldwork season developed as a collaborative endeavor. This position shaped the process in which I was introduced to the town, participated in local activities, and developed into a relationship of

exchange with the collaborators. This reflexive approach, therefore, is an attempt to incorporate both *emic* and *etic* perspectives as a collaborative endeavor of this study, where eventually some mutual interests interplayed.

Interpersonal interactions

This section describes relevant interactions that highlight the historical significance of the chicomexochitl in towns that contain different religious institutions. While practices associated with *la costumbre* (the tradition) are still active, the incursion of other religions often eradicate such practices. Furthermore, the chapter shows how my personal interactions, participation, and mobilization in different towns enabled me to identify different musical practices.

My first interpersonal relationships with collaborators developed out of this initial sense of ‘wonderland’, and I started identifying the main public and private rituals. From the start, many conversations denoted nostalgia for the religious life in the past. I met a female elder ritual specialist to discuss, with the aid of a translator, the relevance of the ceremonial calendar. Referring to the earlier times, the elder talked about the positive aspects of a more unified society that belonged to the same religious belief known as *la costumbre* (the tradition). The arrival of other Christian temples has fragmented the society and made it difficult to work together. She also mentioned that *la costumbre* (the tradition) required different religious commitments, including donation of large amounts of money and commitment to work in ceremonies that included heavy duties. Today’s lifestyle leaves little time for such efforts, suggesting that perhaps no one would spend such amounts of money or time on those practices.

The elder was referring to the religious celebrations that were shaped between the ‘old-Catholicism’ and non-Christian practices known as *la costumbre* (the tradition). In *la costumbre* the rain and corn cycles mark many dates of the public and private religious celebrations, and where mountains and springs are the center for devotion. In the following months I attended a *tlamana* celebrated by the elder (ceremony for the sweet corn), who unfortunately passed away a few weeks later.

The encounter with this elder touches upon important changes in the Nahua society. According to her, in the past the communal religious life was much more homogenous. In contrast, the arrival of the other Christian Churches to town has created a more diverse and fragmented communal life. The elder discussed the celebrations that are part of the religious calendar, of *la costumbre* (the tradition) mostly associated with the corn and rain cycles, which required long days of preparation and the contribution of the whole town. Most of such celebrations have disappeared, while others have remained. The *chicomexochitl* ceremony is one of those celebrations that still remain.

A reflection of the past into the present and the connotations concerning celebrations that marked the rain and corn cycles drew me to explore more in depth these types of ceremonies above others. Among these the *chicomexochitl* represented one of the recurrent public ceremonies used by many in the town of Ixcacuatitla to discuss the public engagements, the centrality of the Postectli Mountain, and the reflection upon the past. Therefore, from the early stages of the fieldwork period, activities, rites and rituals surrounding the rain and corn cycles and the Postectli Mountain became the focus of the study. The events included ceremonies such as the *chicomexochitl*, *atlaltlacualtia* (ceremony

offered for the water sources), *tlamana* (ceremonies for the sweet corn), and other rites associated with the 'seed tradition' (rites that mark the corn cycle).

The *xochicalli* temple is associated with the religious activities of *la costumbre* (the tradition). It has a hierarchical organization that consists of different position elected internally among the congregations engaged in such practices. This organization resembles the *cargo* system, a common characteristic of the religious institutions of indigenous groups institutionalized during the Spanish colonies. I identified the *xochicalli* authorities and conducted individual interviews. Gradually these visits lead me to participate in small private celebrations of the corn cycle that consisted of offerings made for the household altars as well as in the corn field. While I was often included to small events during this period, I was rarely invited to the large public ceremonies.

Considering the active religious activities that surrounded the Postectli Mountain in the stories that I collected, I was already eager to engage in the study of the chicomexochitl ceremonies. Unfortunately, it took rather a while until I started to actively participate. This period of uncertainty reflected on the very nature of the ethnographic fieldwork where plans rarely work as expected. Thus, flexibility and patience were necessary to reach the goals of the project. Some of the strategies to overcome such difficulties included visiting ritual specialists and musicians outside the context of the ceremonies.

Such an example are my visits to Tepeco, a town located in proximity to Ixcacuatitla from where the Postectli Mountain is visible. I went there to visit Juan, a ritual specialist and his family to discuss the elements used in the ceremony and conceptualizations concerning music. These early familiarizations enabled me to identify the strategies used later to

document the complex ceremonies, while conducting distant and participant observations. Since this ritual specialist was also an active healer, he further elaborated on the correlations between ritual and healing systems. According to him, the commonalities include the centrality of mountains, the pantheon of deities, corn grains for divination, and cleansing rites. In this context, the ritual music named *xochitl sones* is used equally in many celebrations of the religious calendar and healing rituals. The ensemble consist of a trio including violin, *jarana* (small guitar), and *huapanguera* (large guitar). It is imperative for the ritual specialist to choose the musicians for the work they conduct. Often the violinist and the ritual specialist are in constant interaction during the healing procedures, rites, and ceremonies.

In Tepeco, I also met with Luis, a violinist that worked with the above mentioned ritual specialist. The interactions with the violinist allowed me to explore the shifting aspects of the religious musical traditions, and the role that the Evangelical Church played in shaping such practices (See Ruskin (2012) for his study on individual musicians). Luis and his father were known in various towns around the area as talented musicians and knowledgeable about the style and the role of music in the ceremonial settings of *la costumbre*. After becoming members of the Evangelical Church with their families, however, the violin player and his father distanced their performances from any associations with non-Evangelical practices. While his father stopped the practice of the violin altogether, Luis returned to play after several years. Assuring the Evangelical Church that his playing merely represents an additional source of income, he was able to participate in ceremonies associated with *la costumbre* (the tradition) and secular contexts without significant conflict.

Similarly, the contemporary Catholic Church distant itself from *la costumbre*. This Church is recognized in the towns as ‘New-Catholic Church’ to differentiate from the other that arrived earlier during the colonial period and it is associated with *la costumbre*. The ‘New-Catholic Church’ rejects any member associated with *la costumbre* (the tradition) by not providing them with services such as baptism or rejecting their participation in public celebrations. Since *la costumbre* religion is open to other Christian practices, many also follow the contemporary Catholic precepts. When needed, however, they travel to the head city of the municipality to get baptized or for other services. With all these challenges, *la costumbre* (the tradition) is still an active religion within a very diverse environment.

The case of Luis and his father represent an example that illustrates how bearers of the ritual music challenged the Evangelical Church’s attempts to eradicate associations with *la costumbre* (the tradition). Considering the relevance of ritual music to ceremonies associated with *la costumbre* and the healing system, their families and the Evangelical Church strongly reacted against their musical practices. This case, therefore, illustrates that being bearers of ritual music not only responds to personal aspirations of playing music, but also conveys responsibilities of social significance. While rituals of *la costumbre* are still relevant for the corn cycle, the incursion of other religions drastically shaped the ritual practices.

I maintained my visits to Tepeco and interactions with the ritual specialist and violin player during my entire stay in Chicontepepec. Both have provided substantial contributions to this work while I was inquiring about the relationships between music and the *chicomexochitl* ceremonies. Moreover, their perspectives and life stories have been invaluable to the understanding of interlocking relationships between *la costumbre* events and

healing practices, and the role of the Evangelical Church in shaping local practices of religious music. While I visited the houses of other musicians in Tepeco, a close friendship developed with this particular violin player who eventually became a major interlocutor on issues concerning secular and religious music. We together produced music compilations with his trio *Nuevo Amanecer*, recording a selection of ritual music and Huastecan *sones* (the popular music of the Huasteca).

Gradually, I received more invitations from various towns to participate in religious ceremonies, rites of passage, and other public and private events. While attending, I identified players and ritual specialists and observed aspects that determined their mobilization, responding to the demands and their level of professionalization. Attending in such events also informed me of the variety of existing musical ensembles and repertoires in the area. For example, in some public rituals brass bands and vocal music play a role. However, the Huastecan trio— composed of a violin, *jarana* (small guitar), and *huapanguera* (large guitar) —is the most common ensemble utilized in most of the religious and secular settings, rites of passage, and other private and public events. Each context possesses a particular repertoire, and trio players are required to identify this diversity. Additionally, most trio musicians also play Huastecan *son*, the popular music genre in the area, in *tianguis* (mobile markets) and local bars to collect money for their performances. My interactions with these players in these various contexts further informed me of the repertoires that are still practiced in the area and the relevance of the context for the performances of ceremonial music. For example, musicians familiar with ritual music never play such a repertoire in inappropriate settings such as bars.

Participating in different celebrations throughout the annual religious calendar enabled me to observe the particularities of local life in the Nahua towns. In the household, for example, the roles of women and men are separated to maintain a balanced subsistence. The example below describes the difficulties that women overcome when there are no men in the house to respond for the duties and hard work required to maintain the production of corn. I encountered this case while attending to a *tlamana* (celebration for the sweet corn). To contextualize the case, below is a description of the ritual as well.

The *tlamana* ritual is a celebration for the sweet corn. It commemorates the harvest of a small portion of the field while most of the corn is left to mature. Large congregations attend to celebrate and perform the *tlamana* ritual as a petition for rain. The ceremony takes place in public and private settings and comprises of a complex sequence of events, starting the night before the celebration and finishes when all the members share the sweet corn used during the ceremony at the sunset of the following day. Two personifications of the sweet corn, a boy and a girl, are at the center and around which all events revolve. This personification celebrates a stage in the life of the Chicomechitl deity (the corn deity). Marigold flowers, yellow candles, corn leaves, and palm arrangements decorate all three altars. The main altar contains images and figures of Saints, Jesus, and Mary as well as the representation of the sweet corn of four cobs. The altar also contains food offerings such as bread, carbonated drinks, cigarettes, and chocolate, which are also spread around on the other altars. At the center of the room, the sweet corn is piled shaping a circular structure.

A woman in her sixties was the host for a *tlamana* ritual that I attended. Since her husband has abandoned her, this woman lived alone with her daughter. Since women are

considered weak to work in the corn fields, men always carry the demands of this work. This woman and her daughter managed to maintain the household economy based on ranching chickens and pork. However, without a man in the house they lived in poor conditions and were unable to produce corn. Many arrived for the celebration of the *tlamana* (celebration for the sweet corn offered for the Chicomexochitl deity) they hosted, and the congregations consisted of neighbors and family members. As tradition demands, the host needs to provide corn for the congregation. Since this woman produced no corn, a family member provided for her the required amount to supply to all participants.

The example above shows that maize subsistence and ritual are interconnected. The separation of gender roles is also illustrated in the duality of the Chicomexochitl deity who is both a boy and a girl. A common myth found in these Nahua towns, in fact, concern a story of this deity who as boy works in the fields, while the girl stays at home. Chapter Six includes a transcriptions of this myth. In the context of the Nahua towns the corn field is central for the subsistence where the division of labor between the house and the corn field are well marked. While women take care of all what concerns the house such as children's care, cleaning, washing clothes, and cooking; men cultivate the corn field. The example of these two women shows how in this system, without a man, they are left to confront hard situations to manage their subsistence. Similarly, I encountered men who after becoming widowers, were unable to cook and wonder around to find other houses expecting that a woman neighbor or family member will eventually provide them with food.

To conclude this section, the different ceremonies provided a broad appreciation of different characteristics and changes that the Nahua towns face in the interaction between the different Christian Churches and *la costumbre* (the tradition). The oldest religion *la costumbre* has become fragmented and gradually replaced by others. In the context of these changes, musicians of ritual music are the examples of drastic approaches that the Evangelical Church undertook to establish their practices. Furthermore, the individual encounters provided an overview of the dynamics of the household and the relevance of the separation of gender roles to support the subsistence in the towns.

The religious experience, a complex matter

This event took place in one of the chicomexochitl ceremonies I attended:

We stopped at the foothills of the mountain where the first altar was located, and after finishing the offerings we were waiting to continue our journey up to the mountain's summit. I sat on a rock exhausted and peered occasionally into the crowd for a hint to suggest that the ceremony would continue. While resting, I became aware of an elder playing a melody on a violin. The melody broke into other noises, and his performance moved me to tears. Many of the participants were sitting listening to the music while we waited for the ceremony to continue, and some of the people commented about the beauty of the music. Unable to interact with the elder, I joined the group of worshipers continuing the ceremony and our pilgrimage up to the mountain's summit.

The above description illustrates a self-reflexive moment where the attention to a meaningful event comes from listening (Rice 2008). In fact, self-reflection has been a common theme in the development of my fieldwork.

Here is a note that illustrates this feeling from an entry in my fieldwork diary dating to May 22, 2010:

Fieldwork sometimes becomes a self-reflection of oneself existence. The self-examination happens in the process of being exposed to the social code. I feel very much examined from inside out. My dress code has become an issue, and I never approach my dress in the field as an indicative of myself. I prefer to be unnoticed. However, I am constantly being criticized for what I am wearing, my shoes, things that they are not used to see. I came with one pair of pants, thinking of buying clothes around. However, my pants became an issue, and I need to go shopping.

This field note entry denotes the result of a situation where the observer is being observed (Cooley 2008). It also implies a level of interpersonal relationships and the process of adaptation where the dress codes are important aspects in the public interactions. The ethnographer, in this case, adapts to the local codes in the field to better interact in the society. The reflexive process has been also part of the development of the methodology to study ritual music in the context of the ceremonies. In the self-reflexive process, positioning myself as a student enabled me to develop a collaborative approach and further to consider how my experience also informs the research outcome.

Timothy J. Cooley and Gregory Barz write: “The often ambiguous quality of musical meaning invites ethnomusicologists into a dialogue of multiple realities, a dialogue shared by social scientists endeavoring to understand other aspects of cultural practices.” (Cooley 2008: 3). These words illustrates how approaching religious rituals through the study of music can highlight certain aspects of the ceremony over others. Among these are the conceptualizations concerning emotions, explored in Chapters Five, Six and, Seven, and the

tangible and intangible characteristics of the natural landscape, explored in Chapter Four. The description below illustrates the main points in the development of the research, which include the process of moving towards an experiential model. This shift resulted in approaching the rituals through the study of music. Thus, looking at the relationship between music and religious rituals highlighted the value attributed to emotional performances and integrated the concept of reciprocity.

Approaching the ceremony through the study of music

I particularly chose the chicomexochitl as the center for the analysis considering the associations with the natural landscape, rain, and the corn cycles. This exploration further incorporated the local life into the representations of emotions and reciprocity. In the experiential level, in fact, emotions constituted the most recurrent associations with music, actively interrelated with local conceptualization about interaction of the seen and unseen reality (Nettl 1994; Titon 1996, 2008).

The complexity of the chicomexochitl ceremony conveys multiple levels of information of local beliefs deeply rooted in the pre-Columbian religion. Since the music was the central inquiry in my approach, the elements that resulted were mainly concerned with the experiential qualities of the celebration. Following multiple ceremonies, therefore, enabled me to identify a recurrent association of emotions and music. Such correlation further unfolded the value attributed to emotions in everyday life and associations of ritual and healing systems. In this context of the ceremony, the congregations present emotions as offerings in exchange for rain. Therefore, the associations of music and emotions became the center to explore how congregations actively use music to convey emotions (this

correlation is further explored in Chapter Seven). The approach further unraveled the interactions among the congregations and the natural landscape.

Initially, the prominence of symbols and the active engagement with musical performances, and especially with dancing, suggested that music is as a central element in a symbolic system as a mechanism for social integration. However, as soon as I was able to explore the ceremonies in depth, one of the most pronounced characteristics was that symbols had multiple meanings but represented no impediment for the audiences to engage. Below are some considerations that illustrate the integrative aspects of the ceremonial experience.

At the aesthetic level, the *chicomexochitl* ceremonies carried a vast number of elements that represented a wide context for the Nahua congregations to interact (Geertz 1973a, 1973b, 1975; Ortner 1989; Turino 1993, 2008; Turner 1967, 1977). In his symbolic analysis, Thomas Turino (2008) argues that the qualities of form in ‘participatory music’, such as open-ended structures and ostinato rhythmic patterns, enable synchronization in the performances. This synchronization creates a sense of belonging among groups actively engaged in music-making, and where “participatory music-dance is such a strong force for social bonding” (2008: 29). Such concept is particularly applicable to the performances of Nahua ritual music, where open-ended structures, ostinato melodic and rhythmic patterns, are active integrative characteristics. Therefore, the performance “becomes a *dicent index*—a direct effect of social unity and belonging” (Turino 2008: 44).

The *chicomexochitl* contains multiple integrative elements. As a major event associated with the agricultural calendar, participation in the ceremony and performance of

music take place among insiders without contesting identity values with other social groups. In this context music is a strong medium that enables participation in an already well-integrated environment. While the symbolic approach corroborates social integration, in the system of beliefs in *la costumbre* emotions have a specific values. In fact, emotions are active elements in the dynamics of the ceremony. The values attributed to emotions are explained below.

About the local values assigned to emotions

Regarding emotions, the ritual specialist in Tepeco pointed out that aspects of the ritual are parallel to the local healing system. For example, the cleansing rites are performed for multiple uses such as healing, foreseeing and removing afflictions resulted from emotions such as jealousy or anger. The context for the cleansing rites varies, and in the *chicomexochitl* the rite is performed the night before the pilgrimage to the mountain summit. Thus, the congregations undertake a cleansing rite to remove, among other things, unwanted emotions.

The contrasting aspects attributed to emotions, where some are accepted in the performance while others are ‘removed’ prior to the ceremony, suggest a system that parallels the ritual life and the healing practices. It was rather difficult to explore on the complexities of such system, but it is worth to consider that there is a value attributed to the performance of emotions in the context of ritual and healing practices. With this value, music is believed to articulate some joy and sadness. Often expressions such as “music makes me cry” or “music makes me happy” reflected on the associations of music and

emotions. In this context, it is believed that tears bring the rain. For the association with the rain, musicians are highly prized for their abilities in emotionally moving the congregations. Therefore, emotions such as joy and sadness in the context of the ceremony are a public display, which function is attributed to bringing the rain.

Offerings and communal life

Reciprocity shapes social bonds (Mauss 1950). In the context of the Nahuatl towns, the reciprocal system is deeply rooted in communal work that enables people to divide labor into group cooperation. This type of organization is common in most forms of local indigenous governance in Mexico known today as *usos y costumbres* (roughly translated to ‘uses and customs’). In the rural settings that lack infrastructure for contractors, the community cooperates in the constructions of roads and houses, as well as plowing and harvesting the corn fields. Also, the reciprocal principle is present in celebrations such as rites of passage and many others that require a large amount of work. The system of cooperation is essential for the life in these towns.

The concept of communal reciprocity is present in the *chicomexochitl* ceremony as the community’s effort to exchange offerings for rain, well-being, and other goods. During the exchange, all participants are required to contribute as a principle of communal work. Following the reciprocity principle, the value attributed to emotions and their associations with music enable me to explore the interactions among congregations and the natural landscape.

The following chapters explore ritual music in the context of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony. Chapter Four describes the interactions of the congregations with the natural

landscape; Chapter Five contains a full description of the ceremony; Chapter Six includes an analysis of music in *la costumbre*; while Chapter Seven examines the dynamics of social participation and emotional engagement.

CHAPTER 4

Music and the Sacred Geography

Introduction

I often entered the Nahua towns of Chicontepec from the south side in a bus that departed from the city of Alamo at five in the morning. The route's final destination was the town of Ixcacuatitla. Alamo is an urban center that grew out of people migrating to the area as the oil companies' labor-force. As soon as the bus left the urban area, the landscape started to change from irregular neighborhoods lacking clear urban planning to greener sceneries of ranches and cornfields. The route went over the hills crossing small Nahua settlements visible from the road, and after an hour and a half the bus passed orange tree plantations, which in the spring filled the air with blossom scent. When arriving in Ixcacuatitla, I would pleasantly contemplate the valley that extends far below and deep into the horizon, where the sunlight of the early morning bathed the mountains creating a contrast with the green landscape. Getting off the bus, the clean fresh air of the early morning splashed my face while people welcomed me as I followed the rocky trail into the town accompanied by dogs that barked at me.

I arrived in the town of Ixcacuatitla in the municipality of Chicontepec in 2010, interested in the Nahua ritual music performed in ceremonies offered to the natural landscape. Ixcacuatitla is a small Nahua town located on the foothills of the Postectli Mountain. The houses are organized following two main unpaved roads as well as small walking trails that run through the settlement. A well is located in the center of the town,

where it is common to see women washing clothes and balancing on their heads buckets while carrying water. Although local transportation includes personal cars, pickups that carry passengers between towns, and passing commercial trucks, most of the people walk or use horses.³² As explained in Chapter Two, the ritual calendar in the Nahuatl towns is filled with public and private rituals including commemoration of saint's days, the Carnival, and the Day of the Dead. Among these celebrations, an active engagement exists with rain ceremonies offered to the natural landscape, which generally take place during the dry season. In fact, the natural landscape plays an important role in the ritual life, where the Postectli Mountain is a ceremonial center. Several indigenous groups from northern Veracruz such as the Nahuatl, Otomi, and Tepehua, perform ceremonies dedicated to mountains, springs, and caves to secure enough rain for crops and cattle as well as protection and other individual needs. Among the Nahuatl towns these ceremonies are known as *tlatlacualtia* (to feed), where chicomexochitl is offered to mountains and *atlatlacualtia* (water-to-feed) is for the water sources. While the former takes place between April and May, the latter varies from town to town. The concept behind the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies resides in the idea that by meeting with powerful deities and mountains, laying down numerous offerings, and feeding them, these powerful entities will bring enough rain and take care of the communities' wellbeing. During the ceremony, the congregations of believers share long days dancing to the rhythm of the sacred music, burning *copal*—an aromatic tree resin, sacrificing birds, and praying under the ritual specialist's leading voice.

³² It is more common in the towns for men to ride horses rather than women. For more details on the town of Ixcacuatitla see Chapter Two.

Music is a structural part of the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies. The ritual music *xochitl sones* (flower-musical pieces) or *sones de costumbre* (musical pieces of the tradition), are over one hundred musical pieces organized according to, and named after, the stages or events that take place in the celebrations. The melodies are performed on the violin and accompanied rhythmically by the *jarana* and *huapanguera* (Figure 6). There are no lyrics.



Figure 6. Musicians from the town of Camotipan: violin (left), *jarana* (center), and *huapanguera* (right). Chicomexochitl ceremony. Cuatro Caminos, Abril 2011.

As an ethnomusicologist, musical performances are central events for my inquiries. This structural homology and the way that the performances of the congregation take place in the ceremony unfolded several local concepts of what constitutes the interaction with the natural and mythical landscape, where emotions have certain values.

John Blacking was interested in understanding the structures that govern the production, transmission, and reception of musical traditions within a social group. According to Blacking “sonic order” is perceived because of the presence of cognitive

structures, suggesting that the patterns of organization in music reflect the social organization (Blacking 1973). In the case presented here, the “sonic order” reflects in the structural homology between the order of the musical pieces and the structural events of the ceremony. By considering structural parallels, I was able to examine the role of music in enabling participation and follow the structure of emotional states in the ceremony. Even though this hardly represents a homology between social and musical system, it is worth considering some presence of the structural homology that reflects Blacking’s inquiries. The presence of musical pieces structured according to the events of the ceremonies informed me about the relevance of emotional states as means of participation in the ritual. This performance reflects the attempt of the congregation to achieve a successful ceremony which further would enable the interaction with the natural landscape and bring the rain.³³

The conceptualizations about music, however, go beyond the structure of the rituals since the music is not only a vital constituent of the ceremonies but also carries some common qualities. Many musicians refer to the ritual music as one of the channels that allows communication with mountains and other deities, and which carries the forces that are activated during the ceremonies. On many occasions, musicians of ritualistic music explained that sacred music must be treated carefully. When musicians acquire the sacred repertoire, they have to be aware of the music’s power. Therefore, it is forbidden to play *xochitl sones* in contexts such as *cantinas* (local bars). *Xochitl sones* are the sonic expression embedded within Nahua conceptualizations about the places they inhabit, together with

³³ Chapter Five contains a detailed description of a *chicomexochitl* ceremony including transcriptions of six *xochitl sones*; while Chapter Six contains a list with names of 30 *sones*.

mountains, rivers, springs, caves, deities, the living, and the dead. Approaching music within the religious rituals led me to explore the natural landscape not only as the tangible reality, but also to scrutinize conceptualizations of the existence of intangible worlds and the interaction of the living and the dead. By approaching musical performances in the *tlatlacuallia* ceremonies, therefore, this chapter sheds light on the intricate relationship the Nahua society have developed coexisting in communion with the natural landscape. This interaction is a particular characteristic of the Nahua towns. To highlight this particularity, a comparative example is presented below with the Huastecan *son*, the main popular genre in the area that often contains in its lyrics descriptions of the landscape that elucidate a relationship that the local people have with the beauty of the lowlands, mountains, and rivers.

Music and landscape in the tlatlacuallia rituals

The natural landscape among the Nahua constitutes mountains, caves, rivers and springs. It also represents living entities where deities reside such as the wind, thunders, and lightings. This coexistence is what I denominate as tangible and intangible realities, and it seems that the forces of the different entities are intertwined with the life of the Nahua towns. In the *tlatlacuallia* ceremonies it is often expected that mountains and springs will reciprocate by providing enough rain for crops and cattle and watching over the wellbeing of the community at large. In exchange, the Nahua towns celebrate the *tlatlacuallia* and commit to placing the required offerings (*tlatlalia tlaixpan*). Figure 7 illustrates the food offerings given to the water.



Figure 7. Offering to the water. Chicomexochitl Ceremony. Ixcacuatitla, Feb. 2011.

The commitment of giving offerings represents a balanced agreement between the congregations and the landscape. In this context, some of the musicians refer to the ritualistic music as one of the channels that bridge these two realities, while others believe that ritual music carries forces that are activated during the ceremonies offered to the natural landscape.

The type of interaction with the natural landscape that unfolds out of exploring Nahua ritual music is particular to the Nahua societies of Northern Veracruz. Before entering into further details, however, a contrasting illustration of the information that music can provide about the landscape is presented with examples of Huastecan *son*. This musical genre is a representative of Mexican regional music, which often illustrates the socio-cultural

diversity of the region and its local geography. Huastecan *son* is popular not only in northern Veracruz but also in southern Tamaulipas, and the states of San Luis Potosi, eastern Hidalgo, and some parts of Querétaro and Puebla. This comparison is included to highlight that in the context of the Huasteca area with the prominence of the Huastecan *son*, Nahuatl ritual music still maintains its particular characteristics in relationship to the mythical landscape.

In the Huasteca region, large festivals of *huapango* (dancing gatherings) often take place around the performances of Huastecan *son* including dancing, poetry, and food. The level of music proficiency in the festivals is high, and in order to participate a group of judges usually selects the musicians according to their talents and experience. In Chicontepec and nearby municipalities such as Colatlan, Benito Juárez, or Ixhuatlán de Madero, *huapango* festivals are prominent. Colatlan holds a festival every December that draws large crowds, for which big hotels have been constructed to accommodate the visitors—a very unusual feature for an area with small towns. To further support local talents and fulfill the performance requirements, the capital cities of the municipalities created spaces to instruct younger musicians, where renowned performers are hired to teach for periods of time. As a folk musical genre, the large repertoire is learned by ear and generally lacks authorship.³⁴

³⁴ Even though most of the traditional repertoire lacks authorship, there are renowned composers of Huastecan *son* such as Elpidio Ramírez.

Common themes in the lyrics include love stories, beautiful women and men suffering from their lover's rejections, life in the region, and the landscape. Descriptions of the latter reflect the contrast with mountains and lowlands crossed by rivers, or references to the seashore and the sea, which characterize the landscape. The verses below illustrate some examples:

Huasteca veracruzana que se arrulla con el mar
que canta por sus montañas y se duerme en el palmar
enlazan toros ladinos corriendo por el breñal
mientras lloran los violines huapanguiendo en el corral.
(Las Tres Huastecas by Los Camperos de Valles, 2010)

Huasteca of Veracruz that the sea lulls it to sleep
it sings on top of mountains and it sleeps on the palms
where people lasso ladino bulls that run on the fields
while violins are crying while dancing in the corral.
(My translation)

Huasteca por tus encantos me he llenado de emoción
al escuchar tus huapangos lo mejor de tu región
es lindo tu amanecer, olor a caña y café
y el beso de la mujer es como probar la miel.
Hay Huasteca linda, eres dichosa
por tus huapangos y tus mujeres hermosas.

Cuando amanece tu cielo se escuchan los manantiales
por las noches yo te quiero por esos bellos cantares.
Mi huasteca es la Hidalguense la que México reclama,
Tamaulipas se convence, también la veracruzana.
Hay huasteca linda, eres dichosa
por tus huapangos y tus mujeres hermosas.
(Alma Huasteca by Trio Armonia Huasteca, 2009).

Charming Huasteca, I am full of emotion
while I listen to the *huapango* music, the best of the region
your beautiful sunrise smells of sugarcane and coffee
and the kiss of a woman is like tasting honey.
Oh, beautiful Huasteca, you are blessed
for your *huapango* music and your beautiful women.

In the sunrise the springs are heard
during the nights I love you for the nice songs.
My Huasteca is from Hidalgo, the one that Mexico claims,
Tamaulipas accepts it, same as Veracruz
Oh, beautiful Huasteca, you are blessed
for your *huapango* music and your beautiful women.
(my translation).

The above verses illustrate some of the features of the natural landscape including the sea, springs, and mountains. These features are interspaced with images of *huapangos*, beautiful women, and references to sensorial experiences such as the smell of sugar cane and coffee. These depictions undoubtedly reflect the Huasteca, for anyone that has visited the region such characteristics create highly rewarding experiences.

Several similarities exist in the Huastecan *son* of the different states where it is popular but, in fact, the musical genre is far from being homogenous. Between the states, the same repertoire might differ in accentuation, rhythmic patterns, melodic lines and verses. In many cases some *sones* pertain only to specific areas and it is common to find local performers who compose new *sones*. There are many secular and religious contexts for this music. Although other popular music has been introduced by radio, the Huastecan *son* remains the main popular music genre in Chicontepepec. Even though the Huastecan *son* is prominent in the area and influences the local musical genres, the Nahuatl ritual music still maintains its particularities. Thus, while in the case of the Nahuatl rain ceremonies music is one of the channels of communication between the tangible and intangible realities, the lyrics of the Huastecan *son* portray the contrasting landscape of the Huasteca region. This comparative

case, therefore, highlights the particularities of the relationships of music and landscape in the context of rain ceremonies in the Nahua towns that are explored below.

In the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies, the religious repertoire known as *xochitl sones* are arranged so each piece describes the events that play a role in the ritual. The majority of the *sones*, in fact, are named after these events, where the musicians and ritual specialist work together to coordinate the time and identify the corresponding piece. In some cases the ritual specialist hums the melody to the musicians. Almost like a play, many dramatic moments of intense emotions take place. When I approached musicians to discuss the nature of music and its role in the rituals, many of their explanations pointed to the power of mountains, the Mermaid (the water goddess), and other deities whose forces interact with the life in this area. Thus, *xochitl sones* are an active part of the ritual that also share the qualities of these powerful forces, a characteristic that makes this music particularly relevant to the context of the ceremonies. Figure 8 illustrates of how music is named according to the events that take place in the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies.



Figure 8. A ritual specialist arranging the cut-paper images. Cuatro Caminos, 2011. Chicomexochitl Ceremony. Photo by author.

Name of the *xochitl son*: *Quintecpanab Tlatecmeh* ('when the cut-paper images are arranged')

At the *chicomexochitl* ceremony in Cuatro Caminos, the ritual specialist arranged the cut-paper images to place them on one of the altars. The musicians at this point played the *son* named '*Quintecpanab tlatecmeh*' ('when the cut-paper images are arranged'). This arrangement of the musical pieces contributes to engage the congregation in participation that includes dancing and the performance of emotions. The relevance of performing together responds to a principle of communal reciprocity, which is a basic norm of social interaction in the Nahua towns. It is a common belief that the right interaction within the congregation further enables the communication with the natural landscape to bring the rain.

Active interaction with the natural landscape is a common characteristic for many indigenous groups, where the natural geography constitutes an integral part of their social life. In such interactions, musical expressions are some of the access points researchers can

use to explore some of the relationships indigenous people have developed with the landscape. For example, Steven Feld observes the contribution of the sonic environment to the formation of music and language among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea. For the Kaluli, Feld argues, the forest and natural ecology constitute the “cultural system” (Feld 1982: 44). Moreover, some studies emphasize the importance of the geography for the construction and maintenance of the social group’s identity (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004; Gummow 1995). Dunbar-Hall and Gibson (2004) approach musical expressions to explore concepts of identity among the Australian aborigines, where reconstructions of the meaning of “aboriginality” are examined from colonial definitions and contemporary relevance. The significance of place constitutes a strong determinant for aboriginal identity and musical expressions illustrate this relationship. For the Nahua, who are still fully dependent on the natural resources, the natural landscape not only represents the social space they share together but also a mythical place to encounter the intangible reality of powerful forces.

The social and mythical landscape

The representation of mountains and springs as two of the main deities and centers of devotion highlights the centrality of the natural landscape in the Nahuas' imagery. This further suggests a relationship the Nahuas have developed with the natural landscape as the result of their communion with it throughout time. The relationship does not necessarily represent a conscious attempt to protect the natural resources *per se*, but it rather signifies how the right interaction contributes to their subsistence as a social group. This landscape represents the social spaces as well as mythical realities where powerful entities reside. Even though there are many elements that constitute the natural landscape, in what follows I examine these two main representations of the natural landscape in the context of the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies, some mythical stories about mountains and water resources, and some accounts about the shared social space. This will further aid to consider elements present in the conceptualization of the landscape, which are also part of the musical repertoire that is performed during the celebration of *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies.

The centrality of water sources and mountains in the religious life of *la costumbre* is associated with the word for town in Nahuatl-- *altepetl*, an agglutinative compounded of *atl* (water) and *tepetl* (mountain). This association between the name for town and the landscape might reflect the original intentions for the location of settlements in the first place: on mountaintops or foothills and close to water sources. *Altepetl* further denotes pre-Columbian cosmological connotations as the hollowed mountain that contains water as a source of life (López Austin 1973). In Central Mexico during the colonial period, the word *altepetl* implied that the *macehuales* (indigenous population) had jurisdiction over the land. This possession

was effective as long as they presented tribute to the Spaniards, who had assigned the land to the natives (Gibson 1964; Lockhart 1991). Today, this terminology describes precisely the Nahuatl settlements in Chicontepec, where a town is commonly located in the foothills and contains one or several springs. The section below explores some of the conceptualizations concerning mountains and water sources, and further meanings attributed to the power of the mythical landscape and the interaction that the congregations have developed with it through time.

Mountains

Among the Nahua towns of Chicontepec, mountains are perceived as powerful entities commonly associated with cabinets and governmental institutions. With an elevation of about 2,168 feet, the Postectli Mountain is the highest in the area, and is considered as the governor or the president by many settlements. Many Nahua, Otomi, and Totonac communities recognize in their rituals the power of the mountains (Galinier 2004; Ichon 1973; Sandstrom 1991). Ritualistic ceremonies for mountains are present in many public and individual settings. During the dry season between April and May the *chicomexochitl* takes place. This ceremony is a public ritual celebrated for the corn deity of the same name, which is represented by seven or eight cut-paper images of different colors and four corn cobs. The cut-paper images, which are the integral part of the deity, represent seeds of different corn types (white, blue, yellow), as well as other plants such as beans, *chile*, or gourd.³⁵ Similar to

³⁵ The number varies between seven and eight, which are represented with different colors. Some of the explanations pointed to either the corn types, specific seeds such as beans, *chile* or gourd or all the plants that are edible. For detailed information about the seeds, see Chapter Two.

most deities represented by the cut-paper images, the Chicomexochitl deity is also conceptualized as both female and male. Many of the references of this deity correspond to the image of two children, a boy and a girl, and the deity is also identified as the seeds deity. The chicomexochitl ceremony is offered to mountains with the common belief that these will provide with rain and wellbeing. Figure 9 illustrates the offerings presented to the mountain in the last stage of the celebration when on its summit the congregation raises a pole called *Cuayagually* (crown). This pole is offered to the sun, and it contains many offerings among which, are a number of baby chickens left to die hanging up-side-down.



Figure 9. Congregation setting the Crown on top of the Postectli Mountain. Chicomexochitl Ceremony offered by the town of Limon. Postectli Mountain, June 2011. Photo by the author.

Since the *chicomexochitl* celebration takes place at the end of the dry season, when most of the people prepare the lands for sowing, it reveals the relevance of mountains to the rain cycle and its direct influence on the agricultural cycle. These associations are already present in the Aztec ritual. In her studies of the Aztec religion, Johanna Broda (2004) has pointed out that Aztec celebrations were offered during the dry season, hoping that the *tlalocan* watery realm will eventually release the water that mountains retain during the dry season. Children were sacrificed to mountains in the belief that their death inside the mountain and the water of the *tlalocan* will germinate the corn. The sacrificed children thus returned during the successful harvest. These practices, according to Broda, are still present among the indigenous groups in Mexico, as an evidence of a historical continuity in which different children deities allude to the children sacrifices (Broda 2004). For the Nahuatl congregations, the image of the *Chicomexochitl* deity is also represented as a dual female/male child. However, there is no equivalent contemporary concept of sacrificing the *Chicomexochitl* to the mountain, but it is rather the seeds that are represented with cut-paper images and cobs that are taken to the mountain and returned to the *xochicalli*. Instead, different birds are sacrificed and their blood offered to deities, mountains, and spring; and finally, the mountain is the entity that will provide water if the ritual was well received.

In Chicontepepec, mountains are also considered as entities that have the knowledge and power to consecrate celebrants. Ritual specialists and *tepahtibquemeh* (local healers) often consider mountains as wise entities that deliver very old knowledge about the powerful forces that interact with the life of the communities. Often, the celebrants perform a ceremony and ask permission from the mountain to undertake their duties. In this, both

ritual specialists and healers will acquire the special and personal ‘pair of scissor’ that will give shape to the cut-paper images used in rituals. Similarly, when ritual musicians have acquired the repertoire of ritual music and are ready to perform in the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies, they offer a ceremony to a mountain. This further serves as a premise of good behavior that the celebrants among ritual specialists, *tepahtibquemeh*, and musicians must undertake, considering that the knowledge they all possess is a given talent. Each person that has this knowledge is required to use it to benefit others, which also entails providing relief in case of suffering. Within these conceptualizations, *xochitl sones* share the powerful forces that pertain to this kind of knowledge and are particularly activated during the rituals.

An archaeological site located on the southeastern side of the Postectli suggests that the ceremonial activities around this mountain are not new (on the left side in Figure 10). Additionally, in 2010 I visited the Cacahuatenco Plateau with a group of scholars from the UVI (Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural). Cacahuatenco is one of the largest archaeological sites in the area and apparently contemporary to the Teayo Castle, another prominent site that had many cultural occupations among the latest being Toltec and Mexica (Besso-Oberto 1992). While standing above the largest pyramid at Cacahuatenco, one archaeologist pointed out the alignment of one of the main roads to the Postectli Mountain, which is clearly visible from the site; this further suggests that the relevance of this mountain to the ritual life of the area is not new. With the exception of Teayo Castle, however, no further academic studies were conducted on these archaeological sites (García Hernández and Sánchez 2000).



Figure 10. The Postectli Mountain and the town of Ixcacuatitla, 2010. Photo by the author.

Most of the inhabitants of the Nahuatl towns in Chicontepec consider mountains as powerful entities that protect them on individual basis, and therefore treat them with respect. Maria Pascuala, a Nahuatl monolingual and one of the eldest persons in Ixcacuatitla, was the owner of the house where I rented a room for few months. Commonly visited by her sons and daughters, she lived only with a young woman who took care after her, cooked, and cleaned the house. Maria had a very strong belief in the power of mountains and often expressed her respect. On one occasion when friends came to visit me in the house, we wanted to hike up the Postectli Mountain (Figure 10). Eventually, Maria approached me and whispered that the mountain dislikes visitors climbing without the appropriate ceremony. “It is dangerous,” she insisted. Following her will, I decided not to climb. In every religion sacred places are respectfully guarded and for Maria, this was no different. She always referred to the Postectli Mountain as a powerful entity that protects but also admonishes misbehavior.

The meaning of the word *postectli* in the local Nahuatl derives from the passive voice of *postequi*, which means to brake or to carve. Standing on the highest point at the town of Ixcacuatitla, it is possible to observe scattered hills of different heights throughout the valley, among which the Postectli is indeed the highest. Many folktales describe the Postectli as the main mountain from which the others have formed. There is a common story that illustrates how God broke the Postectli and scattered the pieces throughout the valley. Ana, an elder from the town of Tepecxitla told the story as follows:

Before breaking down, the Postectli was extremely high and reached the sky. A Nahua man named Pedro mischievously climbed up the mountain and, reaching the top over the sky, he found candles. These candles were the souls of the people and when they were consumed by the fire, their life came to an end. By replacing the candles, Pedro realized that no one would die. Therefore, when a candle was about to burn out, he replaced the candle with a new one to save his family and closest friends from dying. Many people heard about these adventures and, afraid of climbing themselves, visited Pedro and asked him the favor of replacing the candles that belonged to their souls. The Nahua climbed many times and changed the candles so people stopped dying. When God realized this, with fury he condemned him and broke the mountain into many pieces so no one would ever reach the sky again (personal interview, June 2010).

Those scattered hills visible in the valley according to the story, once belonged to the Postectli Mountain (Figure 11). Gomez, who conducted research in Chicontepec, identified six mountains as the broken parts: “Tepenahuac, Tzoahcali, Tepecxitla, Xochiocoatepec, Ayacachtli and Xihuicometl” (Gomez 2002: 106).



Figure 11. View from the foothills of Postectli Mountain towards the northeast. Ixcacuatitla, 2010. Photo by the author.

Figure 11 shows the elevations that are believed to have detached from the Postectli depicted in the story. Different versions of this oral tradition are known around the neighboring towns. A similar association is present in another folktale, which narrates how the leafcutter ants used to climb up the Postectli, pick up soil, and bring it down to the people. Similarly in this story, God broke the mountain in fury so no one would ever trespass. Alan Sandstrom collected a similar story in a Nahuatl community located a few miles away on the southeast side of the Postectli, in which ants and other insects reached the sky by climbing up the Postectli (Sandstrom 1991: 241-242). For the Nahuas in the community of Amatlan (a pseudonym assigned by Sandstrom), the Postectli is identified as the Governor and represents an important center of devotion. During 2011, the ritual specialist who actively collaborated with Sandstrom visited the Postectli and celebrated a *chicomexochitl* ceremony. This ritual specialist's work is considered very successful and he is recognized in Ixcacuatitla as a knowledgeable and powerful celebrant. The *Chicomexochitl* at this time was an offering the ritual specialist gave as a promise, asking the mountain to

look after his health. In Ixcacuatitla many collaborated with donations of food for offerings, candles and sugarcane liquor. However, not many members of the community of Amatlan came with him to the ceremony, and many commented that people in that town have stopped believing in this kind of rituals and do not follow anymore. This ritual specialist was also summoned for a *chicomexochitl* ceremony at Camotipan, another Nahuatl town located close to the Postectli Mountain.

Other mountains are recognized as powerful and are often named either in *tlatlacnaltia*, healing rituals, or any other event asking to help them to overcome difficulties. On one occasion I collected the names of thirty-two mountains, among them the Popocatepetl, Iztaccihuatl, and Orizaba, which are located at such a great distance that they are not visible from Chicontepec.³⁶ These mountains are known to be associated with archeological sites and evidence for ancient religious worship (Mortero 2001). Gómez (2004), alluding to the mythical connotations of *altepetl*, points to the Postectli as a natural sanctuary that provides life in exchange for the *tlatlacnaltia* ceremonies (Gomez 2004). Mountains thus represent a key aspect while exploring conceptualizations about what constitute the landscape and what type of balanced interaction the Nahuas have developed with it.

³⁶ See appendix No. 2 for a complete list of the mountains.

Water and the mermaid

Other common features of the landscape, as mentioned above, are the numerous springs and rivers. Since the Nahuatl towns lack potable water, the natural resources provide most of the drinking water to the villages. Wells are commonly constructed to ease water gathering. Women and children, who carry the water in small buckets, generally fetch water for household use. In some locations, the community has managed to establish a plumbing system to pump the water. The well in Ixcacuatitla is one of the biggest in the area.³⁷ Visitors from other communities frequently visit the well to wash clothes and take back one or two buckets to their houses. There is also a plumbing system that supplies water to every house in town. During the dry season between April and May, the authorities regulate the consumption and prohibit foreign visitors from using water from the well. In 2010 Mexico experienced a severe drought, during which many crops were lost and cattle died. Villages such as Ixcacuatitla, Tepecxitla and Las Silletas were able to ration the water supplies for the whole drought period. Clandestine visitors from other villages often quietly approached the well at Ixcacuatitla at night to take water in buckets. In order to maintain control, Ixcacuatitla's authorities eventually set up a patrol to stop the unwanted visitors. Smaller springs once existed in towns such as Tepeica, Alaxtitla, and Tepeco, but the sources dried up and the dwellers of these villages were forced to go on a pilgrimage searching for water.

³⁷ The well at Ixcacuatitla is divided between El Cerro Ixcacuatitla and El Cerro Los Pinos. This division is one among many that represent disagreements regarding the management of government funding, the *tianguis* income, and political orientation. Considering the latter, the political orientation is a system of participation and reciprocity rather than an ideological inclination. The collaboration in political campaigns is largely shaped by the expectation that if the candidate is elected, the supporters will be reciprocated. Commonly, this support can secure a position in the local municipality or other governmental institutions. For more details about the political division in Ixcacuatitla, see Chapter Two.

During this period, more than 30 communities from the area, mainly Nahuatl and Otomi, made the pilgrimage to the Postectli to ask for rain.

Life in Chicontepec fully depends on the natural resources and the subtropical rain cycles, which enable agriculture production twice a year. While men work in the fields, women take care of the activities in the house such as cleaning, cooking, and looking after the children, especially those who are not yet of school age. Moreover, central daytime activities are laundry, water fetching, and bathing, which mean that women spend a considerable amount of daytime at the well. A very common image of the landscape, in fact, is to see women washing clothes at springs or bathing with their children. In this context, men are forbidden to approach the wells and on one occasion, I witnessed how the women of the community protected this space together. I was helping a group of fifteen women to wash a cow's intestines for a funeral ceremony meal. A boy, about ten or twelve, was sitting on a high pole looking at some girls who were bathing naked. Two infuriated women elders threw stones at the boy, which made him jump abruptly and run in despair. When he was far enough that the rocks would not reach him, we all started to laugh and many women told funny stories about men coming to the well to peek. Since women spend considerable amount of time at wells, these become places for socialization where many stories and news interweave.

The close interaction with the natural geography shapes concepts of sacredness that come to encompass myths and ideas that divinities dwell in springs, mountains, and caves. In many locations a specialized *tlatlacuallia* ceremony, known as *atlatlacuallia*, is dedicated specifically to the water resources. In the case of water sources, the deity of the water is the

‘Mermaid’ known as *Atxinola* (water foreigner) or *Apanxinola* (river/well foreigner). This deity is characterized by the image of a mermaid with the upper body of a long-haired woman, and with a fish tail instead of legs. The *Atxinola* is also represented with large cut-paper images in the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies, together with the images of the Chicomexochitl deity and his grandparents. In the ceremony, these cut-paper images of the *atxinola* are introduced in a clay pot and placed at the altar dedicated to this deity, which is commonly located at the edge of the water source—either a river or a well (Figure 12). Similarly, the image of the *atxinola* not only represents the deity, but it also implies her presence. The ritual specialist invokes the deities at the moment while he/she is cutting the paper to shape the images. Thus, the *atxinola*, and other deities with their images, are present in the ceremonies.³⁸

³⁸ This is the reason the ritual specialists are the only ones who can make the cut-paper images. These celebrants receive this permission after a ceremony in which he/she accepts the responsibilities to perform the celebrations in *la costumbre*. A pair of scissor will be given to him, and which accompanies his duties. The pair of scissor generally is for personal use only and cannot be transferred to other celebrants.



Figure 12. Congregation giving offerings to the water at the local well. Ixcacuatitla, 2010. Photo by the author.

Some wells are named after the saint of the day in the Catholic calendar, and that date indicates the timing for the *atlatlacuaultia*. In Las Silletas, the well is named after Saint John the Baptist and the *atlatlacuaultia* is celebrated on June 24th —the date in the Catholic calendar that commemorates Saint John’s birthday. In the case of Tepecxitla, the *tlatlacuaultia* takes place on June 13th in honor of the well’s patron saint, Anthony of Padua. These ceremonies are close to the summer solstice that marks the beginning of the rainy season. By this time, most of the fields have been cleared and are ready for sowing. Either with or without the name of a patron saint, the *atxinola* is always present in the *tlatlacuaultia*.

The combination of Catholic saints and the non-Catholic pantheon is a common feature of localized Catholicism in most societies in the Americas. Still, an interesting feature is that many of the Nahuatl people from this area clearly differentiate between those Catholic and non-Catholic elements. This hardly represents a conflict, but is rather a harmonious combination that serves as an anchor to present the offerings and petitions-- in this case-- to the water resources.

Music at the *Tlatlacualtia*

The natural landscape as a social space also constitutes an intangible reality that influences the Nahuatl ways of life. The correct participation and commitment in the ceremonies secures a successful interaction, which in time works towards the wellbeing of the congregation. The musical repertoire is structured according to the events that happen in the celebration, which structure articulates the emotional states that aids participation of the congregation. Music also serves to bridge between the tangible and intangible realities and also carries some of the qualities activated during the ritual. In the ceremonies, Antonio, a violin player from Las Silletas, explained that mountains listen to music when a ceremony starts (personal communication, 2010). Without this calling, mountains might be unaware of the ceremonies and disregard the believers' petitions. Considering these musical performances, three conceptualizations that concern the interaction with the natural landscape are unfolded: communication and interaction with the tangible and intangible world, the duality of the forces that are activated in the *tlatlacualtia*, and the commitment of working together for the congregation's wellbeing.

On initiating the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies, numerous events aid in opening the communication channels. The main character in the interaction is the ritual specialist who, as a knowledgeable individual, reads in his corn grains the details of the ceremonies such as dates and offerings' amounts. When the dates have been established, the ritual specialist invokes the deities who arrive at the *xochicalli*, and where the celebrant starts shaping the cut-paper images and defining their attributes.³⁹ In some celebrations, there was a chain made of *cempobualxochitl* flowers that connected two of the altars: one placed inside the *xochicalli* and the other located at the principal entrance, outside the *xochicalli*. This line of flowers also contained cut-paper images (Figure 13 and Figure 14). It is believed that by connecting the altars in this manner, a channel is opened and like a telephone pole, it aids communication between deities, mountains, and the congregation.

³⁹ This concept of bringing immaterial entities is also present during the Day of the Dead, when all the family members that have passed away are welcomed back to the houses, and also in the carnival when the *tlabneliloc* (the devil) comes to visit the towns. At the end of the festivity period, there is a ritual to let everybody go and return to the daily routine.



Figure 13. Left. String containing cut-paper images and marigold flowers in the *xochicalli*. Ixcacuatitla, 2010. Photos by the author.

Figure 14. Right. String containing cut-paper images and marigold flowers in the *xochicalli*. José (violin) and Antonio (*huapanguera*) playing together. Ixcacuatitla, 2010. Photo by the author.

The ritual specialists who in their majority are also *tepabtihqumeh* (local healers), are among the gifted individuals that bridge the tangible and intangible realities. Some are well versed on both stances, but commonly healers' tasks are more specific since they are responsible for both the physical and the spiritual health of their patients.⁴⁰ The idea of opening or enabling channels of communication suggests a different place where deities and mountains reside. However, many of the explanations of celebrants convey the intangible world in the space of the tangible world as different places where homes of deities are

⁴⁰ Commonly *tepabtihqumeh* are more versatile in the tasks of ritual specialists. The knowledge pertains to the same concepts, although not all ritual specialists are able to switch and become *tepabtihqumeh* and treat patients.

located. The deities arrive when properly invoked.⁴¹ Therefore, the sacred geography comprises the visual and tangible reality of mountains, springs, and cornfields as well as their intangible reality. In this intangible reality, also present are the deceased who departed from the spaces of the living but remain in the world. The deceased family visits the household once a year in the Day of the Dead in November, on the dates associated with All Saints Day from the Catholic calendar.

The forces that intervene in the lives of the people in the Nahua towns emanate from the realm of the deities as well as the dead. As mentioned above, *huehuetlacatl* and *tepatihquetl* possess the given talent to elaborate bridges between these realities and, if they are knowledgeable enough, the ability to communicate with their prayers and request what is needed for the community.⁴² In some Nahua studies this given talent is attributed to the power of the ritual specialist's prayers performed during the ritual (Lupo 1995; Sandstrom 1991).

An interesting aspect of this unseen reality is the interaction of forces that are especially activated during the ritual. A common expression of some of these forces is often identified as *Ehecatl* (wind), or sometimes also called *aires* (airs) in Spanish. Even though this is the same word as 'wind' in Nahuatl, the connotations are quite different. One of the representations of *Ehecatl* takes place among the pantheon of deities in the *tlatlacnaltia* ceremonies. Cut-paper images representing the deity attributes are placed in the altars during the ceremony. The *Ehecatl* deity is associated with the color white, and on some occasions

⁴¹ Deities are not only invoked for the *tlatlacnaltia* ceremonies, but often the *tepatihquetl* brings a group of deities for the cleansing ceremonies. These deities are the same as the cleansing ritual performed in the *tlatlacnaltia* ceremonies.

⁴² For detailed information on the *huehuetlacatl* and his/her received talent see Chapters Five and Six.

this distinctive color is used by placing white objects or sacrificing a white chicken in honor of this deity. Another presence of cut-paper images of the *Ehecatl* is in the cleansing ceremony, where the colors of the cut-paper images represent the deities' attributes. For the cleansing ritual, there are eight types of *ehcameh* (plural for *Ehecatl*), each differentiated with a specific color.

The *Ehecatl* as a deity and the forces differ. While the former is a defined entity with specific attributes, the latter is a wider term that exemplifies the conceptualization of the forces that interact with the living, and in some cases, the forces are identified with the dead. Concerning the latter, the *ehcameh* are conceived as wicked entities that have been invoked by witchcraft. The knowledge of evoking deities and *ehcameh* from the dead pertain to the same knowledge as the one that ritual specialists and *tepahtiquemeh* bear. Generally, ritual specialists try to avoid any association with witchcraft, indicating that is the same power that comes from the gifted person. However, the celebrant for witchcraft would invoke different deities and dead people to summon them to act against a person. On many occasions I found that the image of San Martin de Porres, a black Saint from Peru from the sixteenth century, is commonly associated with witchcraft rites.

The interaction with the intangible world conceives the presence of powerful forces. Ritual specialists and musicians as well as the congregations, have to follow the established procedures and treat these ceremonies with special care. With the conceptualization that powerful entities are summoned to the ceremony, certain accepted behavior is expected during the ceremony as well as eight days after it. This includes sexual abstinence or avoiding angry confrontations with neighbors, as well as encouragement to treat honestly the

members of the congregation. Even though alcoholism is common among the men and it is a source for families' discord, I never found any suggestion or attempt to control drinking abuse. The avoidance of certain behavior while the channels are open and deities visit the *xochicalli*, responds to the will of protecting themselves from adversities that might follow misconduct in the religious context.

The powerful forces activated during the *tlatlacnaltia* ceremonies and all what surrounds the celebration, conveys a duality which in itself is not well defined, but explicitly signals the dichotomy between good or bad, or for that matter, good and evil. For instance, in the case of the *tlatlacnaltia* offered for mountains, the offerings for these entities secure enough rain for the agriculture cycle to ensure a fecund harvest and maintain a healthy environment for animals. Also, these will serve as the context for personal requests such as healing, the end of an economic difficulties, or protection for one's family from adversities. Still, this entity can also destroy. Bad behavior or offenses are punished and I witnessed one unfortunate case that illustrates this belief.

During my visit in one of the Nahua towns, a *xochicalli* primary coordinator and his wife were killed in a car accident. Many in the town believed that the mountains and deities punished this man because he stole funds designated for the *xochicalli*. The penalty was so severe because, as one of the main celebrants explained, he was well acquainted with the *tlatlacnaltia* rituals. Since he possessed the knowledge of powerful forces, when he acted wrongly these turned against him and caused his death. I developed a close relationship with his daughter who, at the time of my visit, was in her early thirties. My friend no longer attended the *tlatlacnaltia* ceremonies but kept some practices she had learned from her father

throughout the years. Taking on her father's business, she sold pork meat in her town and at the weekly *tianguis* (local market). Whenever she slaughtered a pig for sale, she lit a candle and kept silent for few minutes. According to her, lighting the candle assists the pig's soul to leave the body in peace and find the path for his departure after death.

Another example of the interchangeable dichotomy is illustrated in the cleansing ceremonies. I witnessed the cleansing ceremony on many occasions either because someone was attacked by a neighbor's jealousy or because they had a bad dream. Deities are invoked to release the person from the afflictions. The deities of the cleansing ceremonies are believed to govern the forces of the earth and are related to sexual pleasures and addictions, and are often considered dangerous. There are eight such deities associated with different colors, and to appease them they are offered tobacco and alcohol. On one occasion, an elder had a recurrent dream about a snake. She became so worried about having this recurrent nightmare that a *tepahtibquetl* arrived to perform a cleansing ceremony. In this ceremony, the healer placed cut-paper images of different colors representing the *ehcameh* and lit candles. After rubbing the body of the elder with a bundle of green leaves, the healer blew into these leaves with cane liquor and prayed onto the deities asking to release the woman from her afflictions. Pouring an egg on top of the cut-paper images, the healer was able to identify images in the egg revealing the reason the elder was having nightmares. Apparently, someone was angry with the elder and wanted to harm her. Finishing the ceremony, the *tepahtibquetl* collected all the elements she used in the cleansing ceremony and tore them apart. After the ceremony, the elder was released from her nightmares. In this example, the elements that interplay in the cleansing ceremony are unfolded while the healer invokes the

deities who, at the end of the cleansing ritual, are the ones that inform the trouble's source. In this sense by consulting the deities with the right engagement of the *tepatibquetl*, they act in favor of the person and release the affliction.

This interchangeable duality also concerns the music. Antonio, a violinist from Las Silletas, commented many times that ceremonial music can bring sorrow if the performer plays the repertoire outside the designated context. Most of the musicians acquainted with the ceremonial repertoire also know different popular music, mainly Huastecan *son*, which they perform in local bars (*cantinas*). Nevertheless, they would never play the sacred repertoire in a cantina, believing that the deities and mountains would punish them with harsh sickness or accidents that might even cause their death.

The musical pieces, similar to the ceremonies, differ from town to town. Despite all the variations I encountered over the course of my research, there were commonalities concerning the concepts of certain power attributed to the music and characteristics that enable communication with deities. Largely, the dramatic experience of the ritual pertains to certain emotional states. Mainly, these states are understood as signs of participation in the ceremony, no different from other tasks such as cooking, cleaning, preparing the flowers, or dancing. The emotional involvement with the music not only keeps everybody busy with tasks, but also articulates the emotional states. While most of the gatherings are accompanied by dance, the dramatic events portrayed some happy and sad moments. Here, the participants come together to share joy or cry. Even though with the exception of musicians and ritual specialists, most of the participants are not precisely aware of the sequence of events or the name of their respective musical pieces, by showing their emotions through

joyous dancing or by crying together all are showing that they are fully engaged. The experience of showing or articulating the emotional states is particularly pronounced while the participants dance.

These ceremonies are extremely expensive and require intense teamwork. On many occasions, a main donor might become responsible for the ceremony by providing services, money, and supplies such as corn, sugar, oil, and chickens to prepare meals. In exchange, mountains and other deities will reciprocate by granting what has been requested. The participants present the personal offerings and acknowledge the central donor by collaborating with him/her in the realization of the ceremony. For all this to be successful, the participants have to be in the right emotional state and with the complete conviction that the ceremony will bring positive results.

Commitment is a therefore the principle that governs the social interaction in these Nahua communities. Due to their isolation from the distribution of urban services, communal life largely depends on collaboration. This is significant for daily tasks such as taking care of the house, the children or any immediate need; or for larger projects like building houses, arranging roads, preparing the fields for sowing, and collecting the products during the harvest season. When a newborn arrives or someone is deceased the whole community visits the family. Often large meals are offered to the visitors, who themselves take part in the cooking. This interaction secures the commitment of others when needed. For instance, when constructing a house, it is almost impossible for the owner or his/her family to achieve its completion alone. Generally the neighbors help while knowing that in the near future they will need help from others. That interaction of commitment is also

present at the *tlatlacualtia*, in which communal efforts will secure the wellbeing of the community at large.

The successful ceremony results from the participants' commitment to collaborate together in the performance of the ceremony. *Tlatlacualtia* are expensive and require a lot of teamwork. The congregation commits to sharing expenses and dividing tasks —mostly donations consisting of money, food, animals for sacrifice, or alcohol and tobacco for offerings. Sometimes individuals commit as the main responsible party, in which case, the person who offers the ceremony covers a great portion of the expenses; still, he/she works together with the community to fulfill the ceremony. In fact, it is almost impossible to achieve a *tlatlacualtia* ceremony with fewer than twenty people. It is believed that the communal effort will finally bring the rain and life will continue the appropriate balance.

Conclusion

The Nahuas attempt to maintain a balanced interaction with the tangible and intangible natural landscape by committing to celebrate *tlatlacualtia*. In exchange, mountains and deities will reciprocate with enough water and safeguard the congregation. The forces that are activated during the ceremonies interact with the life in the region. Therefore, when a ceremony takes place, the participants attempt to carefully follow the conventions and avoid misconducts. The musical repertoire as the ‘sonic order’ parallels the structure of the events in the ceremonies, which enables the articulation of emotions. As one of the channels of communication, the music shares ceremonial attributes.

During the *tlatlacualtia*, the host community takes good care of the participants. To reciprocate, adequate participation is one of the central concerns for a successful ceremony. Music and dance performance enhance their intentions of keeping the participants involved with the different events. Preparation and execution of any *tlatlacualtia* is an event that results of a communal effort. In Nahua societies, in fact, working together is a principle that guarantees the subsistence of individuals and families. In the ritual the performance enhances this concept, in which their faith in the ritual not only solves personal and family needs, but also their participation will further support the community at large.

On one occasion, while I was leaving Ixcacuatitla for few days after I participated in a *chicomexochitl* ceremony, the rain began to fall. I was waiting for the bus to exit the town when an elder came to me and thanked me for participating in the ceremony because we now all had rain. This event reflected the idea that successful participation does not respond

particularly to the members of the Nahua society, but rather signifies the recognition of sharing together the effort to bring the rain. “Dancing to the water, keeps the deities happy, I dance to make them feel content,” are some of the expressions I heard many times while participating and discussing the music in the ceremonies.

CHAPTER 5

The *chicomexochitl* ceremony

This chapter provides a detailed description of a *chicomexochitl* ceremony (seven flower) that took place in Ixcacuatitla during the dry season of 2011. It examines the ceremony in the context of other celebrations in the religious calendar of the *la costumbre* religion. In doing so, the description provides information about the age of the participants involved, generational gaps, and political factions that represent divisions in the town of Ixcacuatitla. Furthermore, a detailed description of the location of different altars (known in the towns as *mesas*, or ‘tables’) where offerings are placed, participants involved in the organization and realization of the ceremony, as well as ritual elements and events are included. These descriptions provide an overview of the ceremony that highlights the relevance of the participation, the pantheon of deities, and the interaction of the congregations with the natural landscape; in particular with the Postectli Mountain, springs, and caves. These events are intertwined with musical pieces to show the parallels between the structures of the music repertoire and the ceremony. The parallel organization further serves as the context to examine the relevance of music in communal participation, where emotions are the public display that functions as the communal concern to bring the rain. The relationship between music and communal engagement and the performance of emotions are discussed in detailed in Chapters Six and Seven.

The chicomexochitl ceremony in the context of the calendar ⁴³

The chicomexochitl celebration (seven-flower) is named after the corn deity, and often marks the beginning of the corn and rain cycles.⁴⁴ As previously explained the deity is depicted as two children, female and male, dressed with colorful clothing that follows the traditional local style and is carefully designed to fit their size. The female/male duality of the deity is represented with cut-paper images and two bundles that contain maize cobs. In some towns the *xochicalli* temple corresponds to a specific temple, while in others it shares its space with Catholic churches but no other Christian temples.⁴⁵ The ceremonies' length varies according to the resources and availability of the organizers, although traditionally the chicomexochitl takes place for twelve days. The first four occur in the ritual specialist's house, who have previously determined and agreed with the organizers upon dates and number of offerings. Here, the celebrant places offerings in the household altar, lights candles, burns *copal*, and starts the process of making representation of deities with cut-paper images. In the following four days, the ritual specialist arrives to the *xochicalli* temple where also the congregation gathers. During these days they all prepare offerings, to finally peregrinate to the mountain's summit in the last day. In the following four days, the ritual

⁴³ The chicomexochitl ceremony is more prominent in the south of the municipality where the Postectli Mountain is located. In fact, in these southern towns it is believed that the surrounding mountains have detached from the Postectli and it is more common for these towns to celebrate the chicomexochitl, *atlatlacualtia* ceremony and other related festivities that concern the corn and rain cycles. See Chapter Four for a description of the natural landscape.

⁴⁴ Here, cycles rather than seasons refer to the returning periods for sowing and harvesting, which are associated with the cycles of the rain. There are two cycles, rainy and dry. Several celebrations in the religious calendar of *la costumbre* focus on the corn and rain cycles. Among the celebrations that mark main events are two rain ceremonies known as *tlatlacualtia* (including chicomexochitl and *atlatlacualtia*), and the rites of the 'seed tradition' of the corn cycle in which the main public ceremony is the *tlamana* (a ceremony for the sweet corn). See Chapter Two for further details on these cycles.

⁴⁵ In Ixcacuatitla two *xochicalli* temples and one Catholic Church exist. None of the temples share their spaces. In contrast, in the town of Las Silletas the Catholic Church and the *xochicalli* share the same temple. See more details concerning the *xochicalli* in Ixcacuatitla in Chapter Two.

specialist, back in his home, keeps placing offering on the household altar while the *xochicalli*'s committee rotates to also place offerings, light candles, and burn *copal* in the host *xochicalli* temple.

In the religious calendar of *la costumbre*, deities such as the Chicomexochitl, *Tlahueliloc* (the deity of the carnival, also identified as 'the devil'), or saints from the Catholic tradition such as Saint John or the Virgin Mary (particularly the Guadalupe Virgin) become central figures for worship. Celebrations hold specific functions to achieve goodwill and good life, where the dichotomy of good/bad constitutes a sense of balance as a whole rather than two poles that never interact. The ritual spaces for the living and the dead, however, are well demarcated and rarely mix, so in the Day on the Dead the *xochicalli* is permanently closed and when a funeral takes place, those who attended are forbidden to enter the *xochicalli*, especially while water ceremonies take place.⁴⁶ In the calendar of *la costumbre*, there are only two ceremonies named *tlatlacnaltlistli*—chicomexochitl and *atlatlacnaltia*—both related to water. Each celebration in the religious calendar has a particular relevance that constitutes different parts of daily life throughout the year, and among them the Chicomexochitl provides a good context to explore some characteristics of the Nahua congregations, the centrality of corn and rain cycles, and the interaction with the natural landscapes.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Additionally, the *xochicalli* temple is also closed during the Carnival in the belief that the *tlahueliloc* (the devil) visits the towns.

⁴⁷ See Chapter Two for more details concerning the place of the chicomexochitl within the religious calendar of *la costumbre*.

Political factionalism, generational gaps, and interaction with mountains

The relevance of the Chicomexochitl as a rain ceremony in the ritual calendar of *la costumbre* raises important issues concerning the dynamics of the political interaction of different group, and the articulation of traditions and modernity concerning the different generations. This section explores these social dynamics surrounding the chicomexochitl ceremony in the town of Ixcacuatitla. Ixcacuatitla constitutes two different political entities.⁴⁸ Annually, each faction celebrates the chicomexochitl separately for Ixcacuatitla and Los Pinos—often on the day of Saint Isidore the Laborer, the patron saint of the town—so organization and participation became exclusive to the faction. As exclusive as these organizations are, some participants of one faction often join the ceremony of the other faction as a result of their struggle with the organizational committee or other members of their own faction.

This factional separation is overall related to *la costumbre* worships rather than to any other Christian practices present in the town. The existing divisions clearly mark the distinctions of each political faction by having its *xochicalli*, schools and *agencias*. With the other Christian temples in Ixcacuatitla, the only division pertains to the *xochicalli* and all religious events related to the calendar of *la costumbre*. The religious organization of *la costumbre* is, in fact, the inheritance of the *cargo* system of local governance that once was a unified hierarchical system in the town and that functioned closely with the political

⁴⁸ See Chapter Two for the political organization of the town.

organization. Today the system is taking a much more fragmented shape with the presence of the other Christian churches and different political affiliations.⁴⁹

In the religious calendar of *la costumbre*, the chicomexochitl and the carnival are among the most prominent public celebrations.⁵⁰ As explained in Chapter Two, ceremonies in the calendar are performed to maintain balance in life and wellbeing for individual and families. In this endeavor, the interaction is attempted with the pantheon of deities and the polarities of the good and bad by placing offerings for the deities. The chicomexochitl and the carnival are good examples of the interaction of these polarities. While the Chicomexochitl belongs to the good, the Carnival belongs to the bad. In these two celebrations the participations differ.⁵¹ The majority of the participants in the former are adults and elders with almost no participation of youth—who consider these traditions belonging to their grandparents; while in the latter the participation of youth is prominent. The generational gap results from the relationships that both generations have with the agricultural cycle as well as the role that the educational systems play. In the Nahuatl towns in Chicontepec, the majority of adults and elders are still farmers who received little or no formal education. For this fraction of the society, the corn field represents the main household support, and in fact, it is central to their lives. In contrast, the busy schedule of school leaves the youth with little time to fulfill agricultural duties. During the Carnival, however, the high schools organize competitions for parades. Students participate and

⁴⁹ The cargo system is an inheritance of the Spanish colonial period. It consists of hierarchical political positions (cargos) occupied by men and women as civil duties.

⁵⁰ See more details on the religious calendar in Chapter Two.

⁵¹ This is more pronounced in Ixcacuatitla since in the cases of Limon, Tepecxitla, and Las Silletas, a large portion of the community of different ages gathered in the *xochicalli* and together peregrinated to the mountain's summit.

compete against other students from the same school as well as against other institutions.

The separation from the corn field and the centrality of the educational institutions in the life of the youth have both contributed to their participation. The differences in participation reflect a certain adaptation of traditional practices in the context of the new generations who are already engaged in a different type of life and economic system.

The educational institutions have opened different job opportunities for the members of the Nahua towns; however, the economy is still mostly based on agricultural production and cattle ranches. Thus, without an irrigation system the *chicomexochitl* has a particular relevance since the ceremony becomes an opportunity to ask the mountain for blessing with the right amount of rain for the sowing season. In this, the Postectli Mountain attracts different communities—not only Nahuas but also Otomis, and Tepehuas—to offer *chicomexochitl* ceremonies each year. In fact, during 2011 a large drought hit Mexico and many crops were lost and cattle died. Numerous pilgrims arrived from different towns to the Postectli Mountain to offer a *chicomexochitl* ceremony asking to end the drought and bring the rain.⁵² The large number that arrived during this period reflected their active engagement with the Postectli Mountain as a ceremonial center.

In spite of all the divisions in town such as political factionalism, generational gaps, diverse religious practices, changes in economic income and so forth, the *chicomexochitl* still brings large crowds many of which arrive to Ixcacuatitla despite the difficult conditions of transportation and lodging. Considering the relevance of this ceremony to the inhabitants of

⁵² Some of the communities that arrived were Tlanempa, Camotipan, Meza Tlapotzala, Tepeica, Tlaxtitla, Tecomate, El Tordillo, Huitzapolli, Puyecaco with a representative of La Mesa, Atlalco, Zapotempa, Ampliación Palma Sola, Xahualpa, and Llano del Medio, among others.

this area, the relationship of corn and rain cycles and the direct interaction with mountains, the *chicomexochitl* is a remarkable case of religious practices deeply rooted in the particular history of these Nahua towns.

The ceremony

The *chicomexochitl* consists of a series of events that take place during several days, where the main purpose for the congregations is to place offerings in different altars located in the town, springs, and mountains. The descriptions below concern a single *chicomexochitl* ceremony containing two main sections: the elements that interplay in the ceremony—location, participants, and deities—and a description of the events in a chronological order of the ceremony's last three days, from day two to day four. The altar's location illustrates the interaction of the celebrants with the centers of devotion, as well as the relevance of the private and communal spaces. Furthermore, the descriptions of the events illustrate the narrative that interplays in the celebration. The information concerning several elements described pertains to one single ceremony. The description is not prescriptive as I believe these ceremonies vary according to the celebrants' style. Rather, it provides a general overview of elements that interplay in the ceremony, highlighting the centrality of corn, rain, and the natural landscape in which the Postectli Mountain is central. In the fragmented characteristics of the religious life in the Nahua towns, the *chicomexochitl* is still a significant event were congregations attempt to interact together with the natural

landscape and bring the rain. To enable these interactions, musical performances in this context articulate emotional engagement and social participation.⁵³

Performing in the *chicomexochitl*

Location

A central part of the ceremonies is the location of altars at the main ceremonial centers: the *xochicalli* temple, the well, and the mountain. These altars are named ‘tables’ and the congregation utilizes them as the space to place offerings to feed deities.⁵⁴ The three main ceremonial centers hold different tables offered to central deities, some of which represent the four elements: fire, wind, water, and earth.⁵⁵ The tables embed two different levels—one on the floor and the other above it—an arch, and a cross. The two levels were often referred as: “up for God, down for the earth” (“*arriba para Dios, abajo para la Tierra.*”). Particular groups of deities from the pantheon are placed on each level, represented with cut-paper images of both the good/bad polarities. The offerings follow the deities’ attributes represented by the numbers of flowers, and colors of foods or candy. The arches are carefully arranged with *palmilla* fronds and the tables carry marigold flowers, *coyol* arrangements (*acrocomia aculeata*), and two types of candles (tallow and yellow candles).⁵⁶ *Copal*

⁵³ The word ‘congregation’ in this dissertation refers to those participants who attend the ceremonies. Even though the Nahuatl town represents an urban unit, the society is hardly a homogenous social group. Rather the Nahuatl society is characterized by divisions that have resulted out of economic hierarchies and different political and religious orientations.

⁵⁴ The word ‘table’ —*mesa* in Spanish, is used to represent altars and there is no Nahuatl translation for *mesa*. Since there is a close relationship between the concept that embeds *tlatlacuātlia* as feeding and the use of tables to present offerings, henceforth ‘tables’ refer to altars used in the *tlatlacuātlia* ceremonies.

⁵⁵ There are numerous amounts of deities involved in the celebration among which fire, wind, water, and earth appeared in different locations and have tables dedicated to them.

⁵⁶ *Palmilla* is a small palm of the *yucca elata* type known in Nahuatl as *tlachichihuatl xobuitl*. The plants such as the *palmilla* and *coyol* grow naturally in the area, while marigold and other flowers used in the Day of the Death are planted together with corn in different months according to the celebrations dates.

incense is burned constantly. The ritual specialist's call summons the deities who arrive to the tables to receive the food offerings, where the tables become the meeting point for the transactions between deities and the congregation. Figure 15 and Figure 16 illustrate the characteristics of the tables where the food offerings are placed, as well as the interaction that the congregations have with the tables during a *chicomexochitl* ceremony.



Figure 15. Left. Main table placed on the foothill of the Postectli Mountain. *Chicomexochitl* ceremony. Ixcacuatitla, June 24th, 2011. Photo by the author.

Figure 16. Right. Members of the congregation dancing in front of the main altar in the *xochicalli*. *Chicomexochitl* ceremony. Ixcacuatitla-Los Pinos, May 17, 2010. Photo by the author.

The offerings broadly represent the act of feeding, which in fact gives name to the ceremonies as *tlatlacualtia* (to feed) or *tlatlacualtilistli* (banquet) (Figure 15). The offerings consist of food such as chocolate, coffee, bread, fruits, and chicken and turkey soup with large pieces of meat. Similarly, candy, soda drinks, beer, *aguardiente* (sugarcane liquor), and tobacco, together with candles, *copal* and living chickens and turkeys for sacrifice are offered. Feeding expands from the commonly consumed food to more appropriate gifts for deities, where the blood of chickens and turkeys is precious and celebrants spread it above each table. Likewise, the congregation contributes with hard work for the ceremony, fasting, performing emotions, or avoiding sleeping. The offerings are central for the *chicomexochitl* and frequently these serve to denote the ceremony itself as *tlatlalia tlaixpan* (to place an offering), where feeding serves to establish the relationship of reciprocity. In order to receive the rain, however, the congregation works together to establish the right interaction with the pantheon of deities so the offerings will be well received. The act of feeding consist of providing actual food such as bread or chicken soup, to more precious elements such as blood of birds, and more abstract concepts, which can vary between a cleansing rite or tears. Pedro, a collaborator from Ixcacuatitla explaining about the thunder deity, pointed out that:

“...you perform a ‘sweeping rite’ so when the lighting comes, it will not arrive ferociously but rather it will arrive calmly.”

“...after sweeping, nothing bad will happen because we fed them.”⁵⁷
(Personal interview, April 2011).

⁵⁷ “...se hace una barrida, para que cuando llegue el relámpago no llegue muy bravo pero que llegue con calma.”
“...después de hacer la barrida, no pasa nada, porque ya se le dio de comer.” (Personal interview, April 2011).

Several tables, similar to the one in Figure 15, are located in centers of worship to place the offerings. All tables are equally designed but contain some differences considering the numbers and color of the offerings, which vary according to the deity. Following the location of the tables enables to examine the interaction that the congregations have in the *xochicalli* and further with mountains, springs and caves. Below is a particular description of the tables placed during a *chicomexochitl* ceremony indicating location and deities in the *xochicalli*, the well, and the Postectli Mountain.⁵⁸

Tables in the *xochicalli* temple

The *xochicalli* temple holds three tables: the main table, table for the fire, and table for the cross. The main table is located inside the *xochicalli* temple, and is where the process of offering begins. The table contains the images of the *Chicomexochitl* represented with cut-paper images placed in a wooden box, two bundles with three cobs, the *Chicomexochitl* grandparents, the Virgin Mary, Jesus, the patron saint San Isidore the Laborer, and other Christian saints. Sacred items such as a rattle, bastions of healers, a bell, and *copal* incense burners are placed in the altar. When other ritual specialists arrive, they often place their personal items in this table to expose them to the ceremony, to later bring back the ceremonies' blessing to their towns of origin. The table for the fire is located in one of the sides of the *xochicalli* (in some places is also located outside); while the table for the cross is always located outside, facing the main entrance.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ I recorded a description of altar stations that contain more than one table as *capillas* (chapels); however, this term was rarely used.

⁵⁹ This cross is differentiated from the Christian one and is associated with a local type, which is also placed at the houses' private entrances during the Day of the Dead to receive the ancestors that have been forgotten.

Tables in the water sources

The well, which is located in the center of town, is the place where the offerings for the water sources are located. There are two tables: one dedicated to the water goddesses named *Atxinola* or mermaid; and the other dedicated to *Tlalli* (earth).

Table for *Tzitzimitl*

Identified as an angry elder, the *tzitzimitl* possesses a table on the north side of the mountain's foothills. Before starting to peregrinate up the mountain's summit, the ritual specialist and a small group of members of the congregation carefully carry the offerings to place them on the table, so to avoid disturbing this deity and awaking her anger.

Tables in the Postectli Mountain

The mountain contains around nine tables separated to three main stations located at the foothill, middle, and summit. The tables located at the foothill are: 1) main table; 2) table dedicated to the deity *Tlitl* (fire); and 3) table dedicated to the deity *Ehecatl* (wind). In the middle of the mountain the tables are: 1) table dedicated to the grandmother, which is represented by one of the large cut-paper images. This paper-cut image is left behind after placing the offerings; 2) table dedicated to the *Atxinola*, also represented by a large cut-paper image. This image is also left behind after the offerings are made to the deity; 3) table dedicated to the deity thunder. On the mountain summit there are also three tables located in different places in the plateau: 1) a main table located on the south side; 2) table for the cross located on the west side; and 3) table of the *Cuayabnalli* (crown), dedicated to the sun and located on the east side of the plateau.

Participants

The Committee in the *Xochicalli*

The authorities in the *xochicalli* temple are: president, treasurer, secretary, *mayordomo*, and *comandante* (a major or captain). This hierarchical organization resembles the *cargo* system. These authorities take care of duties that concern cleaning, lighting candles and organizing the meals to cook for offerings. The main duties reside on the *mayordomo* / *mayordoma*, which consist of keeping the keys to the *xochicalli*, controlling access, and managing and supervising funds collected for the celebration. When all is decided, the authorities organize different groups among the congregations who take responsibility for duties and tasks that take place before, during and after the ceremony.

Godparents and Grandparents

The congregations with the supervision of the authorities designate two women and a men to take the roles of godparents and grandparents. The former couple provides the Chicomexochitl deity (consisting of two ‘children’) with clothing including blouses, pants, shoes and any other adornment such as hats and ear rings. Commonly they contribute the textile and commission a group to design the cloths according to the deity’s sizes. The grandparents assist with similar duties and divide the roles of taking care of the Chicomexochitl deity.

The Ritual Specialist

One of the central figures in the *chicomexochitl* celebration is the ritual specialist, a person who is knowledgeable enough to take care of the structure of the rituals, and the elements that interplay in the ceremonies such as the number and types of offerings and specific prayers. This celebrant is also acquainted with other public rituals such as the *tlamana* (ceremony for the sweet corn), and private ones like weddings, and *lava manos* (literarily ‘washing hands’, a ritual to seal the godparents commitment), among others. Often, the ritual specialist is also a local healer who possesses a wide knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants for treatments. In this region herbs are used for physical or psychological treatments. An essential quality of a ritual specialist is the given talent (*don*) that allows him to interact between the tangible and intangible worlds and invoke and communicate with deities. This given talent also aids in the process of healing while removing troubles of those that come to him searching for a cure. Thus, it is believed that the ritual specialist untangles the past including ancestral heritage, foresees the future, and searches into the present for sources of afflictions in his/her patients.

In the *chicomexochitl* ceremony, a gifted ritual specialist secures a successful ceremony that bridges between the congregation and the pantheon of deities. Many local stories describe powerful ritual specialists who brought the rain with a ceremony, and Otomis are particularly recognized for certain unique personal characteristics. Specific Otomi ritual specialists are often mentioned, such as Felix, Evaristo de la Cruz, and Juan Cabrera from Cruz Blanca. In 2011, I witnessed a *chicomexochitl* ceremony celebrated by Eugenia San Agustín Hernández, Evaristo’s daughter. When she arrived to Ixcacuatitla,

many attributed her special given talent (*don*) as a celebrant who carried a powerful heritage coming from her father's lineage. Many assured that the rain that came after her visit resulted of her work over those performed by others.

This image of powerful Otomi ritual specialist also includes older celebrants. A common story found around several towns tells about a very long draught that affected this area in the 1960s. A powerful Otomi ritual specialist with a missing right foot, offered a ceremony to a wide lagoon. By dancing and hitting the ground with the leg of the missing foot, he brought the rain. Many towns of different municipalities, Nahuas and others, peregrinated with this ritual specialist trusting his knowledge and power of his performance.⁶⁰ This story illustrates the figure of the ritual specialist as a powerful individual who brings the rain and heals. In other cases, some ritual specialists are associated with witchcraft and are often attributed this power to convoke the dead to cause evil tasks such as bringing sickness and even causing death.

Ritual specialists know a variety and wide repertoire of prayers for public and private rituals, broad understanding of local herbalism, healing and treatment of patients with a variety of physical and emotional sickness, and the ability to bridge the tangible and intangible realities. This knowledge has been transmitted orally from generation to generation through a master-pupil relationship enhanced by the experience and curiosity of the celebrant. Still, this knowledge only constitutes one piece in the puzzle that allows him or her to conduct the work, since knowledge alone would bring no results. In fact, what

⁶⁰ Curiously, the image of this ritual specialist strongly resembles the attributes of the Aztec god Tezcatlipoca, especially concerning his missing foot.

characterizes an efficient ritual specialist is the given talent, in many cases identified as given in birth, while in others an acquired skill that resulted from surviving a catastrophic or near-death experience. This talent differentiates these individuals from others in the ability to coexist between the tangible and intangible worlds.⁶¹

Musicians and their music in the *chicomexochitl*

The musical repertoire in the ceremony consists of about 150 *xochitl sones* (flower-musical pieces), that parallel the structure of the ceremony and carry the names of each event, where even deities and tables have their own musical pieces. Therefore, the sound of the Huastecan trio, violin, *jarana* (small guitar) and *huapanguera* (large guitar), accompanies the entire celebration. The violinist plays a series of melodies, which are accompanied rhythmically by the two guitars, while the sounds of a rattle and a bell are constantly interlocked with the music.

⁶¹ See Chapter Four for a detailed description of the tangible and intangible reality in relation to the natural landscape.

The congregation accompanies the events with dancing in front of the altars. Figure 17 is an example of the *son* ‘when finishing cutting the paper’.

♩=140

The musical score consists of five staves. The top three staves are for Violin, Jarana, and Huapanguera, all in 6/8 time and a key signature of three sharps. The Violin part features a descending melody with two phrases. The Jarana and Huapanguera parts provide harmonic accompaniment with chords. The bottom two staves are for Bell and Rattle, both in 2/4 time. The Bell part uses 'x' marks to represent strikes, and the Rattle part uses eighth notes to represent a rhythmic pattern.

Figure 17. Xochitl son ‘when finishing cutting the paper’. Transcription by the author. Pitch adjusted to A440 for transcription.

The piece in Figure 17 corresponds to the moment when the ritual specialist finished cutting the paper images that represent the deities. The congregation gathers dancing around the ritual specialist who is sitting on a small stool praying aloud to the cuts-paper images. The Huastecan trio plays the piece loudly several times until the violinist finishes the piece with a short cadence when the event ends. The musical elements of this *son* are examined below to illustrate the characteristics of the entire repertoire.

The above transcription shows that the descending melody in a disjunct motion consisting of two small symmetrical phrases: the first one is open moving towards the fifth while the second closes back to the tonic. The major key is suggested even though the melody lacks the seventh in the upper tetrachord. The *jarana* and *huapanguera* accompany

rhythmically the melody in a compound duple meter with chords corresponding to the tonic, dominant, and subdominant. The bell and rattle are set in a simple duple meter. This hemiola is a very characteristic polyrhythmic combination in the repertoire, where dancers follow both meters.⁶² While some participants mark the tempo with the compound duple meter, others maintain the simple duple meter with their bodies. The entire rhythmic accompaniment maintains these ostinato rhythmic patterns, creating a cyclical structure of the pieces.

The rhythmic structure features characteristics of the repertoire at large, varying between compound and simple meters including 6/8, 3/4, and 2/4. Considering the melodic structures, similar to the musical piece in Figure 17 most pieces contain two complementary phrases that constantly repeat, where some are asymmetrical. A narrow melodic range within an octave is common where most of the melodies vary between major and pentatonic scales. All melodies are played with a bowing technique in the violin while the accompaniment of the guitars follows a double strumming technique. The melodic characteristics together with the ostinato rhythm create a timeless feeling in the performance.

I argue that these characteristics of the musical elements, together with the large structure of musical pieces, enable participation and in particular those concerning dancing. This participation, which reflects the principle of communal reciprocity, is one of the requirements to establish the interactions among the congregation and further with the natural landscape to bring the rain. A common belief is that the performance of emotions

⁶² The hemiola or sesquialtera is a common characteristic in the repertoires of regional *sones* across Mexico. Considering the ubiquity of this rhythmic form, it has been argued that such rhythmic structures are inheritances of Medieval Spanish folk dances as well as of African music that arrived in Mexico during the Spanish colonial period (Chamorro 1951; Pérez Fernández 1990; Stanford 1972).

such as joy and sadness in the ceremony contributes to establish such interactions. Congregations value the display of emotions as a communal attempt that will eventually secure a successful ceremony. Local association with music and emotions together with the musical elements and the structure of the musical pieces in the ceremony enable me to examine the manner in which music articulates participation. The way that music articulates the performance of the congregation in a *chicomexochitl* ceremony is examined below in this chapter as well as in Chapters Six and Seven.

Furthermore, the sound of the trio in Nahua ritual music is very characteristic and distinguishes this music from other musical genres, and in particular from those of the mestizo population. Broadly the distinctions in sound correspond to the type of instruments used and the tuning system. In the Nahua towns of Chicontepec, the violin, *jarana*, and *huapanguera* are rustic instrument that musicians acquire in urban centers or through other musicians. In other cases, musicians that have developed professional skills look for luthiers and travel to other towns to buy more refined instruments. A well-known luthier in the area lives in the Nahua town of Texquitote Primero in the municipality of Matlapa, state of San Luis Potosí. Often, musicians from Chicontepec travel to buy or repair their instruments with this luthier. Although the difference in quality, still most instruments portray roughness particularly in the resonance bodies and the pegs.

An additional element of the sound quality in the *xochitl sones* is the tuning system. During my visits to the Nahua towns most of the violin players were concerned with pitch accuracy in their playing, while the other musicians were more flexible and let the instruments get out of pitch without re-tuning the instruments. In some occasions the violin

player encouraged the other musicians to tune or did it himself during the brakes. Rather than a defined pitch there is a rather relative one that moves according to the performers. Often the violinist tunes first and the other instrumentalists follow. To tune, musicians identify the intervals between the strings without a specific pitch. The tuning is specific to the *xochitl sones* and differs from other musical genres such as the *canarios* (musical pieces often played in rites of passage such as weddings) and Huastecan *son*. While the tuning for ritual music was identified as *xochitl sones*-tuning and lacks any reference to a particular pitch, the *canarios* and Huastecan *son* tuning was referred as to be in G.

Figure 18 is a table containing both tunings systems common in the Nahua towns of Chicontepec:

<i>Xochitl Sones</i> tuning	<i>Canarios</i> and Huastecan <i>son</i> tuning
Violin: four strings	
4 th — E 3 rd — A 2 nd — E 1 st — B	4 th — G 3 rd — D 2 nd — A 1 st — E
Jarana: five strings	
5 th — F 4 th — B \flat 3 rd — A 2 nd — E 1 st — B	5 th — G 4 th — B 3 rd — D 2 nd — F \sharp 1 st — A
Huapanguera: six strings including doubles	
6 th — F 5 th — A \sharp 4 th — A \sharp 3 rd — D \sharp 2 nd — G 1 st — C	6 th — G 5 th — G (lower octave) 4 th — G (middle) 3 rd — D 2 nd — B 1 st — E

Figure 18. Tuning systems common in the Nahua towns of Chicontepec of the trio instruments for *xochitl sones*, *canarios* and Huastecan *son*. Collected by the author during fieldwork.

Moreover, most of the musicians are farmers so their hands contain calluses, cracks and other signs of their work in the fields. Perhaps this is another element that adds some rough qualities to the performances. In the towns, however, the ability of musicians is recognized not necessarily for any particular virtuoso talents of the musicians, but rather for the feeling that they transmit when playing their instruments. This feeling responds to the

particular articulations, vibratos, or small melismatic notes that are added to the performances of the *xochitl sones*. In particular, the violinist is often recognized for his contribution to the performance in the ceremony and for his individual ability in interpreting the music. Some of the characteristics recognized in the musicians have particular value that are attributed to the place that ritual music occupies in balancing the polarities of good and bad as two principles that govern *la costumbre*. Music in this context pertains to both polarities.⁶³

Ritual music has multiple uses in the context of the chicomexochitl ceremony. For some ritual specialists, music aids them to concentrate while creating the space that enables them to fully conduct their work. For the congregation, it is a quite common belief that one cannot just talk directly to mountains because they do not listen, but rather it is the music that announces that the congregation has arrived so their offerings and petitions will be well received. Music is also the element that allows the community to interact with the world of deities and share forces that interplay in quotidian life, which are particularly activated in the context of the ritual.⁶⁴ Among these elements, ritual music is relevant to engage the congregation in participation. The value attributed to this participation responds to the principle of communal reciprocity that governs social interactions and is also part of the organization of the ceremonies. In this participation the performances of emotions are also presented as offerings.

⁶³ Chapter Six contains a detailed description of the role of music in *la costumbre*, within the context of the balance between the two polarities.

⁶⁴ Steven Friedson has observed a similar use of music in communicating with the spirits realm in healing rituals among the Tumbuka (Friedson 1996). See Chapter Four for the use of music in the context of the tangible and intangible characteristics of the natural landscape in the Nahua towns.

The events that structure the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies involve different dramatic moments in which the central character is the corn deity, the Chicomexochitl. Often the violin player, as the leader of the trio, works together with the ritual specialist to carefully place the pieces with their corresponding events. In fact the musicians are the only celebrants that closely accompany the ritual specialist throughout the entire ceremony, from the moment the ritual specialist places offerings in his household altar, through the days he arrives to the *xochicalli* and later when all go on a pilgrimage to the mountain's summit. Furthermore, when the ceremony ends the ritual specialist returns to his house where he continues to offer food, light candles, and burn copal with the accompaniment of the musicians.⁶⁵

The characteristics of ritual musicians are identified not only as good performers, but also as carriers of the received talent that enables the audience to engage emotionally. This particular characteristic is prized in this ceremony since emotions are considered an essential part in the body of offerings presented to the Chicomexochitl deity and so important factors to the success of the ceremony. Regarding the importance of emotional performances, Pedro, a collaborator from the towns of Ixcacuatitla explained:

“If I do not cry, they will not believe me; then, they will not provide us with water.”⁶⁶
(Personal interview, May 2010)

⁶⁵ Often, the ritual specialist summons the musicians to work not only in different *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies, but also in other public and family rituals or healing treatments; several healers further utilize music to treat psychological and physical illness.

⁶⁶“Es que si no lloro no me creen y no nos dan el agua.” (Personal interview, May 2010)

The willingness to perform emotions is present throughout the celebration among the participant's duties. Since the musical pieces are arranged according to the events as a narration in a non-verbal form, the music carries the narrative of the events and their emotional content. In this, dancing is a continuous aspect of participation and often, female elders danced in front of the Chicomechitl image to the rhythm and melodies of the *xochitl sones*, expressing that their dancing will bring joy to the deity. Similarly, the dancing performance of emotions illustrates the commitment of the dancers to the worship. In this context, musicians of ritual music are prized not only because they embody the repertoire but also because they are bearers of certain knowledge that concerns rituals. A particular belief, in fact, is that music carries powerful forces that are activated in the ritual; therefore, musicians should avoid playing *xochitl sones* in inappropriate contexts such as cantinas.⁶⁷

The congregation

Many arrive to offer to the mountain with the purpose of receiving communal and individual needs and any participant is welcome to attend as long as he or she undertakes tasks, donate supplies such as candles, corn flour for tortillas, or *chile*, and participate in all the events. When non-local communities carry out the celebration, commonly these arrive to the *xochicalli* at Ixcacuatitla and spend the night there before peregrinating to the mountain's summit. The attendants vary between only adults and elders as in the case of Ixcacuatitla, to more diverse populations where even the whole community may participate, as in the case of the towns of Limon and Las Siletas.

⁶⁷ See Stobart (1994) for a similar case of the value attributed to music in relationship to agricultural cycles.

Elements

Catholic and non-Catholic Deities

In the *cargo* system, festivities for patron saints occupy a high place in the hierarchy of celebrations within the religious calendar and are often associated with dates that mark seasonal cycles. In Ixcacuatitla, the *chicomexochitl* often takes place on May 15th, the day of the patron Saint Isidore the Laborer, which suggests a relationship to the cargo system.⁶⁸ During the celebration, the image of the patron saint is kept in the main altar of the *xochicalli*, together with other images of saints, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. However, the main characters in the *chicomexochitl* belong to the non-Christian pantheon that encompasses a large number of deities mostly represented with cut-paper images of different types of paper, colors, and sizes.⁶⁹ Each deity possesses specific attributes and functions according to their characteristics, which determine their location on the tables placed either in the *xochicalli*, the mountain, or the springs.

The large groups of cut-paper images portray structures of humanoid shapes of both sexes, with square heads, eyes, a mouth, and raised hands. The different attributes that characterize them are represented by the numbers and shapes of pointy symbols on the heads, and other illustrations on their bodies. There are four main groups of paper-cut images following the paper types and sizes: a) large images of about fifteen inches of *papel revolución* (newspaper) and *papel brillante* (glossy), of the *Chicomexochitl*, *Atxinola*, and the

⁶⁸ The structure of the cargo system is still present in Ixcacuatitla's political organization. See Chapter Two for a detailed description.

⁶⁹ The cut-paper images are named *tlatecmeh* in Nahuatl or '*recortes*' in Spanish.

Grandparents;⁷⁰ b) middle-sized images of about eight inches made of *papel china* (decorative paper) and representing the *ehecamēh*; c) representations of about eight inches of the Witnesses, made of *papel estraza* (Kraft paper); d) middle-sized shapes of about seven inches made with *papel revolución* (white newspaper), which are the large number of homogenous shapes of deities that are placed in *petlameh* (reed mats) on both levels of tables.

⁷⁰ Among all deities, the large cut-paper images of the Chicomexochitl, Atxinola, and Grandparents are the only ones represented with clothing.

Large paper-cut images with newspaper (*Papel revolución*) Chicomexochitl (Seven Flower)

The Chicomexochitl deity is represented with seven cut-paper images indicating the number represented in his name: *chicome* (seven) and *xochitl* (flower). The colorful images are folded inside two additional cut-paper images of the same deity made of white newspaper.

The seven paper-cut images of different colors in Figure 19 represents seeds of seven corn types:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. white | <i>chipabuac</i> |
| 2. yellow | <i>coztic</i> |
| 3. black | <i>yayabuic</i> |
| 4. red | <i>tlatlacintli</i> |
| 5. <i>xocoyolli</i> | <i>pinto</i> or <i>rayado</i> corn (spotted) |
| 6. <i>cintenantzi</i> (<i>cincaponze</i>) | a cob with only 4 grains |
| 7. <i>cintemiquetzi</i> | a cob with no tip, believed to be the mother |



Figure 19. Seven cut-paper images representing the Chicomexochitl deity. Chicomexochitl Ceremony. Ixcacuatitla-Los Pinos, February, 2011. Photo by the author.

Additionally, the representation of seeds of pumpkin, chayote, sweet potato, and onion are embedded in the different colors, named 'Fruit Chicomexochitl'.⁷¹ Representing this deity are also three cobs and two candles, one of each Chicomexochitl, a girl and a boy, wrapped with handkerchiefs and accompanied by twenty four *coyol* arrangements on each one.

Atxinola, Apanxinola, or Sirena (Mermaid)

The *Atxinola* is the water goddess that comes from water and brings the rain. A male partner, whose name is *Apanquixtiano*, accompanies the *Atxinola*.⁷² The main attributes of this deity are a green dress for the female, a blue dress for the male, and a clay pot. During the ceremony one image of this deity and her partner are left behind on the water sources either being rivers, springs, or lagoons; while the others are left in the middle of the Postectli Mountain in one of the tables where a spring is located. This deity and her male partner are also present in smaller sizes and with no dresses amid the paper-cut images of the *petlameh* deities located on the upper levels on the main table of the *xochicalli*, in the well, and on the main table at the top of the mountain.

⁷¹ I have recorded different interpretations concerning the representation of the seven colors that constitute the deity; however, all agreed that the different colors represent seeds of different corn types or grains and vegetables. Some variations include colors such as blue for corn and beans, and green and red for chile.

⁷² The deity's name and that of her partner in Nahuatl refer to foreigners: *apan* (well) *xinola* (foreigner) or *at* (deriving from *atl*, water) *xinola* (foreigner); and for her male partner *apan* (well) *quixtiano*, (derives from the Spanish word for 'Christian' and used during the Colonial Period to denominate someone of Spanish origin) (Lockhart 2001). These names might suggest that this deity is an adaptation of the mermaid image that arrived with the Spanish. Most of the descriptions about this deity, in fact, follow the common image of a woman being part human and part fish. A similar case of an association of a water-goddess with the mermaid has been observed in Peru by Thomas Turino (1983).

Grandparents

These images are dressed up with traditional clothing consisting of a white shirt and pants made of thick cotton fabric for the Grandfather; while a blouse with the local embroidery and a colorful skirt for the Grandmother. The participants carry the Grandparents to the second station in the mountain and leave them inside a cave. Some of the associations with these images are concerned with the ancestors.

Cut-paper images with decorative paper (*papel china*) Ehecameh

The group of *Ehecameh* deities is represented by eight colorful cut-paper images, which are used to perform the cleansing rites, both in the ceremony and outside it.

Name	Color
1. <i>tlazintlan ehecatl</i>	green
2. <i>tlalixco ehecatl</i>	yellow
3. <i>tlatzintlan ehecatl</i>	red
4. <i>tlalixco ehecatl</i>	red
5. <i>(tlalixco) cimarron ehecatl</i>	black
6. <i>tlatzoehecatl</i>	red
7. <i>tliehecatl</i>	green
8. <i>yohnalehecatl</i>	yellow

Cut-paper Images with Kraft paper (*papel estraza* or *xapo amatl*) Witnesses:

The images of the Witnesses, another representation of a deity, are made of Kraft paper and are used for different purposes.

- for the soil
- for the mountain
- for the house hanging from a string

Paper-cut images with newspaper for the *petlameh* (reed matt)

This homogenous group of deities represented with cut-paper images of white newspaper of about seven inches, are found on all tables. The shapes possess individual attributes that differentiate them and determine their role in the ritual. The ritual specialist organizes the groups on different *petlameh* (mats made of palm fronds), which are placed according to the tables' divisions, following the lower ledge dedicated to earth while the upper one to God.⁷³ The *petlatl* is made of a large sheet of newspaper that contains either twenty, forty, eighty, one hundred, or one hundred and twenty pieces.⁷⁴ The numbers are extremely high so the ritual specialist dedicates most of the three days previous to the peregrination to the mountain summit to give shape to the cut-paper images of deities. As a trained specialist, the ritual specialist is often the only person to perform such a task, since the celebrant possesses the designated scissor, which is given to him or her in an initiation ceremony. Rarely does the celebrant receive aid from another ritual specialist, but if this happens, it is commonly a pupil who has acquired the knowledge and has received a personal pair of scissor. During the process of designing the images, the ritual specialist evokes deities to come to the ceremony, hence the delicate implications concerning the scissors and the process of cutting the paper.

⁷³ *Petlatl* (pl. *petlameh*) translates as a reed mat. However, in the ceremony all mats made of paper where deities are grouped together are also named *petlameh*, as well as the large mat placed in the center of the *xochicalli* to collect every piece of paper that falls in the process of the ritual specialist giving shape to the cut-paper images.

⁷⁴ The number four and its multiples are also recurrent in this case, as shown in the number of pieces assigned to each *petlatl*.

General organization of the *petlameh* (reed mat)

The tables located on the three centers of worship, the *xochicalli*, the well, and the mountain, carry arrangements of deities on the *petlameh* reed mat. The *petlameh* is the first layer placed on the tables before the offerings. Regarding the *petlameh*'s location, each space is well defined in between the two layers of the table, as explained above: up to God, down to earth. Some deities correspond to cloud, thunder, lightning, wind, water, fire, and earth. Others represent deities such as copal incense burner, candle, cross, and tap water; while others, mountain and the mermaid. Some deities are specific to the tables, while others are recurrent or carry the same name but bear different attributes indicating their difference—as is the case of the different types of *Ehecatl* deities corresponding to the wind or winds. For example, on the first table located as a main altar inside the *xochicalli*, the lower level deities for earth are: mother, father, cross, and crown. On the upper level are a variety of sixteen deities some of which are: copal burner, tap, Mother Mountain, Father Mountain, lightning, *ehecatl*, and clouds, among others. Most of the deities are represented in couples with female and male attributes.

Other cut-paper images Cuayahualli

Translated as 'crown', the *Cuayahualli* represents the Sun God and it is placed on top of the mountain's summit on a big pole marking the last stage of the ceremony. Baby chickens and turkeys are hanged upside down to die as an offering to the sun.

Colors associated with deities:

water/mermaid	green/blue
sun/mountain	yellow/blue
fire	red
wind	white
earth	brown
sun	green, yellow, purple, blue, red ⁷⁵

Other elements

Baton

The baton carries eight *coyol* arrangements, seven ribbons of the Chicomexochitl colors, and a handkerchief. It is believed that the baton aids the person who owns it by providing guidance, similar to a president portrayed with a baton. It is often used in cleansing rites.

Candles

There are two types, tallow and yellow candles, which in various numbers are placed on every altar. A particular aspect of the candles is that every person that participates in the celebration carries these to light them in each altar. Also, many bring a thicker white candle, often in a glass vase, for a healer to perform a cleansing rite and bless the candle at the central altar on the mountain's summit. This candle is later carried back to the houses and placed on the household altar.

⁷⁵ Some ritual specialists identify the same colors of the sun with those of music. Moreover, in some situations the sun is portrayed with all colors. This might suggest the illustration of the pole on top of the mountain with the offerings to the sun, and with the colorful ribbons that are placed on top and stretched to different directions.

Copal, Bell, and Rattle

A copal burner, a bell, and a rattle are active parts of each stage in the ceremony. A designated person either burns copal, rings the bell, or shakes the rattle, or rather the participants randomly take part in this activity. The sound of the bell is used to call the deities and also announces that the congregation is arriving to the mountain.

Numbers: 4

The number four or its multiples are recurrent in the division of days, *coyol* arrangements, the cobs in the images of the Chicomexochitl, and cut-paper images in each *petlatl*, among others. Also this applies to the days of the celebration between four, eight, or twelve.

The chicomexochitl ceremonies require the preparation of many elements and an enormous amount of work. The ritual specialist designs the deities and prepares all the offerings while the congregation is busy with making the arrangements of flowers and palms, dancing, cooking, and cleaning. During four days the ritual specialist, the musicians, and the congregation prepare all the requirements to offer to the water sources and the mountains, expecting to receive the rain and other benefits for personal and communal wellbeing.

Events

The description below refers to the last three days of one ceremony, where the ritual specialist finishes cutting the paper and starts the process of placing the offerings on tables. This stage is marked with intense joy since all preparations are getting ready for the

celebration of the *tlatlalia tlaixpan* (placing the offerings).⁷⁶ The events are grouped on Day Two, Day Three, and Day Four, culminating with the peregrination up to the mountain's summit and the return back to the *xochicalli*. Considering the complexity of the *chicomexochitl*, the descriptions below are merely intended to illustrate the particularities of the offerings where the performances of emotions emphasize the importance of participating and being engaged for the ceremony to be well received.

Day Two

The *xochicalli* temple is the meeting point for the second day. The participants start arriving from the early morning hours to take care of cooking and prepare marigold flowers and *coyol* arrangements. The ritual specialist laboriously cuts the paper, sitting at the center of the *xochicalli* temple in front of a large *petlatl* (reed mat), where he deposits every single piece of paper that falls during the cutting process. The musicians sit on one side of the *xochicalli* temple. The participants ring a bell in turns, which is located close by where the ritual specialist is sitting and cutting the paper.

The work is divided into groups separated by gender roles: women take care of cooking, which often happens in a different room dedicated to the kitchen or outside the *xochicalli* temple in a fire-pit adapted for large pots, while men prepare flowers and *coyol* arrangements while sitting together on the benches outside the *xochicalli*. Only the cleaning includes many people of both sexes who sweep and remove old offerings, candles, and flowers from tables while the committee in charge supervises the tasks. When everyone is

⁷⁶ The transcription of this piece and other details appear above in the section 'Musicians and their music' (Figure 17).

busy with their responsibilities they exchange stimulating conversations. Since the groups divide the labor between women and men, I often spent time with the group of women. While working the women often told funny anecdotes about their husbands, to which we usually responded with loud laughs.

The ritual specialist shapes the cut-paper images for the *petlameh* in an order that follows the tables' location starting from the *xochicalli* temple towards the well, until reaching the last table on the mountain's summit. At this stage, the music is a combination of different pieces that correspond to different events of the whole ceremony, and on occasions these reflect a particular deity that the ritual specialist is cutting. Often a group of elders get together to dance in front of the main altar (Figure 20).



Figure 20. Members of the congregation dancing in the *xochicalli*. Chicomexochitl Ceremony. Ixcacuatitla-Los Pinos, Feb. 2011. Photo by the author.

In one instance the ritual specialist elaborating the *petlatl* for the main table in the *xochicalli*, and gave shape to *Tlil* (the deity of fire), while the musicians played the musical piece *son de la Lumbre* (son of the fire). This piece also parallels the event when the ritual specialist places the deity on its corresponding table. The musicians also accompany the process of emotional upheaval that the ritual specialist goes through during the ceremony. On one occasion, the ritual specialist started to weep while cutting paper and listening to the *son* that the musicians were playing, about which he said: “[the music], as if you want to cry, it opens your heart. We will end but music remains, this makes me sad”⁷⁷ (personal interview, April 2011).

Day Three

The ritual specialist continues the paper-cutting process from the early morning, opening the large reed *petlatl* that contains all the pieces left the day before. At this moment, the musicians play the *son de la laguna* (*son* of the lagoon), to which the ritual specialist replied: “the violin sounds like it is praying, the violin sings”.⁷⁸ While opening the *petlatl*, the images are arranged one on top of the other and the celebrant passes copal incense over the *petlatl*, musicians, and tables, and pours sugarcane liquor on the four corners of the *petlatl*. The violinist passes the violin over the copal smoke, asking for the music to be better and strong and wishing the same for the ritual specialist’s pair of scissors. Each person entering the *xochicalli* temple bows in front of the large *petlatl*, greets the ritual specialist, and walks towards the main altar bowing and spreading copal smoke in the following order: on the

⁷⁷ “[la música] como si quisieras llorar te abre el corazón. Nosotros nos acabamos pero la música sigue y me pone triste.”⁷⁷ (Personal interview, April 2011).

⁷⁸ “es como si estuviera rezando el violín, está cantando”

main table, the main *petlatl*, the musicians, the table for the fire, and the table for the cross. The godmother of the Chicomexochitl deity cleans the *xochicalli* and puts on the tables coffee, candles, and copal. A group of female elders dance in front of the main table, following the rhythm of the music while some weep (Figure 21).

♩=130

The musical score is arranged in three staves. The top staff is for Violin, the middle for Huapanguera, and the bottom for Bells. All staves are in 6/8 time and have a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Violin part begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The second measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The third measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The fourth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The fifth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The sixth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The seventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The eighth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The ninth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The tenth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The eleventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The twelfth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The thirteenth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The fourteenth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The fifteenth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The sixteenth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The seventeenth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The eighteenth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The nineteenth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The twentieth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The twenty-first measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The twenty-second measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The twenty-third measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The twenty-fourth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The twenty-fifth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The twenty-sixth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The twenty-seventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The twenty-eighth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The twenty-ninth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The thirtieth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The thirty-first measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The thirty-second measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The thirty-third measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The thirty-fourth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The thirty-fifth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The thirty-sixth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The thirty-seventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The thirty-eighth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The thirty-ninth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The fortieth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The forty-first measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The forty-second measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The forty-third measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The forty-fourth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The forty-fifth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The forty-sixth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The forty-seventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The forty-eighth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The forty-ninth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The fiftieth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The fifty-first measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The fifty-second measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The fifty-third measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The fifty-fourth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The fifty-fifth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The fifty-sixth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The fifty-seventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The fifty-eighth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The fifty-ninth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The sixtieth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The sixty-first measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The sixty-second measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The sixty-third measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The sixty-fourth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The sixty-fifth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The sixty-sixth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The sixty-seventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The sixty-eighth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The sixty-ninth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The seventieth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The seventy-first measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The seventy-second measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The seventy-third measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The seventy-fourth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The seventy-fifth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The seventy-sixth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The seventy-seventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The seventy-eighth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The seventy-ninth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The eightieth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The eighty-first measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The eighty-second measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The eighty-third measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The eighty-fourth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The eighty-fifth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The eighty-sixth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The eighty-seventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The eighty-eighth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The eighty-ninth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The ninetieth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The ninety-first measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The ninety-second measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The ninety-third measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The ninety-fourth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The ninety-fifth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The ninety-sixth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The ninety-seventh measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The ninety-eighth measure contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The ninety-ninth measure has a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note A4. The hundredth measure consists of a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4.

Figure 21. Xochitl son ‘to spread copal’. Transcription by the author. Pitch adjusted to A440 for transcription.

The process of cutting the paper and preparing arrangements of *coyol* and marigold flowers arrangements lasts throughout the day. The ritual specialist carefully organizes all cut-paper images as offerings for each table, including tables that repeat such as in the case of different water sources in the community which includes rivers, springs, and wells. As the day progresses more people arrive to populate the *xochicalli*. The musicians play a combination of *sones*, some of which related to the deities that the ritual specialist gives shape to while others are randomly chosen. The number of dancers in front of the main table gradually increases. The ritual specialist finishes with the *petlatl* images of the last table on the

mountain's summit, with deities representing copal bearer, candle, cross, mermaid, lighting, *Ehecatl* (wind), clouds, mountain, and *Ehecatl Cimarrón*.⁷⁹

Finishing with the *petlatl* images, the ritual specialist proceeds to cut the large cut-paper images of newspaper (*papel revolución*). When ready, the 'Godparents' dress up the deities carefully following their attributes, and together with other helpers sit on the floor over the *petlatl*, where two images of the Chicomexochitl girl and boy, the 'Grandparents', and three pairs of the Mermaid and her partner, get prepared. The images of the Chicomexochitl, which were placed the year before, are removed from the table and brought to the large *petlatl*, and in fact, every piece of paper left out of the cuts or belonging to any deity is collected in the large *petlatl*. During this stage, many approach the *petlatl* to witness the dressing of the deities, while dancers, mainly female elders, participate in groups maintaining together a constant rhythmic pace. Copal is burned constantly and some of the dancers ring the bell in turns. Often this stage is an emotional moment where many of the dancers cry in sympathy for the Chicomexochitl, who as a child, cries alone out in the corn field and suffers out for the lack of rain.

When the large cut-paper images are dressed up and are ready with all the accessories, these are placed inside *morrales* (palm-woven bags) together with arrangements of *coyol* and marigold flowers, and food offerings such as sweet beverages or candy matching the color of each deity. During the ceremony both types of deities —grandparents and mermaid—are left on altars either on the water sources or the mountain, while the godmother carries the

⁷⁹ Some of the meanings of *cimarrón* in Spanish refer to animals that previously being domesticated, have become wild again.

Chicomexochitl images throughout the peregrination to the mountain's summit and brings them back to the *xochicalli* to place them later in the altar. These images and the cobs will remain on the main table at the *xochicalli* during the whole year until the next chicomexochitl ceremony.

In the early evening of the day, the ritual specialist finishes with all required paper-cut images, in which stage everybody starts to gather around the large *petlatl* bringing together the offerings in baskets and preparing for the next day. All the baskets are large and are divided according to each table with offerings following the deities' attributes such as numbers for *coyol* and marigold flowers, and colors for candy and sweet beverages such as juice or sodas. The baskets for deities on the ledge for earth, in addition, contain tobacco, beer, and sugarcane liquor. Moreover, chickens and turkeys for sacrifice are brought and everyone joins in a dance in front of the *petlatl* carrying the bags with deities, baskets of offerings, and birds (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Event 'dancing with the offerings'. Chicomexochitl Ceremony. Ixcacuatitla-Los Pinos, Feb. 2011. Photo by the author.

Figure 22 shows the congregation carrying the baskets and *morrales* (palm-woven bags) where the serious expressions soon transform to joy since the stage to finally place the offerings is about to start. In an extra basket, the ritual specialist collects every piece of paper left from the cutting process. The reminding pieces of paper are deposited on the mountain's summit during the ceremony.

The whole congregation hangs around, some resting while others talking in the expectation for the next stage to start. Most women are busy in the kitchen preparing food offerings consisting of chicken and turkey soup, chocolate, and coffee. When everything is ready, a cleansing rite is performed for each participant in the ceremony. The musicians play the following *son* Figure 23:

♩=162

The musical score consists of two systems of three staves each. The top system includes Violin, Jarana, and Huapanguera. The bottom system includes Violin (labeled 'Vln.'), Jarana (labeled 'Jar.'), and Huapanguera (labeled 'Hua'). All staves are in the key of D major (indicated by two sharps) and 6/8 time. The Violin part features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The Jarana and Huapanguera parts provide a harmonic accompaniment using chords and rhythmic patterns. The Jarana and Huapanguera parts include a small '8' below the first measure of the second system, likely indicating a specific rhythmic or fingering instruction. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Figure 23. Xochitl son ‘for the sweeping’. Transcription by the author. Pitch adjusted to A440 for transcription. This piece is performed without the bell or the rattle.

With the sound and rhythm of the music (Figure 23) the rite starts following the same elements and structure of other cleansing procedures including the *ebecameh* deities, an egg, candles, and the bundle of cleansing plants. In addition, however, two very distinctive elements are introduced: a) a chicken sacrifice over the *ebecameh* deities; and b) a branch with the shape of a large circle is held to perform the cleansing process on the participants by allowing groups of four or five people to pass in turns through the attached branches: four on each side, giving a total of eight times.⁸⁰ Each participant must pass through the circle including the celebrants and the musicians. When the cleansing rite is complete, the circle is torn apart and deposited in a bag so later the celebrant can take and bury all elements in an isolated area. This procedure is similar to the regular cleansing rite, where it is believed that the utilized elements carry what has been removed from the bodies; therefore, everything is collected and buried away from roads and towns until eventually all disappears.⁸¹

The cleansing rite marks the beginning of continuous events that take place throughout the night. Sometimes the *xochicalli*'s hosts provide food for the congregation but often only coffee and bread circulate. The musicians play constantly and, in turns, many dance in front of the main altar with the bell and spreading *copal* smoke. Among the highlights are the events of 'the dancing of the birds' and 'giving the birds to drink', where all chickens and turkeys destined for sacrifice are presented in front of the main table in the *xochicalli* (Figure 24). Both events are accompanied by *xochitl sones*, each of which possesses

⁸⁰ In some ceremonies the number varies to seven: three on one side and four on the other.

⁸¹ In some occasions a black baby turkey is sacrificed at the beginning of the cleansing rite.

the corresponding name that illustrate the event that is taking place. Therefore, the names of the musical pieces are ‘the dancing of the birds’ and ‘giving the birds to drink’.

The ‘dancing of the birds’ is characterized by an intense interaction of the congregation (Figure 24). Often people that have donated the birds for sacrifice are the ones that carry the animals and gather in front of the main altar to dance. While the process when the ritual specialist cuts the paper is characterized by silence and calm, ‘dances of the birds’ is a highly contrasting experience since the *xochicalli* is filled with the loud sound of the trio music, the rattle and the bell, the sounds that the animals produce and those of people talking.



Figure 24. Event ‘dancing of the birds’. Chicomexochitl Ceremony. Ixcacuatitla-Los Pinos, Feb. 2011. Photo by the author.

Figure 24 shows a participant carrying two chickens for sacrifice while the ‘Grandmother’ of the Chicomexochitl deity rings the bell while holding a large crucifix. All are dancing around the violin and the *huapanguera*. The ritual specialist recites the prayers and very loudly talks to the deities in front of the main table, as if he is attempting to place his voice over the sounds and noises of the background.

The musical piece (Figure 25) for the event is the following:

♩=155

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Violin, Jarana, Huapanguera, Bells, and Rattle. The second system includes staves for Vln., Jar., Hua., Be., and Chn. The music is in 6/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Violin part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Jarana and Huapanguera parts consist of dense, rhythmic chordal patterns. The Bells part is a simple rhythmic pattern of eighth notes marked with 'x'. The Rattle part consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system continues the instrumental parts, with the Vln. part ending with a final note and a repeat sign.

Figure 25. Xochitl Son ‘dancing of the birds’. Transcription by the author. Pitch adjusted to A440 for transcription.

The offering process begins as the night advances. The pattern is similar for each table, varying only in the type of offerings and deities which are specific to each table. In the process, the ritual specialist approaches the table and spreads *copal* smoke, reciting out loud a long prayer as appearing to attempt a dialogue with the deities. After a long duration of the prayer the celebrant places the paper-cut images on both table ledges, sacrifices the birds, and spreads their blood over the images. Eventually, one of the participants who have been

in charge of the ceremony, either a *xochicalli* authority or other person that has largely contributed to the ceremony, puts his initials on the images as a symbol of making the transaction official. Then, the food is placed, consisting of chicken soup, chocolate, coffee, candy, soda, and juices. On top of the food, a large portion of bread is distributed all over the table and people light candles. Additionally, for the earth ledge the ritual specialist spreads beer, sugarcane liquor and lights cigarettes. The music constantly accompanies all the events and people dance in front of the table during the entire process. This event is replicated equally for all tables in the *xochicalli*, for the cross, and the fire.

When the offerings have been placed, the ritual specialist sits on the side of the table for the cross which is located in the main entrance, and designs with the special pair of scissors images of goods such as cars, houses, and animals—cattle, pigs, chickens, etc. The representations are handed to the participants, believing that by receiving the image the deities will eventually provide them with the actual goods. The night passes by and some of the congregation leaves to return in the next day's early morning, while others fall sleep in the *xochicalli*. The musicians maintain the music until eventually they also fall asleep.

Day Four

The activities start before dawn when the ritual specialist lights candles, copal, and spreads smoke, while reciting a prayer in front of the main table to later proceed with the other two tables in the *xochicalli* temple. As the sun rises, a small group of participants together with the ritual specialist proceeds to place the offerings outside the *xochicalli* to the Tzitzimitl table located on the north-east side of the mountain's foothill. This post is treated with care, since the deity is identified as an angry elder and sometimes related to witchcraft.

To maintain a balanced relationship and avoiding disturbing her, the peregrination to this table is limited to a few participants headed by the ritual specialist and musicians. When returning from this post, many arrive at the *xochicalli* and all engage in preparations to go on pilgrimage to the other tables. The offerings are gathered together at the center of the *xochicalli*, including chicken and turkey soup, baskets with all the food, *petlameh* with the cut-paper images, *coyol* and marigold flowers, and reed-bags with the large cut-paper images.

Everybody gathers in front of the main table carrying the offerings and dancing to the music's rhythm. The unorganized crowd eventually forms a circle where the ritual specialist leads with prayers and dances, holding the *copal* burner in his hand. Eventually, the celebrant moves from the main table to the exit of the *xochicalli* and walks towards the Mermaid's tables, which are located at the water sources. All follow the ritual specialist, transitioning from dancing to walking at a very homogenous pace to reach the next stop.

A table for the mermaid deity is located on the side of the well; an additional table is placed on the floor, which is dedicated to the deity *Tlitl* (fire). While the former table follows the same details consisting of an arch, a cross, and two ledges, the latter consists of a large sheet of paper that is placed on the floor.⁸² The *petlameh* reed mats of deities corresponding to each tables are placed on both levels. The congregation gathers in front of the table, where the ritual specialist proceeds to handle the offerings including food and flowers. A lot of commotion takes place. Assisting the ritual specialist, people start shouting to each other searching for the appropriate offerings. The celebrant talks to the table attempting to interact with the deities and, in particular, to request the mermaid deity to bring the rain. Gradually,

⁸² Tables for the mermaid deity are placed in the water sources such as rivers, wells, or lagoons.

all the items are placed on the tables, where some follow the particular attributes of the mermaid deity represented with the colors green and blue in candy and in beverages. Finishing with the offerings, the images of the mermaid and her companion *Apanquixtiano* are both placed inside a clay pot over the table that will be left in the well until the next ceremony. The series of *sones* played are of fast tempo and loud. When all is done, the ritual specialist raises the copal burner and turns to the congregation, thanking the sky and the saints and mentions several names such as San Juan. The pace of the activities starts to slow down, while the crowd expresses joy and satisfaction that all the offerings have been placed. The celebrant blows into a clay whistle while he starts dancing with joy with the copal burner in his hand (Figure 26).



Figure 26. Ritual specialist blowing in a clay whistle. Chicomexochitl Ceremony. February, 2011. Photo by the author.

The musicians play the following piece (Figure 27):

♩=160

Violin

Jarana

Huapanguera

Bells

Rattle

Figure 27 is a musical score for a piece titled 'Xochitl son 'when the ritual specialist dances''. The score is arranged in five staves. The top staff is for Violin (Vln.) in treble clef, showing a melodic line starting with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4 and B4, and ending with a double bar line. The second staff is for Jarana (Jar.) in treble clef, showing a series of chords. The third staff is for Huapanguera (Hua.) in bass clef, also showing a series of chords. The fourth staff is for Bells (Be.) in a percussion clef, showing a rhythmic pattern of three eighth notes marked with an 'x'. The fifth staff is for Rattle (Rat.) in a percussion clef, showing a rhythmic pattern of three quarter notes. A rehearsal mark '8' is placed above the first measure of the Vln. staff and below the first measure of the Jar. staff.

Figure 27. Xochitl son ‘when the ritual specialist dances’. Transcription by the author. Pitch adjusted to A440 for transcription.

When finishing with the offerings to the well, the crowd walks towards the mountain. A meandering trail on the south side of the town of Ixcacuatitla leads to the entrance. The ritual specialist and the musicians are at the head of the procession and together with the crowd all follow the trail in a moderate pace carrying the offerings in baskets and reed bags. Figure 28 is the piece that corresponds to this event:

♩=115

Figure 28 is a musical score for a piece corresponding to the event described. The score is arranged in five staves. The top staff is for Violin in treble clef, showing a melodic line in 6/8 time. The second staff is for Jarana in treble clef, showing a series of chords. The third staff is for Huapanguera in bass clef, also showing a series of chords. The fourth staff is for Bells in a percussion clef, showing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes marked with an 'x'. The fifth staff is for Rattle in a percussion clef, showing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. A rehearsal mark '8' is placed above the first measure of the Jarana staff and below the first measure of the Huapanguera staff.

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Vln., Jar., Hua., Be., and Rat. The score is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Vln. part starts at measure 7 and features a melodic line. The Jar. part starts at measure 8 and features a rhythmic accompaniment of chords. The Hua. part features a rhythmic accompaniment of chords. The Be. part features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Rat. part features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

Figure 28. Xochitl son ‘walking towards the mountain’. Transcription by the author. Pitch adjusted to A440 for transcription.

The entrance to the mountain is marked with a white cloth that is hanging from two ropes that are attached to trees. This cloth indicates the gate to the mountain through which all enter, asking for permission and bowing in front of it as a sign of respect. In the mountain, posts for the offerings are divided into three sections containing different tables: foothill, middle-mountain, and summit. The first post is close to this entrance, where a table that remained from previous celebration leans on a rock wall. Many clean up both surfaces of the table, above and below, removing all scraps pieces and throw them on the side of the mountain. When clean, the first layer to be laid down on the table consists of the *petlameh* deities, on top of which the ritual specialist sacrifices birds by cutting the jugular vein and spreading their blood on top of the *petlameh*. The remaining blood is collected in a container until the birds’ bodies stop dripping, at which point, still alive, the birds are thrown down the mountain side and confusingly stumble downhill until they manage to hide underneath the surrounding brunches, where they finally die. These birds’ sacrifices are a very dramatic

moment in the ritual. *Coyol* and marigold flowers are arranged and placed together with the food items and candles.

In this post there are two more tables, one for *Tlil* (fire) located on the floor on the northeast side, and another for *Ehecatl* (wind) on a higher spot on the rock face on the south side; offerings are placed for both with sacrifices and food.⁸³ Additionally, for the *Ehecatl* deity a white chicken is placed alive inside a hole and then covered with a white cloth, which is fixed to the floor by large wooden pegs. Two strings are attached and directed to trees crossing over the main table. The ritual specialist offers chocolate, coffee, bread, and candy to this table. Many present the offerings, dancing and burning *copal* and lighting candles. The participants carrying the large paper-cut deities, Chicomexochitl, Mermaid, and Grandparents, dance in front of the main table.

The pilgrimage continues to the next post in the middle of the Mountain, which contains a main table and separate ones for the Grandmother, Mermaid, and Thunder. Similarly, everybody gathers to present the offerings by dancing in front of the tables, lighting candles and burning *copal*. Here, the images of the Grandmother and Mermaid are left behind.⁸⁴ Similarly, the ritual specialist places all the offerings and deities and sacrifices the birds; chocolate, coffee and breast chicken soup are offered for each table. When finished, the congregation moves towards the mountain's summit while the ritual specialist produces a high pitched sound with a clay whistle (Figure 26).

⁸³ Some of the altars are placed on the floor without any structure supported by legs, but these are still named tables.

⁸⁴ In some ceremonies at the Postectli, the image of the Grandmother was left in a cave located on the west side.

The mountain's summit is the last stop for the pilgrimage. It consists of a small plateau section where the congregation gathers to set up the tables as follows: a main one on the south side of the plateau; another table on the west side for the cross; and another on the east side for the sun, which is also known as the crown. When everybody gradually arrives, mostly sweating and carrying the offerings, some others have already started to clean up the residues of the previous ceremonies. The musicians stand playing close to the ritual specialist who, after all remains have been cleared up, starts to speak to the deities while placing down the *petlameh* of paper-cut images on the surfaces: above and below the table. Then, the celebrant proceeds to offer the chickens' blood, first making them drink sweet beverages and proceeding to cutting their jugular and spreading the blood on the *petlameh*. Together with the ritual specialist, the authorities or a person in charge sign over the images while the musicians continuously play. The arrangements of marigold and *copal* cover the images, while everybody congregates to dance in front of the table carrying reed-bags, baskets on top of their heads, and candles. Food offerings are spread out and each one of the participants attempts to provide with candles, flowers, or candy. In this table the Grandfather image is left, where it will remain until next year.

The table for the cross is placed underneath a large monument of cement cross that was built in the 1980s by a priest, attempting to convince people from the area to stop the rituals dedicated to mountains and instead peregrinate for the Christian Cross. Since many references to a cross already exist in the representations along the tables during the *chicomexochitl*, this large monument, instead of conflicting with the mountain's worship, has contributed to harmoniously blend with the other representations of the cross. Finally,

on the east side, the sun, crown, or rainbow is raised, which perhaps constitutes the most striking aspect of this stage. The crown is a large pole standing tall, on which top a circular structure is placed. A paper-cut crown covers the circular structure, and from the top long colorful ribbons cross towards the trees shaping a similar image of a maypole. Baby chickens and turkeys are placed upside down in the circular structure hanging from their feet. The birds maintain a constant fight by trying to escape, until they gradually die. When all the offerings have concluded, the congregation rests and drinks some of the sweet beverages or water and starts descending and returning to the *xochicalli* temple.

The crowd walking downhill looks at the tables full of offerings. The candles are still lit. They look with satisfaction that the work is done, and stop only to salute by bowing their heads together with their hands as a sign of veneration, and walk quietly leaving the mountain. The musicians continue to play until reaching the *xochicalli* temple where the crowd welcomes the Chicomechitl deity joyfully with dance, bells, and copal. The godparents carry the deity. In this emotional moment many cry happily that the Chicomechitl has returned to the *xochicalli* temple with the ceremony's blessing and accompanied by the godparents and grandparents. The images and cobs are placed in a wooden box on the main table, close to the saints, Jesus, and the Virgin. This moment marks the end of the ceremony where all are happy and satisfied. While some hang out to chat, drink coffee, or eat bread, others return to their homes.

CHAPTER 6

Ritual Music in *La Costumbre*

This chapter examines the active role of ritual music in *la costumbre*, the indigenous religion of the region. Drawing from the analysis that unfolded the large structure of musical pieces organized by the events that interplay in the ritual, this chapter explores the role of music in articulating participation and emotional engagement. In the Nahua towns of Chicontepec, the engagement with the ritual life of *la costumbre* primarily responds to the dependence of these towns on rain to maintain the cornfields. In the *chicomexochitl* ceremony, the participation of each individual constitutes the principle that secures a successful ceremony. Communal work and communal reciprocity are fundamental principles of social interaction in the towns. In this context, music is one of the main elements that articulate the participation considered below. While the role of music in articulating participation has been widely observed in the area, this study further examines the role of emotions in the performance of the ceremony.

In this dissertation, emotions are examined in association with the myth of the *Chicomexochitl* deity and the healing system. This analysis, therefore, uncovers the role of music to convey sadness in the performance of the ceremony. Furthermore, it reveals the role of music in *la costumbre* as an active element that interacts with both good and bad. This dichotomy represents the polarities that interplay in *la costumbre*, which ritual specialists, musicians, and the congregations attempt to balance by providing offerings. The chapter also incorporates life histories of a ritual specialist and several musicians of ritual music to

illustrate the place that music occupies in *la costumbre*. Furthermore, I also examine a selection of the numerous musical pieces in order to illustrate the qualities of the music and the repertoire that enable participation.

Music and emotions in *la costumbre*

It has been observed that in several Nahua towns, congregations actively engage in *la costumbre* ritual through music (Gómez Martínez 2012; Nava Vite 2012; Sandstrom 2005). Alan Sandstrom's descriptions of a *chicomexochitl* ceremony frequently highlight the role of music in engaging participation. Examples of this engagement are evident while people gather in the *xochicalli* temple, when the crowd makes a pilgrimage to the mountain, and when the congregations present their offerings to the different altars during the dance (2005). Among the descriptions of the congregation's engagement in the *chicomexochitl* ceremony, Sandstrom also describes the congregation's happiness in successfully finishing the ceremony together (2005: 25).

A remarkable example of engagement through music is evident in a *chicomexochitl* ceremony from the towns of Ixhuatlan de Madero. Rafael Nava observed a ceremony where the musicians arrived late. In Nava's account, the congregation passively waited for the musicians to arrive and happily began to participate as soon as they heard the music (2012: 13). Further, Nava suggests that ritual music serves to engage the participants in joy and enable them to communicate with the pantheon of earth deities (2012: 14). There, the *chicomexochitl* is celebrated to chase away the bad-winds or *ehcameh* that might come to destroy the cornfields and cause disruptions in everyday life. Like Sandstrom, Nava stresses the importance of communal work in the context of the Nahua ceremonies. While I follow

the same analysis that music articulates participation, this study further examines the role of emotions in the performance of the ceremony associated with the myth of the Chicomexochitl.

Emotions in the myths concerning the Chicomexochitl deity

Emotions associated with the Chicomexochitl deity often include both happiness and sadness. There are different stories about the Chicomexochitl in the Nahua towns of the area. Some of the stories depict the deity as a happy boy, while others describe the perilous circumstances that the Chicomexochitl confronts as a child, while he is alone outside without protection. Anuska van't Hooft, who has extensively worked with the Nahua towns of San Luis Potosi, describes a myth of the Chicomexochitl deity as a boy. The deity is happy and likes to play music and sing. He is remarkable because he created the writing system and was born from the Postectli Mountain (van't Hooft 2008). From other Nahua towns, Rafael Nava tells a story of fishes that have eaten the deity's body and left the bones crying in the river (2012).

In the Nahua towns of Chicontepec, similar myths of this deity engage similar emotions. A recurrent image is a child crying alone in the cornfield. When I asked about emotions in association with the Chicomexochitl, some individuals expressed sadness while others expressed happiness for the deity. In Ixcacuatitla, the deity is both female and male,

Pedro, one collaborator from this area explained:

Do you see, the seeds we will sow of the Chicomexochitl [deity] are the seeds of the child. That is the reason the Chicomexochitl stays in the cornfield; he grows there. We break him into pieces, and there we put four grains of corn, there he is born. If we clean him up, he grows well. If we do not clean him, he stays there under the grass. He suffers from its bonds, suffers from the wind, the child that is the Chicomexochitl. Also, the girl stays inside here because all women do their work at home. Therefore, the one who goes to the cornfield is the boy, who is the Chicomexochitl. For this reason, when the corn plants grow, when we see that the corncobs are ready we have a *tlamana* (celebration for the sweet corn). Because he gave us the corncobs, and the plants of the cornfield have already grown. This is the reason we are bringing him offerings, because the corn certainly takes care of us, and without him, we can never be happy, and we will go hungry. (Personal interview, October 2010)

Participants in the ceremony described the deity in this way in association with crying.

In fact, tears were offered to the deity. Examining emotion in the context of the ritual enabled an exploration of the personal experience of the ceremony as well as the experience of the congregation. In this context, individuals and groups presented their intention of performing sadness or happiness as an offering to the deity. This intention of performing emotions responded to the principle of communal reciprocity, an attempt to work together to bring the rain. It also uncovered the value that emotions have in the context of the ritual. In fact, the value attributed to emotions also has its roots in the healing system. In the context of *la costumbre* the healing system is interrelated with the ritual, where specialists and musicians play an important role as bearers of the tradition. In the case of the ritual specialist, his knowledge and ability enable him to heal patients and lead the congregation in the ritual. On the other hand, musicians' knowledge and received talent enable them to bring the ceremony together. This association of music and emotions is explored below.

The Nahua religion *la costumbre* from Chicontepec presents many similarities with Otomi rituals and religious systems. These similarities concern the pantheon of deities and

celebrations related to the agricultural and rain cycles, as well as worship associated with the natural landscape. Among the similarities, Otomi and Nahua healing systems incorporate music in the healing process. In other healing systems, from Nahua, Otomi, and similarly in Tepehua towns, emotions and music are also in constant interaction with the pantheon of deities (Boiles 1969, 1967; Dow 1986; Sandstrom 1991). Even though the focus of this dissertation does not concern healing but rather rituals, it is worthwhile to point out that the ritual music genre *xochitl sones* has multiple uses, and it is an active element in the healing system. In this context, emotions are connected to both health and sickness.

The characteristics of emotions in the context of the ritual and the healing system are particularly relevant for the analysis of music and emotions in this dissertation. The value attributed to emotions is based in the interrelated healing/ritual systems. Music is an active element, explored here in the context of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony. To illustrate this relationship, I provide life histories of musicians and ritual specialists as well as their perceptions of the ritual and the music. Further, an analysis of the musical pieces illustrates how music articulates the desired performance for a successful ceremony. This analysis further illustrates the established interactions among congregations and the natural landscape.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ An association between ritual and healing system is particularly evident in the interaction that healers maintain with the mountain. Healers rely on the properties of the Postectli Mountain to treat their patients. They frequently use the name of the Mountain in their prayers while treating sickness. See also Piotrowska-Kretkiewics (2012) for the role of mountains in healing in other Nahua towns.

Ritual specialists and musicians in *la costumbre*

The active engagement in ceremonies associated with the natural landscape and the centrality of corn in the religious life, however, are characteristic not only of Nahua but also Otomi and Tepehua towns (Boiles 1969; Boiles 1967; Dow 1986; Gómez Martínez 2012; Nava Vite 2012; Piotrowska-Kretkiewics 2012; A. R. Sandstrom 2005; van't Hooft 2008). In this religion, communal participation is central to the realization of the ceremonies. The roles of ritual specialist and musician have specific functions of leading the congregation. By examining both roles, I considered both the conceptualization of emotions and music in the context of health and sickness, and the meaning of the performance of emotions in the context of the ritual.

The ritual specialist

The local denomination for the ritual specialist is *buehuetlacatl*. The name translates literally as “elder-man,” but the meaning refers rather to a wise man. In most cases, they are also healers who possess extensive knowledge concerning sickness and health, herbs, and a variety of prayers and procedures used in religious ceremonies and rites of passage. Some women undertake the work but male specialists are much more common. The work also consists of knowing the procedures to offer on the different dates of the religious calendar, including ceremonies such as the *chicomexochitl*, *atlatlacualtia* (offerings for the water), and *tlamana* (festivity for the sweet corn). Offering procedures also include smaller rites that take place in the cornfield, in houses, and at family gatherings. For the central role that ritual specialists and healers play in the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies, they often give alone an offering of food (Figure 29).



Figure 29. A ritual specialist and a healer offering to the table of the cross. Chicomexochitl ceremony. Ixcacuatitla-Los Pinos, March, 2010.

In the work that the healer performs, divination is a standard procedure to diagnose sickness in patients as well as to set dates for the celebrations. This divination takes place in a cleansing rite. With a system of sixteenth grains of corn, the ritual specialist foresees afflictions as well as past, present, and future experiences of patients, including both their good fortune and their tragedies. The procedure undertaken with the corn also provides information to confirm the dates for the celebration as well as the result of the offerings. The life history of a ritual specialist below illustrates characteristics of *la costumbre* and the role of music in the context of the ritual. Ritual specialists describe their understanding of dreams and their talent in a fashion parallel to how musicians describe learning to play. The multiple interviews excerpts below correspond to one single ritual specialist. Since the account below refers to a ritual specialist who is also a healer, the term “ritual specialist” is used to identify both roles.

The learning process of becoming a ritual specialist differs in each case: while some are born with the qualities, others experience a transitional event. This event is typically a shocking life experience that a person undergoes, such as accidents or sickness, after which the individual receives the talent. Juan, a farmer who has been working as a ritual specialist since the 1970s described his transitional moment:

I began my work as a healer because one day I got very sick. I went to see a healer and while they were treating me; they told me that I had to become a healer. After that, I started to do my work. I prepared large ceremonies for *la costumbre*. I used to go to the well, to the mountain to ask for my work. Then, the elders finally let me start treating patients...After I got sick, I started to see things, something like the bad spirits. They used to take me, hit me, run after me, and all of that. Those are the dreams I used to have and I could not work. I went to see the elders from Reixtla, Xochimilco, and Aguacapa. They told me that I should become a healer, that I should start doing my work. (Personal interview, October 2010).

This story illustrates how in the process of treating his afflictions he became a healer.

Often, periods of suffering trigger the ability to conduct such work, which are accompanied by revealing dreams. In fact, dreams have multiple uses, including guiding people to the paths to become a specialist and teaching the precepts of *la costumbre*.

The ritual specialist, telling me about the story of his initiation, also said:

...No, no I remember all the dreams. [In a dream] they put me in a house with small rooms. In that house I saw how to make the offerings for the sweet corn, the cornfield, offerings for the house, for the family, offerings for animals. All that work I learned in dreams.

Two elders, female and male, took me in. They told me that if I do not do the work right, I will never come back; I will not return to my home. But yes. My work was right. So I returned through the same door. [In the dream] one had to know how to get in and get out. But if I make a mistake or I do something wrong, then, I would have stayed there. That is what they told me...If I had stayed there, I would have become sicker or died. (Personal interview, October, 2010).

The idea that dreams inform the work, independent of taking formal lessons, is frequently associated with the received talent that ritual specialists possess. This ability to inquire in dreams is an integral aspect of the healing system, which often plays a role in the cleansing rite. In *la costumbre*, healers interpret dreams and identify the sources of afflictions by performing a cleansing rite known as *tlaochpantli* (sweeping). The name “cleansing” refers to the action of cleaning the body of bad-winds or *ehcameh* that bring sickness and bad fortune. Cleansing rites are integral in the rituals of *la costumbre*. As a characteristic, the rites also include offerings, which are presented to a series of deities represented with cut-paper images, all of whom have specific functions. While explaining the cleansing rites in relationship to sickness, the ritual specialist mentioned:

[Sickness] depends on oneself. It depends on bad dreams. For example, if you dream about the dead. If you dream about animals, something will happen to you. If you dream about snakes, cats, dogs, something might attack you...These [animals] represent the bad spirits, the bad-winds, envy and all of that. This is what I do; that is my work [to clean the patients from the bad-winds]. (Personal interview, October 2010).

In the Nahua towns, bad-winds or *ehcameh* are always treated carefully. Among these bad-winds, people are particularly careful with anger and jealousy as the sources of sickness and misfortune. In the *chicomexochitl* ceremony, the entire congregation attempts together

to maintain the bad-winds outside the ritual. To accomplish this objective, every participant undertakes a cleansing rite the night before making a pilgrimage to the mountain summit. The specialist proceeds to make an offering to the *ehcameh* deities, consisting of alcohol, tobacco, coffee, bread, and soup. In this context, music partakes in the process of removing the bad-winds from the ritual with a piece that is offered to the corresponding deities. The musicians play the piece that belongs to the cleansing rite during the whole procession, and finally they undertake the cleansing rite themselves, together with their instruments.

In the *chicomexochitl*, the congregation offers equally to the good—such as mountains, springs, fire, and earth—as to the bad-winds.⁸⁶ The good/bad opposition functions as an organic polarity, where the ritual specialist is knowledgeable enough to present the deities of each side with the appropriate offerings. In this context, therefore, the offerings represent the interaction between the ritual specialist, the congregation, and the pantheon of deities represented by cut-paper images.

In the context of *la costumbre*, ritual music belongs to both polarities. In fact, it is often described as coming before good and bad and showing the path for the ritual. Specialists often expressed that music enables them to follow the path for the ritual so they can give all in their work. Therefore, the musicians bring the specialist into the required state of concentration so he can establish interaction with the pantheon of deities and the natural landscape. Thus, specialists rely on collaboration with the musicians to undertake the work. For the role of music in the ritual, it is imperative that the musicians, in particular the

⁸⁶ “Good” and “bad” here refer to the local conceptualizations of the polarities that interact. These polarities do not reflect good and evil, but rather two forces that belong to the same system.

violinist, know the repertoire well and bring particular characteristics to the performance. This is the reason ritual specialists chose their musicians for the rituals they perform.

Through this life history, I have demonstrated the place that music occupies in the context of *la costumbre*. In the conceptualization of both good/bad and sickness/health, ritual music belongs to both polarities. It also leads the path in the ritual and creates the appropriate environment for the specialist to conduct the work. Below I provide the perspective of musicians via similar stories about the learning process, the received talent, and the emotional content of the ritual musical repertoire. These stories will further serve as the context to examine characteristics of ritual music that contribute to emotional engagement and participation.

The musicians of ritual music

Musicians of *la costumbre* often learn the repertoire in a teacher-pupil relationship. When students are ready to play in the ceremonies, they attend and occupy minor roles, then alternate with principal musicians, and finally play alone only if they know the repertoire well. In the learning process, their participation depends on the ritual specialist and the type of ceremony. Thus, musicians often acquire the repertoire of ritual music both directly from other musicians and by actively participating in performance.

The required instrumentation for the performance is the Huastecan trio: violin, *jarana* (small guitar), and *huapanguera* (large guitar). Among the three instrumentalists, the violinist requires the longest process of learning. To acquire the repertoire, violinists often travel to different towns to visit other musicians, while the other instrumentalists mostly learn their

parts by accompanying the violin. The repertoire is also transmitted between generations of musicians within the same family. Therefore, it is common to find violinists who have learned the repertoire from their grandparents, parents, or brothers. Often musicians choose their partners and work together as a trio through the celebrations of the religious calendar of *la costumbre*.

Musicians who play ritual music know a variety of other genres used in weddings, birthdays, and funerals. They are also well versed with Huastecan *son*, the main popular genre in the area, which uses the same instrumentation. The level of professionalization varies: while most musicians of *la costumbre* are farmers, others are able to earn a living from their music. However, even though they are acquainted with the ritual music repertoire, many professional musicians are too expensive for the ceremonies of *la costumbre*. Therefore, these musicians have stopped performing in rituals and accessed other contexts for performance. The town of Tepeco is famous for hosting different professional trios. Among them are Trio Nuevo Amanecer, Los Tres Compadres, and a professional trio directed by Pablo de la Cruz Miguela, a violinist recognized in Chicontepec as a virtuoso for his style in playing Huastecan *son*. Pablo rarely performed in the ceremonies of *la costumbre* but was actively engaged with festivals of Huastecan *son* that took place in Chicontepec's municipal seat during the time I was conducting fieldwork.

As I have shown in the previous section, ritual music represents a path. It also partakes in both good and bad (as the concepts that interplay in the ritual) and enables the ritual specialist to engage in his work. In the following section I examine some common characteristics that musicians describe concerning ritual music of *la costumbre*. This will

further elucidate the role of music in contributing to the engagement of the congregation with the particular emotions. Like the ritual specialist, some musicians of *la costumbre* described their initiation process as a call that appeared in dreams. A musician who played the *jarana* (small guitar) believed that a dream announced the arrival of his instrument. He said:

[In a dream] I walk with my wife, my shirt is dirty. I stand in front of the well. The godfathers pass by and one tells me: you are going to play. I saw in the mountain a very nice crown. A few days after the dream, a person came to sell me his *jarana*. (Personal interview, May 2010).

This dream illustrates the ability to foresee the arrival of music in the life of the musician. Often, such dreams reveal the musician's intention to self-identify as a bearer of the received talent that has a particular function in the context of *la costumbre*. This talent has similar connotations as the talent of ritual specialists. For musicians, however, it refers to the ability to engage the congregation in performance with a connotation of sadness. Luis, who plays the violin explained the sadness in the *chicomexochitl* as follows:

It hurts a lot. I have felt and seen with the others when we have *la costumbre*, it has to be from the heart. Or some of our heart, we put a chicken or whatever it is that they need. And we do that not because we want to, but because we have *la costumbre* because it does not rain...Now, the rain is about to arrive, but if it does not rain. We are now in May; June will come and there is no rain. The fields are ready, but there is no water, how are we going to sow? No one can sow...Therefore, if someone says, let's have *la costumbre*, all of us who support, it is like we feel it. Meaning, we want the rain, but it does not come. It is then that it hurts because we have no rain. (Personal interview, May 2010).

The sadness associated with *la costumbre* has a direct correlation with the dependence of the Nahua towns on the rain cycles. The performance of sadness, therefore, allows them to show together their concern of not having water for the fields. Consequently, ritual music

is not a particular tradition of happiness but rather of sadness, as explained by the same violinist quoted above:

Where my father learned, the elder from Ixhualtlan prohibited him to sing. He did not like that someone would sing [the ritual music]. It is not a tradition of happiness... but rather it is a tradition of sadness because it does not rain. There is no water. That is the reason [the elder] didn't want us to sing. (Personal interview, May 2010).

Musicians make a commitment together with the ritual specialist and the congregations to offer to the good (mountains, water, air, fire, and earth) and the bad (bad-winds or *ehecameh*). In the *chicomexochitl*, this commitment represents the attempt to work together to bring the rain for the fields. While the performance of music carries a connotation of sadness it also brings the congregations together to dance and rejoice in the celebration. The engagement in participation, where every individual contributes with work, further enables interaction with the pantheon of deities and the natural landscape. In *la costumbre*, mountains and water sources are the main foci for worship and the providers of rain.

Ritual music is an active element that partakes in both sides that interact in the *chicomexochitl*, balancing good and bad while offering to mountains as well as to the bad-winds (*ehecameh*). In the following section, I examine the structure of the musical pieces to illustrate how music creates a narrative of the events that interplay in the ritual. This analysis further illustrates the active role of musicians and their music in engaging the ritual specialist and the congregation in the performance of the ritual.

The ritual musical repertoire

Ritual music of *la costumbre* comprises different repertoires that accompany ceremonies associated with the corn and rain cycles and the natural landscape. The repertoire includes music for the *chicomexochitl* (celebrations for mountains), *tlamana* (ceremony for the sweet corn), and *atlatlacualtia* (celebration for the water sources). In this repertoire, a series of musical pieces are arranged according to the events that interplay in the ceremony. The pieces consist of melodic lines carried by the violin and rhythmically accompanied by the *jarana* and *huapanguera*.

As indicated above, a central characteristic of the musical repertoire is that the structure of the music pieces mirrors the events and actions of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony. Therefore, the pieces indicate the location of altars, the moment when the offerings are presented, dancing with the sacrificial birds, and other moments such walking in the mountain or crossing rivers. Also, the pieces illustrate instances when the ritual specialist cuts the paper, spreads copal smoke over the sacred elements, and presents the offerings. Thus, *sones* commonly carry names such as ‘spreading copal over *Tlitl* (deity of fire),’ ‘when we make the *petlatl* (reed mat) of deities dance,’ ‘to kiss the offerings,’ and so forth. With a vast number of *sones* in the repertoire, musicians and rituals specialists were often unable to determine the quantity.

However, a violinist from Las Silletas commented that:

We play 150 *sones* for all the celebrations. 25 *sones* for 25 mountains including Chiapas, Oaxaca, Popocatepetl, and other local mountains. We have to play 25 so it will rain, otherwise, it will not rain. The *sones* for the altars are different from the ones that go above from the ones that go below [indicating the places in the altar]; there are *sones* for the *Tlilil* (deity of the fire) and *sones* for other deities. (Personal interview, May 2010).

The above description of the repertoire illustrates the variety of the 150 musical pieces, classified according to the place they occupy in the ritual. This description further provides insight into the interaction that musicians have with the mountains to bring the rain. Due to the remarkable role that music has in the dynamics of the ritual, musicians often referred to their work as a delicate duty that requires much commitment and respect. To undertake their roles in the ritual, the musicians – particularly the violinist – are required to be attentive, to commit to the performance, and to be acquainted with the extensive musical repertoire. In this complexity, musicians often closely follow the ritual specialist to secure the right performance. The musical elements differ among the pieces. While some pieces are in a slow tempo, others are heavily rhythmic. I argue that the musical elements of ritual music contribute to engaging participation. The following section analyzes a selection of pieces that illustrate the different characteristics of the music.

Selections of musical pieces

The pieces in the repertoire are characterized by small melodic phrases that constantly repeat while the event is taking place. This form is particular to this repertoire and differs from other popular genres such as Huastecan *son* where wider melodic phrases are common, and AB strophic forms combine singing and instrumental sections. The *xochitl sones* repertoire consists of main pieces and transitions, which are played in between the main

pieces. For example, when musicians played the piece named ‘when we start to spread *copal* smoke on the cross’ (*Tlacopalhuia pan Cruz*) the congregation exited the *xochicalli* temple towards the altar located outside. In this transition, the musician played a different piece, which is identified as a transition.

The pieces differ in character. For example, a *son* used to indicate that the congregation is crossing a river is characterized by a calm rhythm, as if it were indicating the pace to walk (Figure 30):



Figure 30. *Son* ‘to cross the river’. Transcription by the author.

The transcription in Figure 30 illustrates a melodic phrase of seven measures in a compound duple meter. The first unit takes E as the central note and opens with the ascending fourth. This unit is repeated with some variations between the notes in the fourth, omitting the second; it concludes back on the central note. The violinist repeats this melody with the rhythmic accompaniment of the *jarana* and *huapanguera* during the process of crossing a river. While the violinist repeats the melody several times, there is no improvisation but rather some embellishment with tremolos, vibratos, and variations of the rhythmic figures.

Several pieces are utilized for dancing. These pieces are in fast tempo (Figure 31).



Figure 31. *Son* ‘when we make the *petlatl* of deities dance’ (*Quibitotia Tlatecme*).

Transcription by the author

The transcription illustrates a melodic phrase of four measures followed by a closing phrase, also four measures. The first part of the melody is repeated seven consecutive times, while the second section is repeated six times. This cycle of repetition results in a structure of 52 measures that returns numerous times. In the ceremony, this event takes place in the third day when the ritual specialist has finished cutting the paper and all join in a dance to celebrate.

These two pieces represent the qualities that characterize the repertoire. While some of the melodies are compounded with short phrases, the repetitions also create large cycles. The *jarana* and *huapanguera* accompany the melodies with two or three chords, which are often combinations that include the tonic, dominant and subdominant. The pieces repeat in the events over long periods of time. To close the piece, the musicians look to each other to stop until the violinist closes with a cadence. Chapter Five contains a more detailed description of the musical elements and the characteristics of the repertoire in the context of the chicomexochitl ceremony (see Figure 32 and Figure 33 for a list of *sones*).

The musicians provide sound for each event that takes place, characterizing each moment. Therefore, the musical repertoire varies according to the character of the activities, deities, or places of offerings. These characteristics might explain why the ritual specialist believes that music leads the ritual and shows the path. The cyclical melodies that return

endlessly and the ostinato rhythms patterns, I argue, enable a constant participation with a timeless feeling. In this participation in the sadness associated with rain, music -- rather than carrying a particular emotional content -- enables the performance, where the participants engage emotionally to show their concern about the rain. By doing so, they establish interaction with the pantheon of deities and the natural landscape.

Conclusion

The weeping in the ceremony is performed in association with the image of the Chicomexochitl, who as a little boy is abandoned alone to suffer in the cornfield. The congregations display their tears as offerings for this child. Weeping, as an offering, is also verbalized in association with the music. For example, a gifted violinist brings people to weep, articulating the emotional performance in the ceremony. The relevance of the weeping, furthermore, unfolds a large context of interactions. While the corn deity is the central character in the ceremony, the ultimate goal is to reach the mountain so it will provide with rain. In fact, the emotional performances are offerings that the congregations give to the mountains in exchange for rain and other communal and individual needs, thus establishing an interaction within the reciprocal system. In this context, it is imperative that the participants engage with the right emotions for a successful ceremony. In this chapter, I have demonstrated that music is an active element of the performance in the ceremony.

Selection of *sones* played in the chicomexochitl ceremony

This list of names below corresponds to the ritual music I recorded with the Trio 'Nuevo Amanecer'. To illustrate how the names are assigned to the events, here are the translations of the four *sones* from the recording:

- 1 *Tlen Titlacopalhuia*- How you spread copal smoke.
- 2 *Quiihtotia Tlatecmeh* – The *tlatecmeh* (cut-paper images) dance it.
- 3 *Tlen ica tlatenamiqui* –To Kiss and give air to the offerings.
- 4 *Tlatenamiqui iyahualca tepemeh* –Kissing the Mountains around



Figure 32. Selection of *xochitl sones* 1-22. CD cover of the recording made in collaboration with the trio Nuevo Amanecer. Tepeco, 2010. Photo by the author.



Figure 33. Selection of *xochitl* songs 23-30. CD cover of the recording made in collaboration with the trio Nuevo Amanecer. Tepeco, 2010. Photo by the author.

CHAPTER 7

Music and the emotive content of the chicomexochitl ceremony

“la música te da sentimiento”

Carmela Hernández

Ixcacuatitla, 2011

La costumbre religion of the Nahuatl towns of Chicontepepec has multiple levels of complexity, rooted in the pre-Columbian religious practices in combination with the Catholic belief (Gómez Martínez 2002; Sandstrom 1991). The previous chapters have shown the place that ritual music occupies in *the costumbre* with a particular examination of the chicomexochitl ceremony. This celebration is one of the two rain ceremonies that take place in the religious calendar; the other one is named *atlatlacualtia* (water-to feed) and is offered to the water resources. The study of ritual music in the context of *la costumbre* revealed particular conceptualization of emotions. By examining the different aspects of the chicomexochitl ceremony, this chapter explores the role of music in articulating emotional engagement and social participation. The chapter follows the discussion in Chapter Six, where I examined the role of ritual music in the interaction with the bad and the good polarities that reveals the associations with the performance of emotions, music, and the myth of the Chicomexochitl deity.

The relevance of the emotional states for the analysis presented here resulted out of consideration of two aspects: a) particular local conceptualizations surrounding emotions and their relevance in the chicomexochitl ceremonies, where some signified communal participation while others are removed to avoid afflictions or spoil religious ceremonies; and b) the study of the large structure of the musical pieces that led me to explore performance

of emotions and the concept of reciprocity, both highly relevant in daily life within the Nahua towns. Emotional engagement and social participation further serves as the framework to explore relationships.

The description of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony presented in Chapter Five shows how the congregation works together with the ritual specialist and the musicians to achieve a successful celebration. Without doubt, all aspects of the ceremony are harmoniously intertwined and hardly one can imagine any element working in isolation. Still, by looking at the musical performances, some aspects of the ceremony arise to the surface, revealing principles that guide participation in the ritual and further the social interaction in the local life at large. Among these principles, performance of emotions and reciprocity are of particular relevance, which in this study, have been explored through the concepts of emotional engagement and social performance.

Emotions and Music in the *chicomexochitl* ceremony

During the fieldwork season in 2010-2011, I recorded local associations of ritual music and emotions with a particular relationship to a myth of the *Chicomexochitl* deity. As explained in Chapter Six, the emotions associated with this deity correspond to happiness and sadness.⁸⁷ In relationship to sadness, the interviews revealed that music makes someone cry or some descriptions of the music illustrated as if the music cries by itself. Crying in the context of this rain ceremony shows the communal concern of not having rain. The association of sadness with music, therefore, has a direct connotation to the corn fields and

⁸⁷ See Chapter Six for a transcription of the myth of the *Chicomexochitl*.

the rain cycles. As explained in Chapter Six by Luis, a violinist from Tepeco, *xochitl sones* are sad music since it belongs to the rain ceremony that often takes place when there is no rain. Luis mentioned that the congregation comes together and shows their concerns with sadness for not having rain. As a musician, Luis mentioned that it is important to bring all these sentiments into the performance for the ceremony to be successful. Furthermore, happiness in the context of the ceremony was often associated with dancing, as an offering to make the Chicomexochitl and other deities happy. It is a common belief that the performance of both emotions in the ceremony enables the interaction with the pantheon of deities, and in particular with the mountain that ultimately will bring the rain.

The value attributed to the performance of sadness and happiness in the ceremony, in fact, reflects the principles of the polarities that interact in *la costumbre*. As shown in Chapter Six, the ritual life and the healing system in *la costumbre* are intertwined. There are two polarities that interplay, locally identified as the good and the bad, where the pantheon of deities are classified accordingly. Ritual music in such a context partakes in both polarities (See Chapter Six for details). While the pantheon of deities is explained in Chapter Two, here the references only indicate the place of emotions in relationship to the polarities. In the chicomexochitl ceremony the congregations, following ritual specialists and musicians, attempt to balance these polarities by making offerings to both sides of the large pantheon of hundreds of deities that participate in the ceremony.

A contrasting example to the emotions associated with this balanced interaction is illustrated with the cleansing rite or *tlaochpantli* (sweeping). This rite has multiple uses, among which is to remove unwanted emotions such as anger and jealousy from the bodies. These

emotions are believed to be the sources of sickness and bad fortune. In the complexity of such a ceremony, an aspect of the performance is related to emotions. While the congregation interacts with the good polarity by performing sadness and happiness, they offer a cleansing rite to the deities of the bad polarity to be removed from the bodies: anger and jealousy. In the context of the performance, I argue that music is one of the elements that articulate these interactions, which will be examined further below. Before getting into details about the music, however, a description of a cleansing rite is provided to highlight the value attributed to emotions and the role that these have with health and sickness.

As the name suggests, cleansing rites or *tlaochpantli* (sweeping), which are widely performed for multiple reasons, clean or liberate the person from physical and psychological afflictions. In the process, the healer searches in the dreams of the patient for signs that would show him the sources of the distress. This information will determine the type of treatment. Cleansing rites are complex and deeply rooted in the local healing system, and to illustrate the value attributed to emotions, below is a description of a rite that a healer performed to liberate an elder from jealousy. This emotion was believed to have been the cause of the elder's headaches and physical discomfort.

The cleansing rite was performed as follows:

A healer arrived to assist an elder who presented continuous headaches that affected her health for a couple of days. The elder's decision to undertake a cleansing rite responded to the belief that a person has been inflicting jealousy on her, which became evident in a recurrent dream she was having about a snake. On a large paper *petlatl* laid on the floor, the healer spread out in order the common elements including *ehcameh* deities of paper-cut images, bundles of medicinal plants used to remove the affliction from the body, sugarcane liquor, a cross, copal, candles, and an egg. The arranged *petlatl* looked similar to an altar, where the healer lighted candles and spread copal to later start rubbing the bundle of medicinal plants on the elder's body while he spat sugarcane liquor. The healer constantly prayed and conversed with the deities during the procedure. Eventually, the healer broke an egg on top of the *ehcameh* and based on the image's shape between the white and the yolk, deciphered that the elder, in fact, was the subject of jealousy coming from a woman. In conjunction with the dream and the readings that the egg provided, the healer liberated the elder from the affliction. A couple of days later, the elder mentioned that the cleansing rite was effective and that she has been freed from jealousy and now felt better.⁸⁸

Cleansing rites have multiple uses and are essential elements in the healing practices, in which emotions such as jealousy and anger are among the frequent sources of afflictions. In the *chicomexochitl*, the cleansing rite prepares the participants to enter the offering process, hence the act of *tlatlalia tlaixpan* (to place the offerings) which is often used to name the ceremony itself. Chapter Five contains a description of the cleansing rite in the context of the ceremony together with a musical transcription of the *son* 'for the sweeping' (Figure 23). In this context, the cleansing rite is performed to prepare the participants and liberate them, among other things, from unwanted emotions such as jealousy and anger that individuals might carry themselves or which have been inflicted by others (similar to the elder's case). For the sake of the patients' well-being and a successful ceremony, emotions have to be tuned with the right disposition to present the sacrifices required to place the offerings. Within these conceptualizations, music is considered an important resource to

⁸⁸ Description based on a cleansing rite I attended during fieldwork in Ixcacuatitla.

create the desirable emotional experience. In fact, many of the descriptions suggested that the music itself cries or rejoices as an independent entity.

As shown in Chapter Four, Five, and Six, ritual music has multiple roles in *la costumbre*. For some ritual specialists, music aids them to concentrate so they can fully conduct their work. For the congregation, it is believed that one cannot just talk directly to mountains because they do not listen; instead, music announces that the congregation has arrived so their offerings and petitions are well received. Ritual music also assists the congregations in their interaction with the world of deities and shares forces that interplay in quotidian life, which are particularly activated in the ritual; therefore, musicians avoid playing *xochitl sones* in inadequate contexts such as local bars. Among these, music is tagged to the emotional aspects of the ceremony since it enables to create the mood for the participants to cry or rejoice and is often described with expressions such as: “the music gives the sentiment,” “music cries,” or “music makes me sad.” Moreover, music is intrinsically related to the emotional performances while the congregation engages in dancing.

The structure of the pieces organized according to the events in the ceremony, I argue, contribute to engage the congregation with such emotional performance. As shown in previous chapters, the range of the names of *xochitl sones*, all in Nahuatl, vary between illustrating the events such as *Tlen Titlacopalhuia* (‘how you spread copal smoke’), *Quiibtotia pijomeh* (‘dancing of the birds’; see Figure 25 for the musical transcription); to being more specific as to indicate a location or a table as in the case of *Tlacopalhuia pan Cruz* (‘to spread copal smoke on the cross’) or *Tlapopochbuiab quemman mocencabuahya* (‘to spread copal when returning [to the *xochicalli*]’). The melodies of the last two pieces slightly differ to characterize

the action according to the table. Even though other names are present such as deities, lagoons, and flowers, *xochitl sones* are structured as if narrating the small events that structure the chicomexochitl ceremony (see Figure 32 and Figure 33 in Chapter Six for a list that contains the names of 30 *xochitl sones*).

Dancing in the ceremony takes place in most of the events, and the group of dancers varies accordingly. For example, in the *xochicalli* temple when the ritual specialist is cutting the paper, it is mostly the female elders who participate. In contrast, in events such as the ‘dancing of the birds’, all participants partake. To perform, the group gathers closely together facing the main tables. While some dancers are synchronized others are not. I observed that the lack of synchronization mainly results out of people following either the duple or the triple meters of the hemiola. Furthermore, the ritual specialist dances in many instances of the ceremony, in particular after placing the offerings across the tables (See Figure 27 for a musical transcription of the event ‘when the ritual specialist dances’).

The drama in the ceremony develops amid multiple elements, where the congregation follows a complex narrative towards the moment of *tlatlalia tlaixpan* (‘to lay down the offerings’). The intensity increases as the images of the Chicomexochitl are carried throughout the tables until reaching the mountain’s summit. This journey is accompanied by events with a sense of a big ‘happening’ that takes place, intertwined with emotive moments of intensity and relaxation. Many of the ritual specialists often enter a higher emotional state as a result of their continuous interaction with the sphere of deities; sometimes even reaching an intense and inconsolable sobbing. When the Chicomexochitl is carried back to the *xochicalli*, many also weep as the godparents and grandparents enter the temple with the

images and cobs to place them in the main table. These dramatic moments are examples of the highly emotive content that the congregation experiences in the development of the ceremony.

As shown in Chapters Five and Six, the *sones* vary in character according to the events in the ceremony. For example, the *son* ‘to spread copal’ has a slower tempo and a short melodic range (Figure 21); while the *son* ‘dancing of the birds’ is faster and presents a larger melodic range (Figure 25). The musical elements of the pieces illustrate well their performance context. While the former corresponds to a quiet and calmer moment when the congregation is at the *xochicalli*; the latter is played in a moment of intense participation. However, I observed that the performance of emotions, happiness and sadness, take place with both calmer and intense moments. Therefore, the distinction between happiness and sadness are not associated with a particular piece of music but rather with the musical elements of the complete repertoire (sound quality, melodic and rhythmic structures) and the events in the ceremony. In fact, while asking about particular musical pieces in relationship to a particular emotion, none was identified as sad or happy. Instead, *xochitl sones* were characterized as beautiful or as sad music in general, as explain by Luis the violinist from Tepeco (Chapter Six). While the pieces certainly present different character, I argue that the association of music and emotions I collected during fieldwork responds to the musical elements—such as the sound quality, cyclical melodic structures, and ostinato rhythmic patterns—in relationship to the event that forms part of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony. By establishing the sonic context of each event, music enables participation where the congregations openly perform emotions that liberate this performance from a particular

association of the musical piece as being happy or sad. This context explains the reason the participants cry or rejoice in different parts of the ceremony.

Moreover, many in the congregation assured that music is one of the effects that influence the emotional participation by conveying the sentiment of joy and sadness, and dancing is an important element in the performance. Many of the descriptions about the music refer to “la música te da sentimiento” (the music gives you sentiment), as to explain the role of music in articulating the desired emotional performance. These states, however, were not always correlated with the events that interplay in the ceremony and, in fact, the ceremony’s emotional content was perceived differently from what the musicians and the ritual specialist might have intended in the first place. For example, associations with weeping corresponded to the idea that the Chicomexochitl is alone in the field with no water, or rather the deity suffers the adversity of life which is a reference to the myth of the Chicomexochitl. Even though such stage *per se* is absent from the events in the ceremony, this was commonly one of the reasons people cried together, understanding the difficulties of enduring in the corn field with no water. Moreover, in such moments some of the participants shared their tears for family members who have passed away or remained working in urban centers such as Mexico City, Reynosa, or the United States.

Considering joy, dancing takes place almost in each event as the expression of being happy and bringing happiness. This is perhaps the most active part of the participation since the audiences engage by following the musical elements. In the space created in the ceremony, the congregation engages to perform together their emotional performance as part of the series of offerings that are given during the ceremony. Considering that the large

structure of musical pieces describes precisely each specific event, the emotional content of the ceremony was carried by the music as a non-verbal narration, articulating the emotional states and creating the mood that enables the desired emotional participation. Thus, throughout the musical experience and multiple meanings attributed to each event, the congregation together is committed to emotionally participate by demonstrating empathy for the journey that the Chicomexochitl undertakes.

Ritual Music, Emotional Engagement, and Social Performances

In studies of music and emotions, some scholars have argued that music communicates emotions in a system of codification and de-codification between composers/performers and listeners. Patrik Juslin (1997), by creating a controlled sample for research, assessed a relationship between objective playing and emotional non-verbal communication between performers and listeners. The research consisted of guitar players who recorded particular objective performances to communicate their emotional intentions. Still, in this model, communication between coder and decoder left aside specific definition of the system of codification that would have determined the influence of the decoder's subjectivity and the context, as Juslin himself pointed out (Juslin 1997). Following the non-verbal communication model for the chicomexochitl, intentions of musicians and audiences are perhaps the strongest determinants for performing emotions, even though each is embedded in multiple meanings. However, the contexts of the town and the ritual itself play a decisive role in these performances. Therefore, music as a non-verbal narrative articulates

the emotional performances in the ceremony through the melodies and rhythmic accompaniment of guitars, bells, and rattles, within the context of the ritual.

The 'organizing principles' of *xochitl sones* correspond to the structure of the repertoire, and the musical elements including sound quality particularly of the violin, cyclical melodic structures, and ostinato rhythmic patterns (Thomas Turino (2008) observed a similar association of the musical element and participation in his analysis on 'participatory music'). A very important element, however, is the ability of the performers to convey emotions. In this context the violinists are particularly prized for their given talent, as the ability to emotionally move people in the ceremony.

The emotional meaning in music has captured the interest of musicologist for centuries, where hermeneutical resources have informed the relationships between form and the representation of particular emotions through the consolidation of certain musical styles. Composers that were concerned about form and emotional expressiveness in their composition such as Claudio Monteverdi or C.P.E. Bach, provide interesting insights into their intentions by capturing particular emotional experiences within their compositions. These references carried their relevance in the historical moment where these composers interacted with others and the public, assuming that in the reception their intentions in correlating form and emotional meaning were perceived. Regarding this, is it possible to assume that these emotional representations indeed capture specific emotions to be decoded in different historical times? For the *chicomexochitl* ceremonies, sharing emotional performances together are essential for understanding the emotional articulation of *xochitl sones* in the context of the ceremony.

The aesthetic meaning of the music plays a decisive role in the performances of emotions, where the congregation identifies the musical elements. In the process of recognizing those elements the associations with emotions are rooted in the particularities of the local life. Within this context, meaning is attributed to the musical elements. Identifying the relevance of performative acts in the construction of meaning has served to examine the role of music in social formations, where the musical elements are identified with ideological meanings (Eyerman 1998) or participatory musical performances that suggest “social bonding” (Turino 2008: 29). Still, some quantitative analysis contests the arbitrariness of musical elements in conveying direct emotions. By interchanging and manipulating musical elements with one another, Ilie concludes that the elements are “imperfect predictors of specific emotions” (Ilie 2006: 326). Considering meaning in music, Cook states that “meaning emerges from a mutual relationship between perceiver and perceived in which any number of personal, historical, or critical influences come into play” (Cook 2010: 68).

Conceptualizations of music and emotions in the context of the ceremony hardly indicate the identification of a musical piece to a respective emotion in the narrative of the ceremony. Rather the musical elements articulate preconceived emotions that represent the congregations’ concerns to bring the rain. Therefore music, rather than working in a system of codification and de-codification, functions as the articulating mechanism for the performance by engaging the participants with every event, which are heavily emotional (Turino 2008).

One of the challenges of studying emotions in such a context is to differentiate between ‘perceived’ and ‘felt’ emotions. This challenge, however, is resolved in the case of

the *chicomexochitl* ceremony by considering the conceptualizations of emotions that enable the congregation to bear sadness and happiness as a set of offerings, while further avoiding jealousy and anger and even remove them from the body. Cleansing the un-wanted emotions and identifying the performance of sadness and happiness serves as a preamble to observe the relationships that develops across the congregation, and further explore the interaction with the ancestors and the sacred landscape. In this, music opens communication channels between tangible and intangible realities and articulates the desired emotional states by bearing the dramatic narrative of the ceremony.⁸⁹

Still music does not necessarily shape the particular emotion, or carries symbols which are de-codified. Introducing the concept of articulation, therefore, provides a better illustration of the role music has in articulating emotional participation by dramatically narrating the events and serving as a bridge between tangible and intangible worlds. Music articulation, therefore, responds to the role of music in conveying emotional engagement and social participation into the performance of the ceremony. While exploring the performative aspects of music and emotions, the attempts to establish relationships with the natural landscape are of particular relevance. Under the concept of reciprocity, the performance of emotions is, in fact, the manner to present the offerings to the tables. Here, tears are prized as good indicators for the offerings. Within this context music is conceived as the bridge and the element that articulates the communication with deities. In this

⁸⁹ Similarly, established relationships with the natural landscape and the spirit world through sound had been observed among other social groups such as the Kaluli, Tumbuka, Temiar and Suyá (Feld 1982; Friedson 1996; Roseman 1991; Seeger 2004).

interaction, music allows to establish the necessary relationships by expanding the scope to the sacred landscape where deities reside.⁹⁰

Two instances contribute to demonstrate how music articulates the emotional states, in the *chicomexochitl* ceremonies. On one side, the heavily dramatic events that take place in the ceremony, illustrated in Chapter Five, where the musical repertoire is arranged according to these events; and on the other, local association of emotion and music that reveal these interrelationship. At the level of this empirical study where the analysis is drawn from collected data such as participant observation, interviews, photographs, audio and video recordings, dancing while performing emotions is perhaps one of the most pronounced evidence for the correlation between musical performances and emotional engagement. Thomas Turino (2008) argues that engagement in musical performance is the subject of the social value attributed to the music. The participatory aspect of religious events among the congregations of these towns commonly carries the particularities relevant for emotional engagement. The aural and visual stimulation becomes an important feature that brings people together searching for personal, familiar, and communal well-being. Since dancing is one of the required signs of communal participation in the *chicomexochitl* ceremony, music and dancing highly contributes in incorporating people into communal performance. In fact, emotional engagement takes place not only through observing each other's emotional displays, but also through dancing together.

⁹⁰ See Chapter Four for the relationship of the people from the Nahua towns and the natural landscape.

Music intentionality and sensibility

The association of emotions and music in the context of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony provides us with a wide context to explore the dynamics of these interrelationships. For Judith Becker the emotional response to music is a result of the individual interactions with a performance over time, for which the author develops an evolutionary model by attempting to solve the dichotomy of nature vs. culture (Becker 2004; 2010). With this model, Becker proposes to understand people's emotional reaction to music by inquiring about the position of the listener within a particular context over time. According to Becker, similar to a biological organism, the "habitus of listening" corresponds to "special modes of conscious experience," which are subject to genetic determinants and environmental influences that an individual develops throughout his/her lifetime (Becker 2010: 151). A relevant element in the analysis for the case presented here is the concept of the 'gaze' as the ability of the listener to choose a "mode to listen." Becker writes: "Listening address interiors; listening provides access to what may be hidden from sight" (2010: 129). Positionality, the field, and the particular relevance of history for the analysis, are elements derived from Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* in the study of practice (Bourdieu 1980). The 'gaze' as the ability to choose a mode of listening has application for the context of the performance in the *chicomexochitl* ceremony, where the congregations are ready to perform emotions for the deity. The 'modes of listening' are informed by the context and the individual experiences over time, which in the cases that Becker analyzes are examined to explore the emotional alter states that enable trance produced by music. Even though in the case of the *la costumbre* religion the concept of trance is non-existent, the necessity of

presenting their performances as offerings in a reciprocal interchange suggests already a 'mode to listening' to the emotive content of the music which derives from the established conceptualizations about emotions. The "habitus of listening" allows the interaction of individuals with the world as a sense of "*being-in-the-world*" (Becker 2010: 130). Following Becker, the emotional responses to the musical performances in *la costumbre* are intrinsically related to the interaction among the people in the town, with their ancestors, the corn field, and the natural landscape over time.

The association of emotions and music in the context of the ceremony suggests a particular sensitivity related to living in an area where the rain cycles are vital for subsistence, hence the recurrent image of the Chicomexochitl as a child crying alone in the field with no water. Understanding how music moves the participants is subject to the sensibility that comes out of identifying particular characteristics of the musical genre with social constructions (Feld 1982; Friedson 1996; Roseman 1984; Seeger 2004). Since ritual music in *la costumbre* ensures specific connotations, the sensibility towards this music also responds to the uses of music in the ritual and how people identify the musical performances. Therefore, the context is perhaps the most important aspect to understand how the emotional states are articulated by responding to the cultural context and to the context of the ritual itself. This association further illustrates the effects that music has on people according to the context in which the music was created. Other examples to this phenomenon include the musical analyses of Jewish elements in Falasha liturgical music (Shelemay 1980), or the importance of music among the Amuhesha (Smith 1984).

Moreover, the normative nature of these practices suggests that many social values were shaped through time, where certain emotions are presented as offerings to deities and bad or unwanted emotions are removed from the bodies with the cleansing rite. This interaction of good and bad maintains the desired balance, and by articulating emotional engagement and participation, music becomes an active element in these interactions. Exploring social relationships by approaching musical performances elucidates the active role of music for social interaction (Roseman 1984, 1991; Seeger 2004). This dynamic aspect of the musical performances in the social order has been also considered as a powerful medium that structures routines (DeNora 2004; 2010). By analyzing the music choices of a group of bike-boys studied by Paul Willis in *Profane Culture*, DeNora explores the way music becomes meaningful by demonstrating how it works in emotional experiences. Music becomes a medium for interaction through the meaning attributed to the musical choices. Thus, music is liberated as the object of study and rather becomes the process of exploring how the bike-boys interrelate through the musical choices. In this context, music is the mechanism that enables an exploration of how culture comes to inform emotional engagement where action is rooted in the historical context (DeNora 2010: 160).

In the context of the chicomexochitl ceremony, verbalizations concerning music and emotions such as the idea that music makes one cry or rejoice to even further consider that music might itself cry, already suggests recognition of the role of music in articulating the emotional engagement. Thus, music further elucidates the place of not only emotions in the social interaction of public rituals, but also the place that music occupies in the context of those interactions. The action is historically rooted to a particular history of the '*pueblo*'

(Bonfil Batalla 2005), where ritual music becomes a medium for interaction as “a kind of aesthetic technology and instrument of social ordering” (DeNora 2010: 166). The concept of social order and technology are of particular relevance if considering sound as an extension that crosses the boundaries of tangible and intangible worlds. Music in action, following DeNora, enables an examination of the context where the congregation has created a repertoire that allows them to act and emotionally engage in the performance of the ceremony.

The power of music in affecting emotional states or moods has been the center of discussions for many scholars. Music regulation across cultures is prominent, especially in religious contexts where certain instruments or musical elements have been avoided or banned. In Muslim traditions, for example, music was, and in some contexts still is considered *'haram'* and banned from religious practices. Certain intervals, such as the tritones in the context of ecclesiastical singing during the middle Ages, were avoided so to detach the emotional experiences from any association with sexual pleasure. These regulations raise an interesting aspect to consider that goes beyond the ‘power’ that music has in emotionally moving people, but also explores the music choices that people make.

Considering the context of performance, in her analysis of Bedouin poetry Abu-Lughod presents some important insights into performative social acts. In fact, a particular aspect of Abu-Lughod’s analysis of the *ghinnawa* poetry is the context of its performance. Abu-Lughod observes that “context is crucial, not just for the appreciation but even for the understanding of a poem’s meaning” (Abu-Lughod 1986: 174). The author points out that while playing back a recording previously collected, two women responded to the

declamation in the recording since they identified the reciter, named Aziza, and knew the circumstances in which the poetry was produced. With this performative medium, the identification of the reciter and the associations to the personal life of the listeners resulted in empathy embedded in the traditional poetry form of the *ghinawa*. This, according to Abu-Lughod, engaged the listeners with the recordings. For the Nahua congregations in the chicomexochitl ceremony, similarly to the performative characteristics of the *ghinawa*, participants engage in the performance of emotions through their empathy for the deity who as a little boy cries in the corn field alone.

Local verbalization on the relationships between music and emotions already suggest the conceptualization of the effects that music has on the emotional states. In the Nahua context, however, this relationship with emotions carries particular connotations concerning health and sickness. In fact, traditional healers utilize *xochitl sones* to treat patients. Thus, *xochitl sones* present attributes of particular power, which are further intertwined with the performance of the chicomexochitl ceremony, which itself is considered a powerful event. The interviews revealed that this power results from the deities' interaction within the spaces of the ritual. For protection, many advise maintaining good behavior at least four days after the ceremony.

Through the concept of reciprocity in the Nahua towns, the performances of emotions constitute some of the most relevant interactions that not only concern the congregations, but also the ancestors and the natural landscape. Music in the performances of the ceremony is verbalized as the medium that brings someone into tears, rejoicing, or even suggests that music, as a living entity, it cries. Dancing is perhaps the most distinctive

aspect of these performances, which implies participation in the context of the ceremony and within the non-verbal structure and verbalization on the emotive content of the music. This suggests that music, rather than carrying a particular emotion, articulates what the group together is ready to perform while the musical elements contribute to articulate these performances.

Conclusion

In the context of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony, music is utilized to articulate emotional engagement and social performance. The displays of emotions, which result out of local conceptualizations of value attributed to emotions and their relationships to communal reciprocity, are vividly illustrated in the performances as the congregations compel to present together their offerings for the well-being of individuals and towns at large. The ceremony, therefore, becomes the space to engage in joy, sadness, and empathy for the *chicomexochitl* and also to share personal matters as in the case of weeping for family members who are deceased or away from the towns. Verbalizations about the role of music in the ceremonies and the large structure of pieces arranged according to every event in the ceremony, suggests that the Nahua ritualistic music is an active element of the ceremonies that engenders the performances of emotions. DeNora (2010) suggests that culture comes to inform emotional engagement where action is rooted in historical context. In the Nahua towns the musical sensibility is embedded in the particular history, where the centrality of corn and rain cycles and the interaction with the natural landscape have informed the emotional engagement throughout time. Therefore, the local verbalizations on

the relationship between *xochitl sones* and emotions brings one to consider the active intention of using music to engender this participation.

The verbalization on the role of music in affecting emotional states is part of many musical traditions, as evident through the concepts such as *tarab* in the Middle East or *rasa* on the music of India. In the case of the Nahua towns, the particularities of music and emotional engagement are rooted in the particular history of this society, where emotions have certain connotations that reflect their social interactions. The Nahuas, as any other indigenous groups in Mexico, constitute a minority groups with particular cultural identifiers such as language, costume, and religion. In this study too, one can hardly isolate the religious life from language and local idiosyncrasy.

In fact, the interrelationships that have been explored in the context of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony bring into consideration the normative nature of these ceremonies, where music is an active element that interplays in these interactions. The relevance of this analysis, therefore, contributes to an inquiry on the nature of music as a cultural practice that articulates relationships not only among members of a social groups—including their ancestor—but also illustrate the interaction with places where these people live. Bonfil Batalla (2005), distancing himself from categorizations such as minority groups, considers the unity of the '*pueblo*' (town) as a society that has a unique and distinctive history (2005). Therefore, the interrelationships that become evident through the performances of placing offerings (*tlatlalia tlaixpan*) in the *chicomexochitl* ceremony elucidate the connections that have been developed through time in the context of the Nahua '*pueblo*' or *altepetl*.

For many, the successful outcome of the ceremony will be primarily reflected in the rain's arrival. On the experiential level, however, it is the presence of joyful feelings that reveals an adequate participation. On one occasion, I experience a feeling of joy in the day after the ceremony. While discussing with others about participation, many commented that the right display of emotions and willingness to give yourself to the ceremony bring a peace-joyful feeling reflecting that the participant have done the necessary sacrifices.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusions and further considerations

This dissertation has explored the active roles of ritual music in *la costumbre* religion by primarily looking at conceptualizations concerning participation and emotion in the context of the chicomexochitl ceremonies. The characteristics of the musical repertoire, consisting of around 150 musical pieces arranged according to the ceremony, illustrate events, actions, and deities. The qualities of the musical elements and the characteristics of the large structure paralleling the ceremony's events contribute to the engagement of the audiences in the performance of the ceremony. This performance further conveys communal reciprocity and emotions to establish the necessary interaction among the congregations and further with the natural landscape to bring rain. I therefore argue that the relevance of this articulation corresponds to the value attributed to participation in the system of communal reciprocity, which is a characteristic of the social interaction in the Nahua towns as well as the role of emotions in the context of the healing system. This dissertation, therefore, has explored how ritual music in *la costumbre* plays a part between the 'good' and the 'bad' (polarities that interact), articulating participations and emotional engagement to bring the rain.

In the variety of the religious expressions that exist in the Nahua towns of Chicontepec, an active engagement with worship associated with the natural landscape and corn and rain cycles are still central. The active engagement in such practices also includes Otomi and Tepehua towns, where the Postectli Mountain occupies a central place as a

ceremonial center in the area. This fact was corroborated by centering the study in the town of Ixcacuatitla, located on the mountain's foothill. Furthermore, as the study progressed it also showed the variety of other ceremonies in the religious calendar of *la costumbre*. Placing the chicomexochitl ceremony in the context of the religious calendar illustrated the functions of this ceremony in relationship to other celebrations, and further uncovered aspect of participation considering different generations. Previous studies on the ritual life in the area have shown the relevance of ritual music in engaging participation in such ceremonies; or examined associations of emotions and music in the context of the healing systems. None of these studies, however, have centered the analysis on the music or explored in any detail the performance of emotions in the ritual associated with music.

Chapter Four was focused on the role of music in the interaction of the congregation with the natural landscape in the context of the chicomexochitl ceremony. It provides the context to the following Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. This chapter further demonstrated the particularities of conceptualizations concerning the relevance of the communal performance in the ceremony to establish the interaction with the mythical landscape. To explore this interaction, descriptions on conceptualizations of the tangible and intangible characteristics of the natural landscape were provided to demonstrate how music is believed to bridge between these two realities. I argued that this type of interaction with the natural landscape is very characteristic of the Nahuatl towns and I have provided a comparative analysis of Huastecan *son* to illustrate this point. While music in the Nahuatl congregations is actively used to interact with the natural landscape, in Huastecan *son* the relationship is illustrated through the poetry that describes the beauty that characterizes the area.

Chapter Five of the dissertation introduced a detailed description of the chicomexochitl ceremony including the location of altars, role of participants, and development of events during the last three days of a ceremony that took place during the dry season in Ixcacuatitla. This description served as a context for the analysis of the musical pieces that parallel the structure of the events that take place in the ritual. The analysis resulted in a structure of about 150 musical pieces, which are an integral element in the performance of the ceremony. Considering the role of music, a major exploration of this study has been concerned with the communal reciprocity and the value attributed to emotions. In the context of the ceremony the performance of sadness is associated to the myth of the Chicomexochitl, while other emotions such as jealousy or anger are identified with the bad-winds of *ehcameh*, which are removed from the ceremony by performing a cleansing rite. In view of the historical trajectory of *la costumbre* as the oldest religion in the Nahua towns, this study also illustrated a case where the *cargo* system is still functioning but has adapted to the different settings of the town of Ixcacuatitla. A characteristic of this system is the hierarchical organization of the *xochicalli* temple where the authorities included a president, treasurer, secretary, *mayordomo*, and *comandante* (a major or captain).

Chapter Six examined the role of music in *la costumbre* religion and its relevance to the articulation of social participation and emotional engagement in the chicomexochitl ceremony. The analysis is based primarily on the structure of musical pieces that parallel the events that interplay in the ceremony, mirroring actions such as moments where the ritual specialist cut the paper to design the representation of deities, and spread copal smoke on the altars; or where congregations dance with the sacrificial chickens, or walk towards

mountains and cross rivers. All the activities and events are illustrated with the music that is represented in the dissertation by a selection of 30 musical pieces recorded with the Trio Nuevo Amanecer from Tepeco. Furthermore, the analysis of two pieces showed the qualities that characterize the music where ostinato rhythmic patterns and returning melodic units create cyclical structures. I argued that the parallel structures between the ritual and the musical repertoire, together with the qualities of the musical elements enable constant participation where the participants engage in the performance of emotions to show their concern about the rain. The communal participation and the performance of emotions are intentions that reflected the basic concepts of social interaction and conceptualizations on emotions that are relevant to the ritual and healing contexts.

My conversations with ritual specialists and musicians revealed the active role of music and emotions in the context of the religion and the interrelations between ritual and the healing systems. Emotions and music interact within local conceptualizations on the polarities between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’. Offerings for the ‘good’ (mountains, water, air, and fire, among others) and the ‘bad’ (the bad-winds or *ehcameh*) are equally exchanged to balance these polarities throughout the religious calendar. While music plays a role in both polarities, emotions such as jealousy or anger belong to the bad, and sadness and happiness represent concerns of the congregation about the rain. Thus, I demonstrated through the life histories of the ritual specialist and musicians the place that musical performances occupy in *la costumbre* and its relevance for the ceremony in articulating emotional engagement and social participation.

Chapter Seven explored the dynamics of the conceptualizations concerning music and emotions in the performance of the *chicomexochitl* ceremony. Based on the information in the previous chapters about the role of music and emotions in *la costumbre*, this chapter introduced the concept of music articulation as the role of music in conveying emotional engagement and social participation into the performance of the ceremony. This concept draws from other observations on the relationship between music and emotions in different studies, following premises that the performance of music and the associations with emotions depend on history and the context where the relationships have been established. Therefore, this chapter demonstrates that musical performances in relationship to emotions represent a performative act that concerns the people of the Nahua towns in their attempt to bring the rain. Furthermore, the analysis also showed that the ceremony serves for both the congregation purposes as well as the individual experiences. While the congregation engages in the performance as the social characteristic of communal reciprocity—meaning that everybody works together to bring the rain—the ceremony also represents the context where individual share their personal sorrows. Therefore, crying in association with the *Chicomexochitl* deity represented the individual contribution to the work that all carried together, while it also responded to personal situations such missing a family member that has passed away or is working outside the town in an urban center or the United States. The performance in the ceremony recreates the communal reciprocity, a basic principle of social interaction in the Nahua towns. The purpose of the interaction is to further interact with the pantheon of deities and the natural landscape, which is believed to ultimately bring the rain.

Possibilities for further research

During my study in the Nahua towns I observed many issues that could potentially serve for future research, and which were covered here. In Chapter Six, I have discussed the different types of music that exist for other celebrations in the religious calendar and rites of passage. A comparative analysis of the repertoires will provide insights on the differences and similarities of the music and its role in articulating the values attributed to each celebration. As I have discussed in Chapter Six, ritual music plays a role in the religious conceptualizations between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’. In this context, a comparative analysis between the music used to offer for the ‘good’ such as in the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies (chicomexochitl and *atlatlacualtia*) and for the ‘bad’ such as the Carnival, can provide a perspective on how the representations of these two polarities take place. The comparative analysis can be done by examining the musical elements such as melodic and rhythmic patterns, names of pieces, and places where the music is performed. This comparative analysis can provide a broader perspective on the role of the musicians and the ritual specialist as the individuals who interact with both polarities. A further analysis can include the trio music used in rites of passage such as *lava-manos* (a ceremony to seal the godparents’ commitment), weddings, and funerals. This will provide a perspective on how these repertoires inform the events and if they have any connotations with the polarities of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

The comparative analysis can further provide insights on the generational gaps and the relevance of *la costumbre* to the new generations. As I have discussed in Chapter Five, congregations that participated in the chicomexochitl and the carnival differed. While in the

former it was the adults and elders who commonly participated, in the latter it was the youth who largely participated in the parades that included students of middle- and high-schools. By taking the *atlaltlacuaultia* ceremonies and the Carnival, this comparative analysis can shed light on the different perceptions on the role of the ritual and its relevance to the life of the young generations, who are less involved in agriculture. In this examination, the practices and choices of young musicians will further offer a context to understand the relevance of musical practices for young generations.

Regarding the musicians, a future case study can focus on the violinist Pablo de la Cruz Miguela from Tepeco and his three children. Pablo is well acquainted with the music for the religious calendar of *la costumbre*, rites of passage, and Huastecan *son*. He has taught music to his three male children who in the time of visit were between the ages of 13 to 21 and performed trio music in different contexts. These young musicians were more interested in learning Huastecan *son* to be able to participate in festivals rather than learning ritual music of *la costumbre*. However, during the Carnival they were traveling between towns and playing music with the parades. Conversations with these young musicians revealed that while they are acquainted with a variety of repertoires, they rarely participated in a *tlaltlacuaultia* ceremony. While they knew many pieces, they were not fully acquainted with the whole repertoire or the order of the sequences. Therefore, examining the context where these young musicians learn and perform music will provide a view of how traditions are reevaluated and what is the relevance of the music to the life of the new generations.

Furthermore, the personal histories of musicians of ritual music provided an example of the value attributed to the Nahuatl ritual music and the dynamics that interplay in the

process while traditions shift. In Chapter Three, I discussed a case of the family lineage of musicians of ritual music, who became members of the Evangelical Church and abandoned their musical practices. This decision responded to their attempts to follow the Evangelical precepts and distance themselves from any association with *la costumbre*. A detailed examination of the role of music in the dynamics of the different religious practices in the Nahua towns will further illustrate the ways in which music is perceived in other religious expressions, as well as the role of musicians in maintaining the traditions while they are no longer active participants of *la costumbre* celebrations.

The Nahua towns are in constant change, where some of the most drastic alterations of lifestyle are concerned with economics. As the population moves away from the agricultural production, the religion function of *la costumbre* and ritual music is being reevaluated to become a symbol of the local identity. I noticed that people who are no longer dependent on corn production used music and elements of *la costumbre* in different contexts which might differ from their original uses. For example, I witnessed that a teacher used my recordings of ritual music from the chicomexochitl in the context of the Day of the Dead as background music for the family gathering. This use contradicted the traditional context of the music. For the celebration of the chicomexochitl, death or any association with it, is maintained outside of the celebration to the point that even if someone attended a funeral they were no longer allowed to enter the xochicalli temple during the ceremony. This separation indicates the opposite sides that the chicomexochitl and the Day of the Dead occupy in the calendar. Since this teacher was no longer involved with the ritual life of *la costumbre*, her uses of the music represented a reevaluation of the musical tradition. For her,

the music was a characteristic of the locality disconnected from the meanings that the music carries in the context of the original performance. These types of reevaluations of the musical practices provide a perspective of the changes that this society undergoes as well as to consider how recordings of ritual music create a different use of the music outside its context.

This dissertation has shown the complexities of the ritual music repertoire and its uses in the context of *la costumbre* religion. As diverse as the Nahua towns are, the mountains, springs, and rivers still constitute the sacred landscape and integral parts of the Nahua social life. By celebrating private and public ceremonies and rites, people interact with the mythical landscape to balance between the polarities of good and bad to maintain individual and communal wellbeing. In the context of the chicomexochitl ceremony, I have shown how the musical elements of the Nahua ritual music enable the interactions of these congregations and further with the natural landscape.

Appendix 1: Glossary

- atxinola.** Atl (water); xinola (foreigner). Water goddess known in Spanish as the ‘mermaid’.
- cargo system.** A pan-Mesoamerican hierarchical organization of religious positions (cargos) occupied by men and women to fulfill obligations as their civil duty. This type of civil-religious organization is commonly found among indigenous societies in Mexico and other countries in Latin America. In Ixcacuatitla a resemblance of the cargo system is found in the hierarchical organization of the *xochicalli*.
- canarios.** Small pieces played with the Huastecan trio, commonly used in weddings and *lava manos*.
- cempohualxochitl.** Marigold. Ceremonial flower used in chicomexochitl celebrations, the Day of the Dead, *tlamana* ceremonies, among others.
- cuayahualli.** Crown. Sun God.
- copal.** Tree resin of aromatic properties, often burn in ceremonial contexts in Mexico.
- coyol.** *acronimia aculeata* palm
- cut-paper images.** Deities represented with humanoid figures designed on paper of different kinds.
- ehecatl.** Wind. Refers to both a deity and other forces that interact with the life of the Nahua towns. Some of the *ehcameh* emanate from deities while others from the dead.
- ehcameh.** Plural of ehecatl.
- ejido.** Communal land that allows private property. The Mexican government created ejidos after the Mexican Revolution as institutions that enable rural societies to appropriate land. In the Nahua towns of Chicotepec, the ejidos differ from other communal lands as the owners are more independent in managing properties, which stresses the individual rather than communal decisions (Perramond 2008).
- elotl.** Sweet corn that is tender and ready for consumption
- huapanguera.** Also known as *guitarra quinta*, is one of the variations of the Spanish guitar that is part of the *Huastecan trio*. Generally, the *huapanguera* accompanies the melody of the violin with rhythmic strumming patterns.
- huehuetlacatl.** A master of ceremony, generally a man who is knowledgeable of the procedures concerning ceremonies such as weddings, *lava manos*, chicomexochitl, etc. Many *huehuetlacameh* are also healers.
- Huehuetlacameh.** Plural of *huehuetlacatl*.
- lava manos.** A ceremony that celebrates the compromise of the godparents towards their godchildren. As traditionally in these Nahua towns, these ceremonies take few days where the whole family gathers together.
- la costumbre.** (The tradition). The local religion resulted out of the amalgamation of Catholic and non-Christian practices. In the Nahua towns of Northern Veracruz it corresponds to ‘the old’ Catholic Church—associated practices introduced to these communities before the twentieth century— and the non-Christian practices— associated with the corn and rain cycles and the natural landscape.

morral. Palm-woven bag utilized by farmers to carry their lunch to the corn field in work days.

palmilla. A type of small palm of the *yucca elata* type, known in Nahuatl as *tlachichibuatl xobuitl*.

petlatl. Reed mat. The nomination for one order of cut-paper images determined by number between twenty, forty, eighty, or one hundred and twenty pieces.

petlameh. Plural of *petlatl*.

son. The term *son* is assigned to a variety of regional music found throughout Mexico. The instrumentation and the strophic musical form that combines instrumental and vocal sections, reflect the influence of folk Medieval Spanish music in Mexico introduced during the colonial period that eventually was associated with the rural areas (Stanford 1972). Furthermore, the complex polyrhythmic combinations including hemiola structures have been identified as being of African origins also introduced into the Spanish medieval popular dances that arrived to the Americas (Chamorro 1951; Pérez Fernández 1990; Stanford 1972). While the *xochitl sones* follow the rhythmic patterns and conventional instrumentation of other *son*-type regional music— such as the violin and the variety of guitars—the cyclical forms and absence of lyrics differ. These characteristics of the musical form make this type of *son* particular to the Nahua towns of eastern Mexico. See Chapter Five for details on the musical elements.

sones. plural son

tables. Altars used to offer for deities. Lacking the Nahuatl word for tables in this area, altars are named ‘mesas’ in Spanish.

tequio. Work with no wages. One of the civil duties that each member of the community undertakes, which roles vary occupying political positions, to build or clean roads, or any other activity required in the clinics, schools other communal spaces. The tequio provides no salaries and duties are gender specific.

tianguis. Mobile market, which often circulates among rural areas. The tianguis is an ancient type of commerce that dates back to the pre-Columbian indigenous societies. Today, in the Nahua towns, the tianguis provides items that vary between pharmaceutical and cleaning products, furniture, and house appliances which arrive from the urban centers to more local production such as groceries and clothing. Since this rural area lacks the infrastructure for large stores, the tianguis is the only provider of such scale

tlahueliloc. Deity of carnal pleasures and addictions, associated with the devil. Deity of the carnival, who is believe to visit the towns during the celebration.

tlatlalia tlaixpan. To lay down an offering. *Tlalia* (to put); *tlaixpan* (in front of something). The word *tlaixpan* coming from a compound word deriving from *ixtli* (face) was translated to me as offerings. In the Nahuatl Dictionary on line based on Molina (1970 [1571]) is translated as altar.

tlaochpantli. ‘Cleansing ceremony’ also known as ‘swiping’ performed to relieve bad energy and sickness from an afflicted person. Often healers perform this ceremony while treating patients or *huebuetlacameh* in the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies with the idea to relieve the participants from bad energy before entering the ceremony.

tlatecmeh. Paper cutting or clipping. Term assigned to all deities represented with paper-cut images, also referred in Spanish as *recortes*.

tlatlacualtia. Draws from the Nahuatl root *tlacualtia* that means to feed. As a concept *tlatlacualtia* is used to name ceremonies offered to mountains (*chicomexochitl*), water springs (*atlatlacualtia*), and offerings of the ‘seed’s’ tradition’ (*costumbre de semilla*), where different stages of the corn are named as *xinechtlacuatia*, *milltlacuaultistli*, etc.⁹¹ Also, this concept of feeding is present in many other dates such as funerals and the Day of the Death. However, the name *tlacualtia* refers only to ceremonies for the seeds tradition.

tlatlacuaultistli. Feast. *tlatlacualtia* ceremony

tonalmitl. Dry season, also known as ‘heat of summer time.’

topiles. Policeman. One of the lower positions in the hierarchy of the *cargo* system.

usos y costumbres. (Indigenous uses and traditions). System of local governance often found in indigenous societies, which functions independently to establish laws concerning land, cultural and economic resources, and social conduct. Lacking direct translation into English, *usos y costumbres* is often referred as the indigenous law. In Ixcacuatitla the system of local governance has three political institutions Agencia Municipal, Juzgado, and Comisariado.

xochicalli. House of the flower, translated into Spanish as ‘casa de costumbre’ (house of the tradition). It is a temple used for celebration of festivities such as *tlamana* ceremonies, *chicomexochitl*, and any other *tlatlacualtia* ceremony.

xochitl sones. Sones of the Flower. Repertoire consisting of different pieces of music (*sones*) played during the *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies. These pieces are structured of repeated short melodies, improvisation, and a rhythmic accompaniment of two or three chords with the *huapanguera* and the *jarana*.

xopamitl. rainy season.

⁹¹ See Chapter Two for details on the ‘seed tradition’.

Appendix 2: List of Mountains

Antonio, the violinist from Las Silletas, provided the names of the mountains used in the *chicomexochitl* and other *tlatlacualtia* ceremonies. Antonio pointed out that there are 36 mountains but while naming them he counted 40. (Personal interview, Las Silletas, 2011).

According to Antonio, the mountains named in the *chicomexochitl* are:

1. Las Silletas
2. Ixcacuatitla
3. Cruz Blanca
4. San Esteban
5. Santa Ozar
6. Cholula
7. Malinche
8. Laguna —de México; also some identified Cerro de México
9. Ciudad de México
10. San Gerónimo—Tulancingo; de Santo Domingo
11. Santo Domingo
12. Cerro de Salud
13. Hasta Tonantzi de Milagrosa
14. Xochipatlayo
15. Chiapas
16. Poza Rica
17. Cerro de cueva
18. Cerro del Señor Santiago
19. San Juan
20. Tonantzi Divina de Tampico
21. San Agustín
22. Cuahuitzil
23. Aguacaapan
24. Limon
25. Temoctla
26. Tultepec
27. Hixnepala
28. Tepeyac
29. Tepenahuac
30. Hitzapolli
31. Huichintitla
32. De la falsa

33. De Pitaya
34. De Sombreroete (cerca de Alamo)
35. De la Loma Dorada
36. Achichipic
37. Tepancahuatl
38. Tecalco
39. Tepeco
40. Aguacate

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