



Lauren Shaw, ed.. *Song and Social Change in Latin America*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2015. 256 pp. \$42.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-4985-1175-9.

Reviewed by Fiorella Montero Diaz

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Commissioned by Lars Fischer (UCL Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies)

This volume is divided into two parts. The first section, “Music and Agency,” comprises seven chapters on music and social change while the second, “Conversations on Music and Social Change,” consists of five interviews with music practitioners whose music has had an impact on the political and historical making of Latin America. The contemporary perspective of the interviews is complemented by a historical analysis of the nexus between song, music, resistance, and social change in the region in the more theoretically inflected essays that form the first part of the book. As a whole, the collection offers an insight into the way in which music movements associated with clusters of resistance have the potential to impact and change not only the shape of society but also the way in which history itself is understood.

With its focus on literature, history, and music the book bridges disciplines, which all too often are cordoned off into separate academic spaces with their distinct methodologies and perspectives. In their contributions to this volume, the authors demonstrate that music represents much more than simply a reflection of, or response to, changing times. It is also an active agent and has the potential to transform everyday life. Not least, given its combination of poetry and music, song can disseminate messages in spaces and contexts

associated primarily with entertainment. The contributors demonstrate beautifully how song can also lend a voice to the voiceless, commemorating history, and thus changing the status quo. Given the range of scholars and practitioners involved, the readers of this collection are exposed to a variety of voices, much as audiences tend to encounter a variety of songs, allowing them to analyze the intended message themselves.

In the first section, the contributors each cover either a decade or a specific historical moment between 1950 and 2000. They each focus on a specific music genre, analyzing its relevance and situating it in its historical context. In seven chapters, readers are offered a discussion of: (1) new representations of Puerto Rican urban music culture that challenge its stereotypical characterization as dangerous as well as essentialist, romanticized, and static notions of its authenticity; (2) the Brazilian Tropicália movement and its attempt to decolonize and transform Brazilian identity through conscious appropriations of foreign cultural influences; (3) Central American song performers’ personal accounts of memory and everyday life and the ways in which they strategically blend music and poetry that addresses their country’s context and history, thus creating a music dialogue between the past (earlier works of music), the present (the references in their own composi-

tions to those earlier works of music), and the future (in the form of hope); (4) Spanish-language Argentinian, Chilean, and Peruvian rock music that articulates protest against political and social repression by deploying varying combinations of metaphors, explicit lyrics, an explicit or implicit political message, distorted sounds, and harmonic tensions; (5) Mexico's "Rock in Spanish" movement and its contribution to the identity politics of the Mexican middle class; (6) the role of Colombian Vallenato music in rendering marginalized communities in/visible and creating a sense of belonging via its musical narrative; and (7), the evolutionary rather than revolutionary transformation of Cuban traditional song at a number of historical junctures, as seen by performers who, across several generations, shaped new genres and transformed music traditions (e.g., *trova tradicional*, *nueva trova*).

Like a patchwork quilt, the book offers its readers insights into a variety of historical situations and geographical locations, all characterized by similar, though by no means identical, political circumstances. It shows readers a mosaic of various ways in which music has been deployed to chronicle, contest, and transform historical developments in Latin America between 1950 and 2000. While this is the book's greatest strength, in order to highlight relevant cross-connections more effectively, this quilt could nevertheless have done with tighter stitching, be it in the form of greater engagement between the authors or a more hands-on approach on the part of the editor.

Given its wide-ranging disciplinary scope, accessible presentation, and the absence of unduly technical musical analysis, this book has the potential to appeal to a broad readership. It will be of interest to historians as a guide to ways of appreciating more deeply the role of music in the making and changing of history; to scholars of popular music and ethnomusicologists interested in the specific impact and role of music in its respective social and geographical context; to liter-

ary and Spanish studies scholars and even to religious studies scholars, given that some of the contributors have also incorporated analyses of religion and theological movements in the region into their discussion (e.g., chapter 3).

One common thread running through the diverse experiences reflected in the collection—and the one which, for me, represents its greatest contribution to scholarship—is the discussion of how music and musicians contest capitalist paradigms, neoliberal systems, and ideas of economic modernity through the deconstruction of the Actual and its reconfiguration in another Possible reality. This reminded me of Thomas Turino's discussion of the ways in which music "habits" can contest systemic prejudices and stigmas, thereby normalizing different social values and communal perceptions.[1] I myself, in my work theorizing hybrid music in postwar Lima, have likewise suggested that "music indeed links people's dreams and desires to their ordinary lives. As dreams of a different life are transformed into a real change in habits, a normalisation of a different lifestyle and relationships occurs." [2] This volume shows how music of various genres can trigger a range of interactions between performers and audiences and potentially animate those listening to recall, reflect upon, contest, and reconfigure their reality, even if this requires them to challenge imperial powers (the United States), economic systems (capitalism), ruling powers (dictatorships) or geographical space (the rural/urban divide). Historically contextualized biographies play a key role in this context and they are richly represented in every chapter.

A less obvious common theme is the importance of the medium of music hybridity when it comes to building an idea of social modernity, to uniting generations in support of a common cause, to decolonizing genres and making them more "unique," to creating new mythologies (e.g., chapter 2), to bringing traditional genres and current fused traditions into a conversation with

each other, to reusing foreign genres with a history of protest and rebellion (such as rock) while adding local elements such as Peruvian cajón, Andean instruments, or indigenous dance tunes (e.g., chapters 4, 5).

The question of how the music “message” reaches the audience—sometimes directly and explicitly, sometimes indirectly—is another common thread. Even when politically engaged musicians, in difficult and repressive environments, claim to be apolitical or resort to the medium of commercial music, which many think of as being innocuous by its very nature, the audiences not only decode their message but also channel it back toward the musicians, who sometimes respond by nuancing their mode of expression or choice of medium in order to continue with the production of socially engaged art.

As a general rule, the contributors focus primarily on the lyrics and messages expressed verbally, rather than the music and sounds. Yet they also provide many examples for the ways in which metaphors, identity transformations, and protest can be expressed with musical means. Historical references, anger, discontent, and hope can also be expressed with harmonic means, intentional deviations from music conventions, music indexing, and by sampling the past and bricolaging the present. The discussion of musical structure and form plays a prominent role, especially in the interviews that form the second part of the collection. Rubén Blades, for instance, explains his use of circularity and repetition to build a sense of never-ending cycles. Unfortunately, these issues are not explored more fully in the first part of the book. For many of the contributors song lyrics seem to weigh more heavily than the music. Further analysis of sound, music aesthetics, and the artists’ onstage presence would have enriched and rounded off their study of song.

It becomes obvious early on that one of the principal preoccupations of the book is the study of the relationship between music and memory and the role of music in the representation of, and the communication among, the oppressed and marginalized. Less attention, alas, is paid to the fact that music can also cement distorted forms of memorialization and romanticize discourses of trauma and repression, or nurture an illusion of change, especially in contained spaces like music venues. An exploration of these issues would have been useful in nuancing the discussions of the different sociohistorical scenarios and would have made for a more balanced volume overall.

Given the collection’s strong focus on the voices of marginalized communities, one is also left wondering about the voices of their hegemonic counterparts, those who are privileged in terms of their racial and class status or those directly implicated in repression and dictatorial regimes. How does the music under discussion impact upon, how is it perceived by, these other groups? Do audiences from these groups also identify with the song’s lyrics and the social movements they represent?

What emerges from the interviews in the second part of the book is the degree to which the artists influence one another and a variety of scenes across a broad range of genres as diverse as ballad, rock, hip-hop, and salsa. The artists’ self-identification—“no, no, no. And this is important... I’m not an ideological singer” (Rubén Blades, quoted on p. 177), to give just one example—by no means invariably matches the actual impact of their music. Whatever their music genre or scene (commercial, alternative, dance, hip hop, to name just these), and whatever the singer’s own political convictions, their music can still impact audiences in unforeseen and unexpected ways and motivate other artists to create socially engaged music, even if they do so while dancing salsa at a party. Messages are particularly likely to be understood in a manner that differs from the

composer's original intention when a time lapse is involved and the music reaches new generations. When Ana Tijoux identifies Violeta Parra as the best rapper to date, for instance, this involves an interesting reinterpretation of Parra's time, music genre, and political stance.

Finally, the book highlights the importance of knowing the historical context of a country, a place, a region in order to understand its music and vice versa. Music is the soundtrack of history and, as the contributors to this collection insist, one cannot be fully understood without the other. This volume underlines the benefits of academic interaction across disciplinary boundaries. Historians, ethnomusicologists, and literary and cultural studies scholars stand to benefit greatly from the deeper understanding of historical and social contexts that greater engagement with music could facilitate.

Notes

[1]. Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 95.

[2]. Fiorella Montero-Diaz, "Singing the War: Reconfiguring White Upper-class Identity through Fusion Music in Post-war Lima," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 25, no. 2 (2016): 191–209, here 207.

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