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Author(s): Greg Urban

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Reviews

SHERZER, JOEL, COMP., ED., AND TRANS. *Stories, Myths, Chants, and Songs of the Kuna Indians*. Illustrations by Olokwagdi de Akwanusadup. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003, 248 pp. ISBN 0-292-70227-2 (cloth: alk. paper); ISBN 0-292-70237-X (pbk.: alk. paper). Cloth \$50.00. Paperback \$22.95.

Unconventional though it may be to open a review by telling readers how they should approach or “read” a book, such is my impulse in this case. For this is no ordinary ethnographic account, not a work to be “read”—in the usual sense. Its significance lies not, or at least not primarily, in its description and analysis. This new volume assembled by Joel Sherzer is instead a portal into the traditional culture of the Kuna Indians of Panama. By design, it endeavors to draw audiences into that culture, to render that culture immediately accessible to them.

My first piece of advice to would-be readers is this: do not read this book without simultaneously visiting “The Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America” website (<http://www.ailla.utexas.org/site/welcome.html>). At that site, once you register, you can listen to the actual recordings of stories, myths, songs, and chants on which the transcriptions and translations in this book are based. Hearing the voices of Kuna performers—immersing oneself in the sounds of the language, the music of the songs, the cadences of the chants, while simultaneously following along in the texts—is crucial to the experience of this book. It lends to the book that magic of ethnography that Clifford Geertz dubbed “the sense of ‘being there’.”

The book itself consists primarily of texts—transcriptions and translations. There is a short introductory chapter that tells us a little about the 70,000 Kuna Indians who live on the islands along the Caribbean coast of Panama. We learn about the “gathering house, where myths are chanted,

counsel is given, political speeches are made, humorous and moralistic stories are told" (2–3). We learn about the "chicha house, where fermented drinks for young girls' puberty rites are made" (3). But mainly this chapter tells us about Kuna "literature." And it is important here that Sherzer uses the word "literature." He means to suggest an analogical relationship between the texts transcribed and translated in this book and the materials taught in English literature classes in the United States—whether Shakespeare or Keats or Malcolm X. These texts are, in some respects, a Kuna analog of literary canons in American or European educational systems.

The question this raises, however, is that of authorship and credit. All of the Kuna materials are traditional—the author, so to speak, is the Kuna people. Yet each individual telling is distinct, a point Sherzer brings home by presenting us with two different versions of the same story. How different or similar is being a teller of a narrative, in the case of the Kuna, to being an author of a literary piece within Western canons? Are tellers perhaps more like musical performers than literary authors?

In any case, after these brief introductory remarks come a dozen chapters, each dealing with a specific performance. The bulk of each chapter is a transcription and translation (into English) of a recording available on the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America website. The transcription occurs on the left page, and on the right is its English translation. Both transcriptions and translations are organized into lines and stanzas, the stanzas separated visually by spaces. There are also commas and spaces suggesting pauses within lines. Sherzer has endeavored to create for the reader a visual aesthetic, analogous to the oral aesthetic associated with actually listening to the performances—being there.

But the transcriptions are an inadequate substitute for listening. Far preferable is reading along while simultaneously listening to the recordings. For example, you can listen to the "One-Eyed Grandmother" told by Pedro Arias. The story is, according to Sherzer, derived from the European Hansel and Gretel tale. But in its telling, it is unquestionably Kuna. The first thing you hear on listening to the tape is the obvious difference in language—the actual sounds and words that make up Kuna speech. But, if you listen carefully, you also enter the world of Kuna aesthetic sensibility.

A close examination of even just one line enables us a glimpse through the portal into Kuna culture that this book and its associated recordings provide. Let us look at line 37 of the "One-Eyed Grandmother" told by Pedro Arias. Sherzer places the Kuna text on the left page and its English translation on the right, but I will render them consecutively here:

Kai ukka, kai ukkate natku, urki nakusku eti, papti papsorpa nait ka ukka
mese mese mese mese mese mese (gets softer), eti natsursi ittos kai ukka.

With sugarcane husks, with sugarcane husks when they started off, in the boat when they started off, and the father behind the father they were going

along putting putting putting putting putting putting (gets softer) sugarcane husks, as they went did you hear sugarcane husks.

If you listen to just this line over and over again, you get a sense for the oral aesthetic of this narrative. Indeed, although Sherzer treats this as one line, sustained listening led me to explore its internal musical poetic structure, which might be represented as follows:

kai ukka
kai ukkate natku
 urki nakusku eti
 pati papsorpa nait
 ka ukka mese mese mese mese mese mese eti
 natsuri ittos
kai ukka

With sugarcane husks
with sugarcane husks when they started off
 in the boat when they started off
 the father—behind the father they were going along
sugarcane husks
 putting putting putting putting putting putting as they went
did you hear
sugarcane husks

In keeping with the Hansel and Gretel theme, the children are about to be abandoned by their father, but they have cleverly marked their trail with sugarcane husks. And the words (and sounds) “sugarcane husks” form the repetitive backbone of this segment of the narrative, three distinct occurrences, leading up to the six-fold repetition of the word “putting.” And then, as if one has not gotten it yet, the narrator reiterates: “did you hear, sugarcane husks.”

This little passage brings home the point that Sherzer has provided us with a portal into Kuna culture. The discourse-centered representation of that culture—using transcribed and translated texts, along with actual tape recordings—makes Sherzer as ethnographer less obtrusive in our efforts to learn something about the Kuna. Because he has done such an outstanding job of providing us (as reader/listeners) access, we can explore Kuna culture in some measure on our own, coming up with alternative analyses and representations of the materials.

The book consists not just of stories—musical and poetic as they are in themselves. It also contains songs and chants, more often the focus of ethnomusicological research. The book is divided into three parts. The first part (roughly a third of the book) consists of secular narratives such as the “One-Eyed Grandmother.” The second part deals with myths and magical chants, and makes up the bulk of the book. The third part consists of three women’s songs, and takes up the final thirty pages.

The myths and chants are all stylistically similar—intoned with salient repetitive (and somber) pitch contours and palpable rhythms. We are here in the realm of the sacred, and the gravitas of these chants brings the point home, in contrast to the secular narratives or the lullabies and songs at the end of the book. Sherzer notes repeatedly that magical chants are “addressed to representatives of the spirit world” (147).

In “The Way of Making Chicha” (chapter 9), the chant contains, in the semantic meanings of its words, an intricate description of the process of making chicha—a fermented drink prepared for ceremonial occasions (165):

Having filled the chicha vessels, the chicha vessels were full.
They are sealing them with *urwa* leaves.
They were sealed with *urwa* leaves.
Attached along the golden wall they were.

The chant depicts not only the practical aspects of chicha making, but also—and perhaps more significantly—the social aspects (171):

The libation maker now is announcing, to the owners of chicha.
“Bring me, the sacred mouth rinse.”
The owners of chicha, are standing pouring, this very sacred mouth rinse for him.

Sherzer observes that the chant, while a description of the social processes of chicha making, is performed during the fermentation period, and is actually addressed to the spirits of the “fermenting fruits, plants, and other ingredients that are used in the making of chicha” (147).

I was unable to find in the text internal evidence that the words of this chant—unlike some of the others—are addressed to the spirits of the fermenting ingredients. Presumably, this is a discussed fact about the text. However, this fact does make sense if the chanter and chant (the sounds and words) are understood to have efficacy in the world, facilitating the fermentation process, and adding a meaningful layer to the social relations and practices surrounding chicha and the girl’s puberty ceremonies of which the chicha forms part. They do so by providing a conduit between the human mundane world and the occult but potent world of spiritual forces.

To appreciate the efficacy of this chant, you should (no, you must) listen to the on-line recorded version while reading the text. You will be struck by the hypnotic quality of its repetitive style. Broken into stanzas of typically three or four lines, each stanza—though unique—reveals a recognizable intonational contour, with distinguishable musical notes and a palpable rhythm. The feeling is sober, not humorous, and one can appreciate the effect this long piece has, chanted in connection with the puberty ceremonies. Its potency is as much, if not more, in its sounds than in its semantic meanings.

What will strike readers as the most song-like materials occur in the third and last part of the book, titled “Women’s Songs.” Presumably, songs

form a separate genre in Kuna understanding. However, the first “song”—the “Chicha Song”—sounds stylistically similar to the chants from part 2, and quite distinct from the three lullabies and the “Counsel to a Parakeet” that follow. Indeed, Sherzer states that, “since the Chicha song is addressed to the spirit world, it shares certain stylistic features with the curing and magical chants” (214). It was unclear to me why he chose to group this piece with the other songs in a gender-labeled section.

The “Counsel to a Parakeet” is entertaining, using a trill sound to demarcate each stanza and representing the parakeet’s cry. Sherzer portrays this in the text as “prrrr” (239), presumably indicating an alveolar trill, such as that found in the Spanish word for “dog” (*perro*). Although, listening to the on-line version, it occurred to me that this might be a bilabial trill.

In the book the songs are treated like the stories and chants. They are transcribed and translated, organized into lines and stanzas. There is no attempt here to render musical qualities as notes or to characterize the intonation contours more generally. As in other chapters of the book, Kuna culture is allowed to come through the textual representations conjoined with the tape-recorded instances.

In addition to the texts and introductory notes by Sherzer, the book also contains twenty-eight photographs and twenty-one illustrations. The latter were done by Olokwagdi de Akwanusadup, “a Kuna artist well known in Panama and Central America more generally for his drawings, book illustrations, paintings, and murals” (6). Sherzer comments on these illustrations—one or more of which accompany each chapter—throughout the book. They play a part in the general endeavor of the book to allow the Kuna to more directly represent their own culture to the outside world.

From a broader perspective, this book is a continuation of the great Boasian tradition of ethnography, as reflected through subsequent developments—principally the ethnography of speaking and discourse-centered approaches to culture. Boas emphasized the collection and publication of texts as a cornerstone for the description of culture. The ethnography of speaking tradition refined the representation of texts through the use of lines and stanzas, recognizing aspects of poetic structuring in oral expressive forms. The texts in the Sherzer volume conform to the conventions developed in the ethnography of speaking tradition.

The discourse-centered approach shifted attention to actual instances of discourse as things in the world, embroiled in social relations and having multiple modalities of meaning—not just the transcribable semantic meanings, but also iconic and indexical meanings accruing to sounds and forms. The approach is reflected in this book and in the audio recording available on the noted website, as well as in the commentary about social contexts found in the introductions to each chapter.

The materials contained in this volume are extraordinarily rich. The texts and transcriptions communicate to us, as readers, many of the

semantic meanings and poetic forms that go to make up Kuna culture. The tapes, available online, furnish access to additional layers of meaning and ethnographic experience. The photographs and illustrations contribute a visual component. The introductions to the texts help us to better comprehend the social contexts of the discourse production, as well as features of the discourse and surrounding culture that might otherwise remain sternly opaque. As an exemplary piece of ethnography, as a portal through which Kuna culture can pass into and be accessed by a broader social world, this book is a marvelous success.

Greg Urban, *University of Pennsylvania*

APARICIO, FRANCES R., AND CÁNDIDA F. JÁQUEZ, EDs. *Musical Migrations: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America, Volume I*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 216 pp. Illustrations, photos, transcription excerpts, index. ISBN 1-4039-6001-1. Cloth \$89.95. Paperback \$29.95.

The conceptual borders of Latin American musical life have long been imagined to stop at the southern boundaries of the United States where nation, race, capital, and power shape and reshape the perception of things “American.” Even within the boundaries of the United States, the emergence of “Latino America,” while palpable, is more a useful political project—for some a capitalist project—than an organic historical occurrence. How Latin America and Latino America materially connect, beyond the newly coined “Latin/o America,” is the topic of much scholarly and political discussion. It is also a topic that is increasingly piquing the interest of music scholars, whether they are studying 1950s Latin jazz in the U.S. big city, the salsa scene between the Caribbean and the East Coast, or Chicano musicians on and beyond the Mexico-United States border. There has been no comprehensive interrogation in this hemispheric sense, however, of the breadth and depth of these cultural exchanges and what problems and prospects they present to the study of Latin American popular music.

In this context, *Musical Migrations* is an important and needed set of essays that rethink the complex cultural world that is the music of *las Américas*. In twelve essays plus an introduction, the authors collectively map the expanding web of relationships that chart a Latin American and Latina/o musical universe: from the Caribbean to the United States, Europe, Africa, and back again, radiating out to North, South, and Central America. On the other hand, the volume does come across as Caribbean-centric, which may detract from its hemispheric vision. This sense of movement, or migration, is the main trope of the collection as it “foregrounds the processes of dislocation, transformation, and mediation that characterize