

RESEÑAS

LAURA FAHRENKROG CIANELLI, *Los “indios cantores” del Paraguay: prácticas musicales y dinámicas de movilidad en Asunción colonial (siglos XVI-XVIII)*, Buenos Aires, SB Editorial, 2020, 301 págs.

Laura Fahrenkrog’s painstakingly researched and elegantly written history of indigenous musicians in the administrative orbit of Asunción del Paraguay demonstrates that mobility was crucial to sustaining the divine cults in Asunción. With few economic means, weak educational and cultural institutions, Asunceños were unable to train their own musicians and so called on Guaraní musicians from the reducciones for the better part of the colonial period. An astounding example of colonial inversion, the hinterland institutions (the indio mission towns) furnished the colonial capital (Asunción) with some of the trappings of culture. But as Fahrenkrog shows, this migration of indio musicians to Asunción was intimately tied up with the dreaded tribute system of personal service that grew up in Paraguay.

There were two basic types of mobility and the first was the movement of indio musicians from mission towns to colonial cities. The second kind of mobility was between mission towns. This occurred in the context of new reducciones which required training from reducciones with more mature musical schools. This first pattern of mobility was interwoven with tribute service in Paraguay, which required travelling long distances to serve on encomenderos farms, governors’ public works projects, or yerba mate harvest expeditions. Sometimes indio musicians travelled enormous distances, as when some twenty musicians from Yapeyú travelled over seven hundred kilometers to Buenos Aires to celebrate Corpus Christi. In this way, Fahrenkrog argues, labor mobility was “musicalized” and applied to musicians, thereby underscoring the importance of reducciones as not only the economic foundation of the region’s colonial cities, but also its cultural foundations.

Spanish reliance on indigenous musicians or artisans to beautify their religious life was not new in Spanish America. The late seventeenth-century paintings of the Corpus Christi festival in Cusco produced by the famous Cusco School of indigenous painters is but one example of the impact of indigenous artists on Spanish cultural life in the Americas. What makes Asunción so interesting is that indios from reducciones came from the periphery into the center. Fahrenkrog’s findings challenge the center-periphery paradigm to demonstrate that in a peripheral region like Paraguay, the center (city) was profoundly shaped by the periphery (the mission/s), thus creating a kind of backward feedback loop whereby missions, colonial hybrid creations, were then returned to the cities where they impacted cultural life. Even if Asunción was the administrative seat of power for the province, it was not the “city set on a hill.”

Fahrenkrog argues that this pattern of musical mobility was unique to Paraguay, or at least has not been documented for other regions in Spanish America. The colonial

paradigm of *reducción*, a secular-religious program for instilling in indios “*policía Cristiana*,” was intimately tied up with values associated with the *urbs* and sedentariness. Implanting a sedentary existence among the semi-sedentary and politically decentralized Guaraní was a prolonged and in no way a straightforward process. One of these zig-zags in the process of creating *reducciones* involved Guaraní transitions from a semi-sedentary to sedentary existence. What has been little understood in the literature are the ways that *reducción* (the process) simultaneously promoted sedentariness and semi-sedentariness. By demanding regular and sometimes prolonged labor turns from Guaranís in mission towns, Spanish officials created a kind of colonial semi-sedentariness. Fahrenkrog’s book adds an entirely new dimension to historians’ definitions of labor, documenting regular and prolonged musical service periods, similar to the *mita* (literally “turn”) service of manual labor. Legally, indio musicians were not subject to the *mita*, but in some cases *encomenderos* and officials skirted this law and succeeded in getting violinists and singers to engage in the most menial of labor tasks. But more often than not, Spanish and religious officials valued indio musicians for their skills and regularly requested “musical tribute” to fill Asunción’s chapels and streets with song and music.

Indeed, indio musicians were not without social prestige and many invoked their office as “cantores” to avoid being counted as a tribute-paying indios. Within the mission towns themselves indio musicians possessed a certain social prestige. Fahrenkrog tells of the *maestro de música* from the Yaguaron pueblo who in 1729 was dishonored by the pueblo’s *cabildo* after they scolded him and his musicians for not performing at a community festival. The *maestro de música* protested to the *cabildo*, throwing his staff of authority to the ground, and prohibiting any member of the *cabildo* from returning the staff to his hands—only the priest could reinstate his symbol of authority (p. 116). The episode reflects a colonial hierarchy imbricated within a Guaraní pueblo hierarchy, with musicians assuming and defending an honorable place (p. 116).

That this minor conflict took place in Yaguarón (a Franciscan- then secular-sponsored community) is no surprise. Fahrenkrog reveals that Yaguarón was the musical pueblo of Paraguay, boasting forty-two musicians in 1701 and unsurprisingly provided the most musical services to Asunción. While not blind to the significance of the Jesuit order and Guaraní-Jesuit *reducciones* in Paraguay’s musical culture, Fahrenkrog skillfully triangulates sources from a variety of institutions and social perspectives within Asunción to give us a portrait of Paraguay’s soundscape that is not occluded by institutional “tunnel vision.”

By centering on the humble but old and, therefore, venerable Asunción, Fahrenkrog models how to study musical practices in a peripheral colonial space. Besides documenting this reverse flow of culture from the *reducciones* to the city, Fahrenkrog reveals the importance of African slave musicians, especially in the Jesuit college in Asunción. Blacks and indios were essential to sustaining the divine cult in the city. The archival work on display in *Los “indios cantores” del Paraguay* is nothing short of inspiring. Consulting archives from Rome to Rosario, Fahrenkrog left no stone unturned. The author’s work in the Asunción National Archive deserves specific mention. Paraguay’s colonial records are very poorly preserved and haphazardly catalogued, which made finding musicians in the documentary record even more difficult. Fahrenkrog waded

through a tremendous amount of material to identify the smallest of details, which she adeptly weaved into this colorful portrait. Methodologically and theoretically sophisticated, Fahrenkrog's work goes beyond national or niche historiographies to make a tremendous contribution to Guaraní studies, mission history, and ethnomusicology.

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