

*Surrendering to Utopia* offers a direct reflection on how anthropology only recently came to terms with human rights and their universalistic claims while the book simultaneously outlines the field's numerous theoretical and methodological challenges. Its message is that anthropology can and should have important roles in how human rights are developed and struggles over culture framed. As Goodale summarizes, to approach human rights, an 'anthropological key' ultimately means 'an acceptance of the complicated and (to some) endlessly frustrating fact of human multiplicity' (p. 133).

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DEBORAH KAPCHAN. *Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007. Pp. 325. ISBN: 978-0-8195-6851-9 (cloth); ISBN: 978-0-8195-6852-6 (paperback).

Deborah Kapchan's *Traveling Spirit Masters* explores the aesthetics, poetics and performance of Gnawa possession-trance ceremonies in Morocco and their recontextualizations into the world music market. It shows how 'dreams, visions, and spirits take material form', and how, on the other hand, 'material and aesthetic forms themselves travel and inhabit each other, producing hybrid cultural imaginations' (p. 5). The first part of the book, 'The Culture of Possession', offers a phenomenological and semiotic analysis of the ritual life of the Gnawa, descendants of slaves brought to Morocco from sub-Saharan Africa since the eighth century.

In night-time healing ceremonies (*lilat*), male ritual musicians employed by a female community perform trance-inducing music characterized by bass melodies played on a three-stringed instrument called *hajhuj* and repetitive rhythmic patterns of metal

castanets. The spirits (*jinn*) inhabit their hosts' bodies permanently and must be placated by trancing and offerings. Through propitiation, the afflictions caused by the *al-mluk*, literally 'the owners', can be cured and their power harnessed. Kapchan sees a metonymic relation between spirit possession and the history of enslavement. Thus, learning to control the spirits is 'a potentially liberating endeavor, leading one out of victimhood to mastery' (p. 18). 'Working the spirits' is a Gnawa expression for this kind of control.

Kapchan investigates the relation of bodily metaphors, particularly those of falling, rising and standing, to codified gestural repertoires—Maussian 'techniques of the body'—that create a sacralization of space and serve as transitions into altered states of being. These shifts into trance performance reveal the essential irony of spirit possession: 'The loss of control is brought on by gestures that are highly conventional, repeated and recognized by all participants in the possession-trance community' (p. 64). From embodied poesis the focus moves to the poetics of trance in narratives of possession. Through a close reading of repetitions, sound symbolism and tempo in one of these 'entranced narratives', the author argues that 'shifts in ontological and temporal register take similar form in both the embodied performance of possession trance and in narratives about that trance' (p. 83). The role played by music is decisive, since the rhythms are narratively reproduced. Trance is multisensory and interaesthetic, so to understand it in all its complexity, 'an analysis of many semiotic systems—gestural, musical, olfactory, and linguistic' (p. 80) is called for.

Whereas the first half of the book treats possession as meaning inhabitation by spirits, the second part, 'Possessing Culture', employs the verb 'to possess' in a different way, asking what it means to possess culture and what it is that is possessed. Kapchan follows Gnawa musicians as they leave their traditional roles as ritual healers and assume new ones as folklore entertainers playing for tourists in the Chellah Gardens of Rabat or performing theatrical versions of *lilat* in the nightclubs and concert halls of Paris or New York. These kinds of recontextualizations are bound to cause changes in any given genre, especially as they relate to a sacred music once considered so powerful that singing the songs outside a ceremonial context was thought to provoke the wrath of the spirits. What is even more interesting is how these transformations spiral back to the local context and influence Gnawa ritual practices in Morocco.

Money has played an important symbolic role in the ritual lives of the Gnawa, as it has been offered to musicians in exchange for their blessings (*baraka*). Due to the rapid commodification of ritual music, money has nevertheless become a symbol of contamination and raised debates about authenticity. *Tagnawit*, authentic Gnawa-ness, is reputedly not possessed by those who have commercialized the music at the cost of its devotional aspect. Yet with the gradual decline in popularity of traditional healing ceremonies in urban Morocco, the Gnawa have had to capitalize on their mastery of music. In the 1960s, the Gnawa became symbols of the 'essence of African culture' and Morocco's connection to international struggles for racial equality, and were sought out by many Western artists.

The African-American jazz pianist and composer Randy Weston, a long-time collaborator of the Gnawa master (*m'alle*) Abdellah El Gour, for instance, was possessed by the color blue, the color attributed to the spirit Sidi Musa (also known as Moses), when he attended a Gnawa trance ceremony in 1969, and this epiphany tied him to Africa, the birthplace of all traditions. In the claims to authenticity that both the Gnawa

and their African-American collaborators make when emphasizing their common history and shared experience of slavery, Kapchan sees a fetishization of victimhood. Similar processes of creating cultural heritage have also been described in the context of other communities of African diaspora, like Heidi Feldman's *Black Rhythms of Peru* (2006) on the revival of Afro-Peruvian music.

The return to a spiritual source that the Gnawa represent for Weston is expressed in a revealing way in the liner notes from his 1994 album *The Splendid Master Gnawa Musicians of Morocco*: 'You will rediscover (...) the divine elements missing from much modern day music, as well as a rediscovery of our true connection with God, because in its true form, untainted, what is music but the voice of God?' (p. 129). World music, as an aesthetic form of global imagination, tends to portray ritual forms of music as pure traditions, creating a transnational notion of 'the sacred' for its own purposes. Gnawa music is packaged and sold to foreign audiences as 'trance music', while, according to critics of commercialization, it is emptied of its ritual significance and healing power.

Such may be the irony of the commodity fetish. Surely, to a certain extent, meaning is flattened by appropriating only selected aspects of a ritual. However, paying attention to which meanings are repressed and which are adopted exposes an interesting inversion of signs, namely that 'what the Gnawa repress in the commodification of their music (its spiritual aspect and its ability to heal) returns as the main icon of Gnawa identity in Western appropriations of the music, while the exchange relations that are misrecognized in the West return to haunt the ritual life of the Gnawa' (p. 150).

*Traveling Spirit Masters* is a comparative, multi-sited musical ethnography in the vein of Veit Erlmann's *Nightsong* (1996) on Zulu migrant workers' *isicathamiya* performance practices in South Africa, or Thomas Turino's *Moving Away from Silence* (1993) about Andean panpipe music in the context of Peruvian rural-urban migration. All these studies bring to light the complex interplay of local traditions and the global market. While a generally engaging and thought-provoking read, what is particularly enjoyable is the way that Kapchan's ethnographic analysis and theoretical insights intermingle with passages of beautiful prose imbued with Sufi mysticism. The author's deep personal experience of, and immersion into, the world of Gnawa trance elevate it from a mere object of study to a vehicle of knowledge.

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