

*Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa and Music in the Global Marketplace.*

Deborah Kapchan, Wesleyan University Press. Middletown, CT. 2007, 325 pages. 19 b&w illustrations. ISBN-13: 978-0-8195-6852-6, pb; ISBN-10:0-8195-6852-X.

This book is the culmination of more than twenty years of research. It is a rich account of the symbols, intricacies, and manifestations of trance and possession among the Gnawa in Morocco, and joins a number of other recently published books on trance in North Africa (Jankowsky 2010, Waugh 2005). The book combines a range of narrative forms including hagiography, first person and reflective prose, as well as the history of the Gnawa and their spiritual world. The text is also peppered with personal anecdotes, many of which are probably indulgent, but the author manages to keep her focus on the challenging task of presenting a grand narrative of trance and possession in a community split between a localised, religiously embedded culture and peregrinations to the west. Somehow the author conceives of the west as a euphemism for the 'globe', but this is altogether another story. The author describes the book as an ethnography of North African expressive culture, 'which distinguishes itself from previous scholarly works on Morocco by analysing how Moroccan cultural practices influence and interact with other, nonlocal cultures, contributing to emergent aesthetic and ideological formations at the global level' (7). One of the author's aims is to examine the specificity of Gnawa trance as well as its transcultural potential. The book is intended to use Gnawa trance as a platform from which the author investigates the power of trance, the way it circulates globally, its relation to music and gendered subjectivity, and its enactment.

The book is divided into two parts. Part One consists of Chapters One through Five, and the second part consists of Chapters Six through Eleven. There are notes on translation, since the author uses Moroccan Arabic terms and language where necessary, nineteen illustrations consisting of photographs only, an Epilogue, Notes, Acknowledgements, an extensive Bibliography covering a range of disciplines including ethnomusicology, anthropology, critical theory, religious texts, performance studies, and the history of Gnawa culture.

Part One is called 'The Culture of Possession' and explains how a cultural imagination takes material form intersubjectively, in the body and senses, in sound, image, and word' (3). This part of the book explores ritual life as performed and narrated by the Gnawa themselves and the women in particular. As a woman the author is made privy to women's worlds, but she also navigates the world of men with ease and apparently their trust. Chapter One sets out the ritual world of the Gnawa in Rabat, exploring their historical relation to slavery and their place in the contemporary imagination. In Chapter Two the author analyzes Marcel Mauss' concept of 'mixture of sentiments' in the discursive world of the Gnawa where the roles of magic, of Eros and of trauma and healing define the ritual lives of the Gnawa, and how the awareness of these elements in their lives eventually allow them to restructure relations of subjugation by 'working the spirits'. Chapter Three discusses particularly the expression of grief, and

extends this analysis to the body in trance. The chapter explores the bodily metaphors of Gnawa trance, their relation to the codified gestures of trance performance and their intersections with the poetics of trance in narratives of possession. Chapter Four is an analysis of one narrative of possession in which the theme of mediation is dominant. Chapter Five makes evident the porosity between the interior life of the individual and the exterior life of public ritual and discourse.

The second part of the book is called 'Possessing Culture'. It explores the worlds created when the Gnawa, their music, and their beliefs travel to France and the United States. Chapter Six is a description of Si Mohammed Chaouqi in the Chellah Gardens where the Gnawa had become a tourist attraction and their significance to ritual only is being contested in this new environment. Chapter Seven analyzes the role of sacred music on the world music market, the collaborations of Gnawa with African American pianist and composer, Randy Weston, who became enamoured with Gnawa during a visit in 1967, and Gnawa encounters with Moroccan pop star, Hassan Hakmoun. Chapter Eight is an account of the author's experiences when she travelled with the Gnawa in France. Following Marcus (1998, 14), she describes this chapter as a 'multi-sited research imaginary'(4). Chapter Nine is an analysis of the contemporary fascination with trance experience through the narratives of three performers by the names of Si Mohammed Chaouqi, Randy Weston and a group of Breton performers in Brittany. In Chapter Ten the author demonstrates how discourses of history and race are reconfigured through the collaborations of Randy Weston and Gnawa master, Abdellah El Gour. In sum, the book is supposed to document the processes of spiritual, musical, physical, and geographical translocation.

Other than the absence of a serious discussion about the music itself, the book is replete with discussions around perhaps too many other issues. Some of these, such as Gnawa relationship to the Sufi tradition, the influence of slavery from sub-Saharan Africa on the religious worlds of Morocco, ancient secondary sources in Moroccan Arabic, lucid dreams (51) and 'commemorative memory' and rituals (32, 35), are important and help place the author's theorisation into perspective. At other times however it comes across as if the author is reaching at all possible interpretive hooks, ranging from mimesis, flow, excision, through crying, among others. This means that the reader is able to see the wood right through the trees and the reader should ideally have had a little space to interpret the unfolding narrative for him or herself. On the other hand, the scholarship is rigorous and the author reveals not only her 'knowledge' of the subject of Gnawa traditions but also her deep engagement with extant and classical theories of representation and interpretation in anthropological research. The author turns to scholars such as Lefebvre, Erlmann, Mauss, Merleau-Ponty, and Kristeva, to provide the basis from which to launch her discussions. Mostly, these scholars are cited to substantiate an observation and the author reveals her erudition with each scholar she invokes. But is it really necessary to start a chapter with three lengthy quotes (see Chapter 5)? In her favour however is the fact that the author also cites indigenous

Moroccan scholars.

The book is also a testimony to the indomitable spirit and creativity of the fieldwork researcher. The author has spent considerable lengths of time in Morocco; as tourist, student and as resident. During this time she learnt the language, and married and divorced a local Berber man. These experiences, together with how frequently locals assumed the author was Moroccan, gave the author incredible facility into a community abroad. The book has several passages where the author describes her everyday interactions and conversations with Gnawa healers/musicians. She describes vividly the experiences of Gnawa musicians abroad, and reveals the levels of her intimacy with Gnawa healers/musicians and the women. One of her challenges though was to experience 'enactment' - one of her aims in the book - to enter the realm of trance herself so that she can have first-hand experience of trance. But in order to enter this world the author had to be familiar with the spirits, some of whom are considered malevolent and others as beneficial to healing. On pages 50-51 the author graphically describes her eventual admission into this world. But since the author is concerned with 'enactment', itself an act of artifice, one wonders how genuinely participatory the author's involvement is. In the concluding chapter the author describes her vision of Moroccan spirits, presumably after she had departed from Morocco, and imagines the kindred spirit of her mother, to the point where the prose becomes a pastiche of fantasy and realism.

On the question of methodology, there is plenty of evidence of the Moroccans providing information and becoming acquaintances and friends, but in the end they are unfortunately excluded from the authority of the text. The author also recognises that music is an important part of these possessions, and had she been an ethnomusicologist there would have been more discussion on the music. As the author is not an ethnomusicologist as such, the book is then at least a potential guide to further research on the music of the Gnawa. Trance and possession are global phenomena and include traditional manifestations as well a state of mind induced by post-modern fetishisation. There are very few books on this subject in North Africa least of all the music, although Waugh (2005) makes considerable effort in transcribing and analysing the music. *Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa and Music in the Global Marketplace* may not strictly be ethnomusicological, but it does make a valuable contribution to the understanding of music in possession and trance.

*Lee Watkins*, Rhodes University