

Romani Routes. Cultural Politics & Balkan Music in Diaspora. By Carol Silverman. Oxford: University Press, 2012. xxvii, 398pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Figures. Hard Bound.

Cătălina Tesăr, Museum of the Romanian Peasant

Romani Routes by Carol Silverman is a journey across time and space which straddles North America and Southeast Europe and oscillates between past and present state regimes and their socio-economic slants, in quest of the driving forces of production and consumption of the Balkan Music. In this work, Silverman details the processes and actors which lie behind the present craze for Gypsy and Balkan music in the U.S. and Western Europe. The book seeks to demonstrate that Balkan music, a fusion of Balkan beats and Gypsy music, is not merely an art. It is a product of the workings of global market forces and state politics against the backdrop of Romani people's struggles for recognition and visibility. The Balkan music making draws on stereotypical representations of Roma as exotic and sensual and their internalization by the Romani people. The phenomenon of Balkan music merges appropriation of Romani music by non-Roma celebrity patrons with social marginalization of the Roma. It thus maps onto relations of exploitations which convey the idea of Roma being "powerless politically and powerful musically" (2012:241).

Combining approaches from ethnomusicology, anthropology, and cultural studies, the book draws on ethnographic research among Roma and non-Roma musicians and music producers, managers and festival organizers who have ties to countries such as Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Romania and who reside there or elsewhere, as well as on analyses of mass media materials. The main actors, however, are Macedonian and Bulgarian musicians with whom more extensive fieldwork was conducted in the New York City neighborhood of Bronx, where a sizable community of Macedonian Roma resides. Fieldwork was also conducted in Šutka, the large Romani community located on Skopje's outskirts, as well as in diverse Bulgarian locales, where Carol Silverman has been travelling since the 1970s. Covering almost three decades, the richness of this narrative derives from the complementary roles of the author as an anthropologist, a folklorist, a singer of Balkan and Romani vocal genres, and as an activist of Romani issues. As a collaborator of the NGO Voice of Roma, Carol Silverman has been involved in grassroots advocacy for the Romani voices and in bringing an educational component to the entertainment industry.

The book is organized in four sections, comprised of thirteen chapters. Part one acts as an "Introduction" to the uneasy history, rich culture, and social marginality of Balkan Roma with a focus on Bulgaria and Macedonia. It also considers the paths of their recent migration to the U.S, sets the historical context of the development of music as a Romani profession (2012:18), and gives an overview of the Balkan styles and genres. A theoretical framework is outlined, which emphasizes the challenge Romani populations pose to the common understandings of notions of diaspora, hybridity, transnationalism, and performance. The author wonders about her role in the context of increasing discrimination against the

Romani people in Europe, mushrooming popularity of the Gypsy music in the US, and the rise of the Romani movement.

Part II, "Music in Diasporic Homes," considers the role of music and dance in forging links within transnational families with origins in Macedonia who now live in Western Europe, U.S. and Australia. Relatedness is created and experienced through the movement of people and goods, such as tape recordings, especially during wedding celebrations and other life cycle events. Central idioms of Romani cultural figurations are also explored in this section: the virginity and the demure behavior of women, their association with the private space, and their predicament of living within an overarching patriarchal ideology. These themes are readdressed throughout the book, in relation to Romani women stage performers. The female belly dance, the Macedonian *čoček* and Bulgarian *kyuchek* in particular bring about a sensitive discussion as to how women navigate their divergent representations, both as members of a community that values the containment of their sexuality, and as stage performers for an audience that consumes them as eroticized objects.

Part III, "Music, States, and Markets," looks at how state socialism and post-socialism shaped Balkan Romani music in Bulgaria. While music produced by Roma was at odds with the official cultural politics of ethnic sanitization during communism, it nonetheless left a legacy of resilience. The best example of this is the endurance of the genre wedding music in spite of its official prohibition. Not only did Bulgarian wedding music proliferate in the privacy of people's home celebrations, but it also crept into the informal musical market. In post-socialist era, although Gypsy music became exceedingly popular, it also became prey to exploitation by both non-Romani entrepreneurs and those Romani people who were lured by the tunes of the market logic. The fact that Romani musicians and Roma people did not overcome marginality is best epitomized by the phenomenon of *chalga*, a pop-folk genre that attracted moral criticism on the part of the cultural and political elites despite its overwhelming popularity among the working classes.

In part IV, "Musicians in Transit," the author poses the question, "How did Romani music become the hip commodity labeled Gypsy music that is now found in world music festivals, in urban clubs, and endorsed by movie stars such as Johnny Depp and Madonna?" (2012:241). She presents a tentative answer: this happened by the synergy between economic and political power disparities, marketization and commodification of Gypsies' Orientalized images, and appropriation of Gypsy music by the non-Romani entertainment industry. However, Silverman hints that Romani musicians have not been passive actors in these processes. The evolution of stars such as Esmā Redžepova and Yuri Yanakov shows how Romani musicians not only adopt self-exotization as a market strategy but also adapt to the market demands. This raises a question: should we consider the collaboration of Roma musicians with the driving forces of the world music scene inherently exploitative? I would appreciate further discussion on this issue, given that at times I felt unsure about the extent to which Roma people themselves felt exploited versus it being the authors' interpretation.

This observation aside, the book is an instructive reading both for the scholars of Romani studies, identity politics, post-Socialism, or transnationalism, and for non-professional readership with a taste for Balkan music.