Adriana N. Helbig

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

CIP data is on file at the Library of Congress

ISBN 978–0–19–763177–5 (pbk.)
ISBN 978–0–19–763176–8 (hbk.)

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197631768.001.0001

Paperback printed by Marquis Book Printing, Canada
Hardback printed by Bridgeport National Bindery, Inc., United States of America

For the silenced

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Preface

I first heard Romani music in 1996 while studying classical piano performance in Vienna, a city where my grandparents sought refuge during World War II while escaping from Nazi and Soviet occupations of western Ukraine. My father was eight years old when he was uprooted from his childhood home in Velyki Filvarky near Brody, spending his formative years in a displaced persons' camp near Murnau in the Bavarian Alps in the American zone in Allied-occupied Germany. Members of my father's family were taken as *Ost-Arbeiter,* the Nazi German designation for foreign slave workers gathered from occupied Central and Eastern Europe to perform forced labor in Germany during World War II. The family was reunited in Corning, New York, in 1953 and relocated to Newark, New Jersey, where my sister and I were born in the 1970s and grew up in a community of ethnic Ukrainian refugees, dissidents, and political émigrés. My mother was born in a displaced persons' camp in Erlangen, Germany, the only one of my grandmother's five children to survive the war. Her father had been active in the underground movement in Rava-Ruska near the Ukrainian-Polish border. As a war refugee, he used his skills as a partisan commander to organize the lives of ethnic Ukrainians in Erlangen's displaced persons' camp. My maternal grandmother, née Subtelna, was born in 1905 in Kejdantsi near Tarnopol (today's Ternopil, Ukraine), in Habsburg Galicia and lived with our family until she was ninety-five. She was fluent in five languages and taught us Ukrainian, Polish, and German. She received letters from her brother who had decided to turn back in Vienna and return home after the war, only to be sentenced to hard labor in the Siberian *gulag* for his role in the underground movement. The pages of these letters were marked through with black ink, the words crossed out by Soviet censors.

That the research for this book began in Vienna is not a coincidence. I had chosen to study abroad in the city that had played such a pivotal role in my family's routes. It was also the city of music and a place where I intended to launch my career as a classical pianist. The city, however, would serve as a circuitous route for my return to the home my family had left so many years before. As a music student living in the heart of the city, I was drawn to the

music of street musicians who played near the conservatory. I was invited to the outer *Bezirke*, city districts, to spend time with the families of musicians, both Roms and non-Roms, who had fled violence in the Balkans. In intimate gatherings, I witnessed the role that music plays among people whose lives have been uprooted by war. I write this book with a reminiscence of those times because during that era of fluidity, social flux, and personal discovery, upon my return to the United States, I entered a graduate program in ethnomusicology in the Department of Music at Columbia University. By way of this prestigious American ivory tower, I later returned east, into the Carpathian Mountains, along the borders of Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania. It was there, in the center of the poorest, most violent, most economically and politically corrupt region at the time—Transcarpathia—that I began my study of the not (yet) globalized "Gypsy" music.

Since the 1990s, extensive volumes have been written about traditional and popular Romani music genres across the world, and these writings significantly deepened my understanding of the issues as a student. Subsequently, I, too, have contributed to this literature, particularly as it relates to Romani experiences on the territories of the former Austrian Empire. I have also engaged with Romani musicians in Pittsburgh, where I have lived and taught for more than a decade. Romani families who had immigrated from Austro-Hungary to Pittsburgh at the end of the nineteenth century formed an integral part of the city's industrial soundscape. The neighborhoods of Homestead and Braddock were home to a sizable Romani orchestra founded during the Great Depression through the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Musicians like George Batyi, whose family members played in this orchestra, have given presentations in my courses and participated in conferences I have organized on Romani music at the University of Pittsburgh. To further contextualize Romani music performance for students, I drew on my mother's expertise in the East European travel industry. I organized and led study abroad programs for undergraduates at the University of Pittsburgh, traveling with them to the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. For many, these trips were the first they made abroad. This book incorporates their thoughts, feelings, and ideas regarding their visits to Romani music festivals, Romani Holocaust memorial sites, Romani museums, and urban and rural Romani communities.

I am not an ethnic Romni (fem.), but I come to this study with great respect and love for those who have historically had no voice in academia. As a scholar, I strive to include the varied perspectives of interlocutors I have

worked alongside for minority rights, cultural rights, and equal representation. Furthermore, as a musician and an ethnomusicologist, I have learned over the years how to not only view music solely as a political act, as I grew up to perceive it in diaspora, but how to appreciate music as sound, emotional release, and even entertainment. A great sense of joy had come from organizing a student ensemble that popularized Romani music among undergraduates who were very much the same age as I was when I first heard this music. The writings within these pages incorporate their experiences as well. This book, then, is as much a synthesis of knowledge as it is a critical analysis and fresh revisiting of my experiences with Romani music over the years. It is a rethinking of old ideas in light of new political landscapes and economic spheres. It is a rewriting of well-known paradigms within Romani music studies and a reworking of old and new ethnographic materials. It is also an acknowledgment of my role in the process as a researcher, performer, and activist who has lived and worked alongside Roms, sharing their music within the framework of Romani rights advocacy.

As the title states, this book is a re-sounding—a re-articulation—of the upheavals and resurrections that have shaped Romani ways of being in the world. In my re-listenings, I have tried to retune my ears to the experiences that I, as a young researcher, was not equipped to understand, relate to, or adequately describe. This book, about life processes, memories, and hope, is also one of release from the burdens of witnessing the marginalization of a culture and its people. It does not purport to offer solutions to the injustices but, nevertheless, serves as a testament to advocacy. It is also a story written amid generational traumas of World War II, the experiences of Soviet collapse and the harsh realities of Ukrainian independence (1991), the changes brought forth during Ukraine's Orange Revolution (2004) that shaped my dissertation fieldwork, and Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity (2014) whose violence triggered the post-traumatic stress (PTS) that sidelined my initial attempts to write this book. The story within these pages has found its peace, embodied and passed on and experienced by those who have taken on these issues. It is also a story that spans continents, crosses borders, speaks in different languages, and engages with people of many backgrounds. I acknowledge the great responsibility I have felt over the years to give back and help, recognizing the sheer impracticality of some of the tasks I took on while rejoicing in the knowledge that I did my small part in time of great difficulty. The past looms large, and this book sorts the feelings and memories in a way that will help me to move forward.

While some people who have been a significant part of this project have passed on, others continue to work actively in their communities, performing, teaching, and working toward new tomorrows. It is to these family members, friends, colleagues, musicians, and all who have welcomed me into their lives that I dedicate this book with great gratitude.

Acknowledgments

Research for this book has been funded through generous grants from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), the Fulbright Foundation, the International Research and Exchanges (IREX), the Institute of International Education (IIE), and the University of Pittsburgh's Global Studies Center, the Center for Russian, East European Studies (REES), the Humanities Center, the Provost's Office, and the Nationality Rooms and Intercultural Exchange Programs. Initial phases were supported by grants from the Shevchenko Scientific Society, the American Association for Ukrainian Studies, the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University, and the Ukrainian Studies Program at Columbia University. The research for this project began in 1999 as part of my dissertation in partial fulfillment for the doctoral degree in ethnomusicology in the Department of Music at Columbia University. My dissertation came under the direction of Ana María Ochoa Gautier in its later stage with committee members Aaron Fox, Michael Beckerman, and the late Mark von Hagen. The research has continued over the last twenty years in terms of fieldwork, conference presentations, academic writings, and as collaborations with activists, scholars, musicians, and friends in Ukraine and in countries across Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans.

First and foremost, I wish to thank Evhenia Navrotska, educator, activist, journalist, media consultant, and friend, without whom the Romani rights movement in Ukraine would not be where it is today. Evhenia has dedicated her life to helping Romani leaders in Transcarpathia fight against prejudice and discrimination in education and media. She was among the first people I met in the field and continues to be a guiding force for me and for others within the Romani rights movement in Ukraine. Aladar Adam, leader of the Romani Yag (Romani Fire) organization and editor of the *Romani Yag* newspaper, which I translated into English for its online format for many years, has also been a close friend and a pillar of support throughout the years. The late Josyp Adam and Maria Adam, who welcomed me into their home and into their family, have been a very large part of my life since the early 2000s. A heartfelt thanks goes to Svetlana Adam and Zoltán Boshanyi, and to their

daughter, my beloved goddaughter, Nikoletta Adam. Together with Oktavia Adam, Serhyi Chichak, and their son Bardo, the Adam family has helped me in all aspects of my research. A new generation of Romani leaders led by Zola Kondur, Alia Yurchenko, Myroslav Horvat, Viktor Chovka, Petya Gabyn, and Denis Varody have offered inestimable help over the years. A very special thank you to Nataliya Zinevych, Senior Research Fellow, M. S. Hrushevsky Institute of Ukrainian Archaeography and Source Studies National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and to Michael Beníšek, Assistant Professor at the Romani Studies Section of the Department of Central European Studies at Charles University in Prague, whose research among Roms in Ukraine informs my own. I also wish to acknowledge Serhiy Ponomaryov, Roma Program Director at the International Renaissance Foundation, for his long-term commitment to Romani causes in Ukraine.

Having worked on Romani issues in many countries, I am grateful to Zuzana Jurková with whom I led the Romani music, culture, and human rights study abroad from the University of Pittsburgh to the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia (2012) and to the Czech Republic and Hungary (2014). I express thanks to Lynn Hooker, Irén Kertész Wilkinson, and the late Speranta Radulescu for joining our students abroad. I am also grateful to the late Kateřina Jurečková from the CET[1] program in Prague/Washington, DC, and to the wonderful people at the University of Pittsburgh's Study Abroad Office and the Center for Russian and East European Studies for their continued support of all of my Romani-related projects, including research trips, courses, study abroad initiatives, concerts, conferences, and publications. A special thanks to Bob Hayden, Eileen O'Malley, Emilia Zankina, and the late Susan Hicks for their enthusiastic support during the years we collaborated through Pitt's REES. I am also grateful to Murray Barkema, Director of the Vienna Program, Central College (Iowa) for his inspiration and guidance. To all of my colleagues and friends in Austria, *Herzlichen Dank*.

I offer a deep bow of respect, *nyzkyii uklin*, to the broad network of ethnomusicologists in Ukraine who have supported my work over the years, especially Ira Dovhaliuk, Iryna Klymenko, Vera Madiar-Novak, and Viktor Shostak. I feel a great debt of gratitude to Romani music scholars Michael Beckerman, Ursula Hemetek, Lynn Hooker, Zuzana Jurková, Barbara Rose Lange, Svanibor Pettan, Carol Silverman, Irén Kertész Wilkinson, Petra Gelbart, Siv Brun Lie, the late Speranta Radulescu, and the late Katalin Kovalcik. Thank you to my University of Pittsburgh colleagues, especially Shalini Ayyagari, Andrew Weintraub, and Mathew Rosenblum, former

Chair of the Department of Music, for their continued support of this research in terms of programming at the University of Pittsburgh. I wish to also acknowledge the feedback of scholars including Donna Buchanan, Naila Ceribašić, Lynn Hooker, Ana Hofman, Ian MacMillen, Noriko Manabe, David McDonald, Carol Muller, Inna Narodytskaya, Marcia Ostashevsky, Svanibor Pettan, Maria Sonevytsky, and others with whom I have, over the years, collaborated on projects relating to this research. Thank you also to Samantha Bassler for her assistance in preparing the index. To musicians George Batiy, Raif Huseni, Walt Mahovlich, Ethel Reim, Eva Salina, and others with whom I have worked over the years, thank you for sharing your talents with my students. And a special thank you to my former student-turned-colleague Jonathan Heins, who, upon graduation, co-directed the Carpathian Music Ensemble that I founded and directed at the University of Pittsburgh between 2008 and 2018.

I express my deepest love, respect, and gratitude to my beloved piano teacher Prof. Taissa Bohdanska at the Ukrainian Music Institute, to my high school music teacher Sr. Mary Gomolka at Mt. St. Mary Academy, to my music professors at Drew University Dr. Lydia Lydeen, Dr. Lynn Siebert, Dr. Norman Lowry, and the late Garyth Nair, and to my piano mentors Ana Bershadsky, Kazuko Jankovski, Seymour Bernstein, as well as the late Jan Gorbaty, for offering me strong foundations in classical music. The late Roma Pryma-Bohachevska, the Ukrainian-born prima ballerina and choreographer with whom I worked for many years as a piano accompanist for dance camps and workshops, helped foster my deep appreciation and understanding of folk music and dance traditions of Ukraine.

I express deep gratitude to my wide circle of friends, especially Kerri Stover, Alexa Milanytch, Areta Trytjak, Vicki Bixel, Cindy Abbott, and Roxy Korchynsky. Thank you to the Milanytch family, the Mykyta family, the Lew/Dobriansky family, and my extended family in Ukraine, Europe, and North America. I wish to offer a special thank you to Iryna Kliuchkovska, Director of the International Institute of Education, Culture and Diaspora Relations of Lviv Polytechnic National University and members of Lviv-Inturtrans, especially Vasyl and Luba Popovych, Iryna Potatuyeva, and Natalia Zaborska for supporting this project from its first iterations in the late 1990s. Natalia Zaborska, together with her late husband Bohdan and the extended Sobol family, have offered such a depth of support that no words of thanks would suffice.

And lastly, this project could not have been possible without the unwavering love and support of my late father and music lover, Omelan Helbig,

Figure 0.1 Map of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, 1889. The research for this book was conducted along the Carpathian Mountain range near Unghvar (today's Uzhhorod, Ukraine). The author's family hails from the surrounding areas of Brody, Lemberg (today's Lviv, Ukraine), and Tarnopol (today's Ternopil, Ukraine). Artist: The Palmer/Getty Images.

and my musically talented and ever-imaginative mother, Georgine Marijka Stadnycka Helbig. My mother, a formidable force whose insights and imagination as a travel agent specializing in Ukraine fueled my love for ethnography, continues to offer an unwavering depth of support for my career in ways that would be impossible to describe.

I write this book with great love and respect for my family's histories, joys, and traumas. To those who wish to remain unnamed, thank you for the love and support you bring into my life. Know that you remain, now and forever, close to my heart.

Awareness

> There are poverties and there are poverties.
>
> —Adrienne Rich

> History is written by the rich, and so the poor get blamed for everything.
>
> —Jeffrey Sachs

> Poverty is the worst form of violence.
>
> —Mahatma Gandhi

On a cool May afternoon in 2016, amid the blooming sakura trees gifted in 1923 to the city of Uzhhorod by the government in Vienna, a large group of attendees crowded into a nondescript classroom at the Uzhhorod National University to witness the launch of the new Romani Studies Program, a collaboration between the university, Romani activists, community leaders, and scholars that aims to familiarize students with Romani history, language, and culture through a series of courses taught over two semesters. During the event's introductions by city councilman Myroslav Horvat, a young Rom with a law degree, the projector tipped and the screen fell out of focus. A student rushed to fix it, steadying the machine with a hardcover book whose familiar binding caught my eye. Titled *Play for Me, Old Gypsy: The Role of Romani Music in the Roma Rights Movement in Ukraine* (2005), I was glad to see my doctoral dissertation continuing to be of some use. Having worked and lived among the Romani communities on the westernmost edge of Ukraine for more than twenty years, I smiled at the moment's symbolism.

The words that follow do not focus on the academic program described above, if only because such endeavors are the work of Roms whose voices are more important in such settings than mine. Instead, this book is about Roms who, like guitarist Sasha Latsko, live just a few steps away from the university

ReSounding Poverty. Adriana N. Helbig, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2023.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197631768.003.0001

but have no access to the programming inside its walls because of the poverty in which he lives. The university programming is geared for Romani students whose families, affiliated with development organizations, have established themselves as members of the bourgeoning post-Soviet middle class. The inherent class divisions within Romani communities, augmented by (in) accessibility to economic resources, play a significant role in how analyses of Romani modes-of-being are (mis)understood. By bringing us into the lived experiences of the objectified poor and the economically Othered, the words on these pages turn up the volume on the not-always-audible soundtrack of Roms who, despite numerous efforts through multiple development initiatives, live in squalor and face hunger. I write this book to show that while development initiatives help *some* Roms, they cannot pull the poorest among them out of the direst situations.

Through an interdisciplinary approach drawing from the intersection of sound studies, poverty studies, and disability studies, I bring readers into the sound worlds of Roms living in the greatest degrees of poverty through stories of musical histories, tunings, performance aesthetics, and activism. I draw on my own experiences of physical and emotional traumas in the field to create space for addressing the sounds of Romani emotional and physical health as affected by the socioeconomic and personal challenges they face. My travels behind the Iron Curtain as a child in the 1980s and my witnessing of US diaspora travel experiences to independent Ukraine as a tour guide and helping reunite family members who had not seen each other since World War II have greatly informed my research. I cast such experiences as "grief tourism" due to the significant emotional toll they brought on to everyone involved. Such experiences drew me to this project through what I term "grief fieldwork," research in contexts of significant psychological and emotional hardship.

To some extent, my fieldwork echoes what Timothy Rice describes as a "new form of ethnomusicology in times (and places) of trouble" (Rice 2014, 191). In Eastern Europe, newly emerging facts about the past, especially regarding World War II history, shift present-day relationships to time and place. Broadening Rice's observation, this book accounts for shifts in memory that allow for new ethnomusicologies to emerge. Since the fall of communism, international funds have helped maintain Holocaust memorial sites like the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. Funds from the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the European Union, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation as well as numerous donations from individuals as foundations have helped conserve the memorial while making

it accessible to visitors. For several decades, annual visitors to Auschwitz numbered approximately 500,000. In 2019, 2.3 million people visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, contributing to a significant rise in so-called dark tourism.[1]

I traveled to Auschwitz in 2012 with students from the University of Pittsburgh to guide them through witnessing. Among the research projects resulting from this trip was Evan Zajdel's undergraduate B.Phil. thesis, which I advised, titled *Narrative Threads: Ethnographic Tourism, Romani Tourist Tales, and Fiber Art* (2013). Zajdel's nonverbal processing of these experiences resulted in five works of fiber art, including the final piece that incorporates the artist's hair. In his art piece titled "Amnesia in a Place of Remembrance," Zajdel offers a silk reinterpretation of an Auschwitz prisoner's armband (Figure I.1). The use of hair as padding in the triangle and the chenille references the Nazi practice of shaving prisoners to send the hair to German factories for use in upholstery (Zajdel 2013, 44–50). Zajdel writes, "I include my hair because my visit to Block 4 caused a complete emotional shutdown. Without this shutdown, or without my later shock in the Sauna, I could perhaps have simply buried my memories of Auschwitz and let time help me forget" (47). Zajdel argues for the credibility of artistic expression resulting from fieldwork and reminds us that emotional processing is an essential component of the research process. Echoing Zajdel, this book makes an argument for time—to learn, process, and present.

Getting Involved, Responsibly

At its core, *ReSounding Poverty* serves as an example of applied ethnomusicology. The book offers a critique of how we, as applied scholars, engage with the music and the musicians alongside whom we conduct our research. From the courses we teach to the musical performances we give, ethnomusicologists use the tools of audio and video documentation, ethnographic interviews, extended fieldwork, publications in various languages, presentations at conferences (as presenters and organizers), and classroom work to analyze, delve deeper, and exchange ideas about that which we witness and experience. In applied work, we engage with the projects framed by our interlocutors, albeit pushing such frames in new directions when appropriate. We offer our knowledge of local practice, along with our access to resources that can facilitate community-based action.

Figure I.1 Evan Zajdel, "Amnesia in a Place of Remembrance," 24″ × 13″, 2013. The artist's hair, silk thread, mulberry paper, silk dupioni, willow wood.

My applied work experience has helped me understand that, despite the alleged grassroots appearances of such actions, the success of musically informed community actions in postsocialist contexts is determined on many levels by Western economic and political forces. Western institutions play

a significant role in establishing and perpetuating the global frameworks through which mediated cultural expressions are understood. Shifts within Western political and economic networks play a critical role in transforming and determining what we understand by the notion of culture and what we do in its name.

Such arguments, made in hindsight, stem from my twenty-year path as a researcher who became active in the Romani rights movement during the 1990s through affiliations with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These nonprofit organizations are independent of local government funding structures and are active in humanitarian agendas. At the time of my research, Western-funded nonprofit organizations were using music to advance equality discourse in Eastern Europe. My involvement in such projects stemmed from my willingness to collaborate on projects important to Romani NGO leaders, hoping that this would ultimately afford me greater access to all members of the local community. My multiple roles as researcher, musician, and unnamed behind-the-scenes policy worker determined the type of data to which I had access. Working as a minority rights advocate alongside Roms during two political upheavals in Ukraine in 2004 and 2014, I write this book sharing how exchanges between Romani musician-activists, students, and scholars were facilitated globally through development networks. At a time when academic relevance is being questioned, I draw on my experiences as a music professor and university administrator to highlight some of the complex ways that universities in the United States shape global human rights discourse.

To bring help is, by far, not the sole purpose of writing this book, but it has continued to be a guiding factor of the research. To be guided by doing good, and the pitfalls that such intervention brings, is not the same as doing good scholarship. Thus, this book is hardly a statement of advocacy, and indeed it critiques the author's involvement in such endeavors. Instead, it seeks to offer a snapshot, a feeling of what it is like, as an ethnographer and author, to have lived half a life, twenty of the forty-some years on this earth, engaging with a people who feel silenced and forgotten. Time, then, is a crucial guiding factor in this endeavor, as it has been akin to a character in a Greek tragedy that looms large, comments, disrupts, and guides. The time that has passed has also borne witness to major political upheavals that have, in their own ways, upended aspects of this research, suspending it in times of great violence and danger, and speeding it up in alternate cycles, as during the rushed preparations of court documents and testimonies[2] I prepare for Romani

asylum seekers from Eastern Europe to the United States.[3] Thus, this book jumps across centuries, between the past and present, and across countries, new borders, changing laws, and new technologies. In so doing, it weaves a narrative that belongs as much to me as it does to the people whose lives I share in these pages. As I ponder the ironies of job security, grant monies, and the luxury of sabbatical time to write these words, my thoughts are always, as they have been for years, with the Romani musicians whose call for the change I echo in this book.

The Politics of Sound

While *ReSounding Poverty* is of interest to anyone wishing to know more about Romani musical traditions, it is, first and foremost, a critique of the economic structures within which Romani musics circulate. Specifically, it addresses the role of NGOs as market actors within neoliberal processes specific to the margins of Europe. It offers a micro ethnography of economic networks that function on a transnational scale and impact the daily lives of Romani musicians on the borders of the former Soviet Union and the European Union.

Lying at the heart of this book is the economic deprivation and financial poverty that frames it. In post-Soviet market economies, marred by violence and deep-rooted corruption, poverty is increasingly blamed on a lack of self-mobilization. The rhetoric of the haves and have-nots now collides with self-actualizing rhetoric from the United States, reinforced, in part, via NGOs (Round and Kosterina 2005). Everyone is responsible for their economic security. The neoliberal project, as it has taken root in formerly socialist economics, has, in following David Harvey's thinking, become a class project (Harvey 2007). NGO-salaried labor has contributed to the rise of a Romani middle class that seeks to further interests of Romani advancement in education, economics, and politics. This advancement is achieved, to an extent, through the use of cultural capital that has, through a history of Soviet manipulations, solidified dominant stereotypes of Roms as dancers and musicians. Such stereotypes reinforce rhetoric of Romani-specific skills and talents that cast Roms as emotion-generating entertainers. Such stereotypes also reinforce contemporary narratives that aim to justify the exclusion of Roms from educational and professional advancements because they are perceived to be *only* valuable to society as entertainers. Such discriminatory