

Sonic Signatures: Music, Migration and the City at Night

Edited by Derek Pardue, Ailbhe Kenny and Katie Young
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Sonic Signatures is a compelling and multifaceted exploration of what urban soundscapes at night mean for migrants. Edited by Derek Pardue, Ailbhe Kenny, and Katie Young, the collection distinguishes itself from previous literature on cities and nighttime through its unique points of view and articulations as well as its innovative approaches and analyses to investigating the multisensorial aspects of darkness. The book addresses the limitations of recent anthropological studies of migration that focus largely on temporality and tensions by instead investigating different instances of musical “encounters” of migrants at night from across the world as represented in ten chapters and the five interludes in between them. It thus stands as an invaluable transdisciplinary and multi-modal contribution from scholars and artists to the fields of (ethno)musicology, sound studies, night-time urban studies, cultural studies and migration studies. Through “methodological experiments” and woven creative conversations from ethnomusicology, geography, philosophy and fiction, the contributors offer nuanced perspectives on the role of sound in urban environments and how it shapes human experiences and identities.

The editors introduce the volume as an exploration of the complex relationship between the power of music and senses of space, memory, migration, cultural identity and belonging within the context of the nocturnal city. Overall, the collection emphasises the importance of music in both migrants’ adaptations to new environments and their resistance to cultural erasure, making a compelling case for the relevance of these themes in contemporary migration studies. The chapters explore this transformative power of sound and music by each delving into the

diverse musical landscapes of different cities, capturing the essence of nocturnal life through a series of themes that range from belonging and cultural identity to resistance and solidarity. Unique to this collection is the inclusion of “interlude” chapters within each thematic grouping. As interplays of personal experiences, academic exploration and artistic expression, the interludes present exciting alternative forms of music study and writing that highlight how understandings of music transcend conventional academic boundaries.

The book highlights the significance of music in bridging geographical and temporal gaps, allowing migrants to navigate cultural transitions while maintaining ties to their homelands. The interplay of these themes across the chapters and interludes is striking. One notable aspect is how music becomes a bridge between diasporic communities and their adopted homelands, fostering a sense of belonging and providing a link to cultural roots. For instance, Áine Mangaoang’s exploration of Irish music in Oslo (Chapter 8) and Sipho Sithole’s examination of iSicathamiya in urban settings (Chapter 9) reveal the power of music to uphold the connection between migrants and their heritage. Other studies uncover the complexities of night-time culture, addressing issues of inclusivity, discrimination, and representation. For example, Gibran Teixeira Braga explores tensions between acceptance and exclusion in his chapter on Berlin’s queer electronic party scene where he demonstrates the coexistence of a seemingly inclusive environment with underlying inequalities in “door policies” (Chapter 10). In addition, Masimba Hwati and Austin T. Richey’s interlude on the Zimbabwean independence movement (Interlude 3) offers valuable insights into the complexity of the role of sonic culture in shaping resistance against colonial rule. The notion of the “sonic unconscious” as a realm of memory and resistance is also effectively followed up in the interludes, where personal narratives and creative expression intersect with scholarly analysis.

Authors employ a diverse array of research methodologies and analytical approaches, many of which are thoughtfully applied, providing valuable insights and enriching the overall narrative. Of note, several chapters and interludes feature first-hand accounts and interviews with individuals who have direct experience with the sonic cultures under examination. For instance, Sithole’s discussion of iSicathamiya music captures the perspectives of migrant workers and musicians, providing an authentic portrayal of their lived experiences and anxieties as shared through the night-time economy that ties the city to work for the Black majority: after hours, many head to segregated townships, while others retreat to servant’s quarters or men’s hostels in the city. This approach lends depth and authenticity to the research of the dissent, grounding it in the voices of those who actively participate in these cultures through detailed ethnography. Another valuable aspect of the book is the blend of musicological methods and analysis. Braga’s discussion of Berlin’s queer party scene, for example, combines ethnomusicological research based on interviews with DJs with analyses of how electronic dance rhythms, frequencies, and structures contribute to the aesthetics of these queer spaces.

Furthermore, the interludes in the book introduce an innovative analytical approach, marrying academic research with creative expression to explore socio-cultural phenomena. For example, Nick Prior’s interlude about ‘Tokyo After Hours’ – a piece of music the author composed during a fellowship as a visitor/migrant in Japan – combines discussions on field recordings, personal reflections in

composition about the city and electronic music composition to provide a holistic perspective of Tokyo's urban rhythms (Interlude 2). While this approach allows readers to engage on a more emotional and sensory level, its degree of subjectivity might be regarded as peculiar in academic contexts. Nonetheless, beyond enhancing the book's accessibility and appeal, this form of writing embeds creative expression in scholarship in a way that uniquely challenges, and thereby indirectly questions, the standard dimensions of scholarly writing. The interlude captures the composer's process, preserving its logistics, experience, and individuality often overlooked in academic studies. Crafting it involves accessing global data from a bustling city's living room, mirroring Tokyo's tech-driven noise and night-time silence, revealing contrasts within these spaces.

Sonic Signatures importantly introduces a variety of identities and challenges that inform migrant experience of nightlife scenes. However, more thorough analyses of the economic, legal, and political factors influencing these experiences would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of each case. For example, examining the "Refugees Welcome" parties in Berlin as an initiative to address inclusion, Braga portrays the city's nightlife scene as a space of inclusivity where diverse communities intersect, and yet hints at underlying issues with door policies that exclude certain groups. This portrayal leaves room for a deeper examination of whether the scene's diversity is more of a performative façade, given the persistence of exclusionary policies. More broadly, while the collection offers detailed analyses of cases where music and migration inform and are part of one another, these studies would benefit from a more extensive exploration of the socio-economic and -political dimensions of the sonic cultures discussed.

There are also some generalising arguments and assumptions left unexplored; for instance, the collection in general takes the practice of music as "an imprint of the city", or migration as a "sonic process" without addressing the limitations of such interpretations. Similarly, there are some notions mentioned but not articulated clearly enough; for instance, it is not always clear what exactly are the inherent socio-political potentialities of music for migrants. Moving on, the reader may struggle to be convinced of some of the editors' general arguments in the Introduction chapter that, for example, "people" (as a whole) might find nights an easier atmosphere in which to have further self-reflections or to explore more intimate experiences, or, even, why music is such a medium for all "people". Similarly, as several important terms are variably used by the authors to address different experiences and conditions, an acknowledgement of that variety, and the connections or disconnections between these uses and scholarly theorisations, would clarify the chapters' transdisciplinary strengths. For example, the interchangeable use of the terms diaspora and migrant require more thorough contextualisation of the different perspectives and knowledge systems behind these terms. Finally, having referred to the terms "unconscious" and "conscious(ness)" throughout the book, a more detailed explanation of the idea would have been beneficial, especially from a psychoanalytical point of view rather than only referring to Deleuze and Guattari in the introduction.

Overall, *Sonic Signatures* offers invaluable insights on how music serves as a tool of cultural resilience, allowing migrants to maintain connections to their roots while

adapting to new environments. The concept of the “sonic signature” emerges as a space where memories are encoded, and resistance is articulated, illustrating the deep connection between music and historical consciousness. The authors’ explorations of night-time as a time of creativity, solidarity, resistance, and cultural expression provides fresh perspectives on the significance of the nocturnal. This novel approach of engaging with the night as a cultural space uncovers the hidden narratives of marginalized communities, demonstrating how the night can be a canvas for social transformation and sonic expression. Furthermore, the unique transdisciplinary structure of the book enriches the exploration of music and migration among a diverse range of contexts. It argues that music is not just a form of entertainment but a means of cultural resistance, enabling marginalised communities to assert their existence and adapt to new surroundings. The breadth of insights on the nocturnal musical experiences of migrant communities from South Africa to Germany to Brazil to Japan and further beyond provide much needed and comprehensive contributions to understanding how music serves as a medium for both adaptation and resistance within various migratory contexts.