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Ronald Radano, Tejumola Olaniyan, eds. *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), ISBN 978-0822359869 (hb), 978-0822360124 (pb).

Against the black background of the book's cover, a patch of globe bulges out. As if through a telescope from deep space, we see the Indian Ocean and parts of Africa, India and Middle East; across them, the title is emblazoned. Our eyes fall on the non-West, while fragments of a score of 'Rule Britannia' are superimposed to the north and south. However, readers expecting an account of music in British empire, long the paradigmatic target of postcolonial criticism in other fields, may be in for a surprise. The book itself rotates the globe through 180 degrees and moves forward in time. It mainly considers the 'unofficial' US empire and its sprawling effects across the world in the period since World War II: in jazz history, in American and Cuban hip-hop, along the US-Mexico border, in African diasporas, in the proliferating spaces of multinational enterprise, and amid historical and contemporary foreign occupations. Britain does figure, as do some other imperial powers (Japanese, Chinese, Ottoman); but given the book's largely US-orientated contents, the lingering presence of a former world power is a strange mascot. One shouldn't judge a book by its cover, of course. Such common wisdom is the child of 'high' British empire: the moral lesson urges the unlettered individual to look beyond appearances to discover true meaning. Pausing a moment longer over this particular cover, though, can guide us toward important aspects of the book's approach to empire.

One thing that the icon cues is the close connection between British and American empires in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: an infamous succession, perhaps even in aural terms. For the ethnomusicological readers to whom the book is mainly addressed, the split between music and territory might also recall Steven Feld's argument about the mutually reinforcing relationship between schizophonia and globalization.¹ Feld's idea was closely tied to sound reproduction technology, the patterns of circulation of 1990s global pop, and an extractive approach toward musics of the Fourth World. In this sense, the cover image knowingly gestures at a longer history of Western schizophrenic domination: a technique of oppression that significantly precedes the phonograph. This idea is exposed in the introduction, where editors Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan argue that 'musical repetition and its global distribution... is distinctive to the age of empire' (13-15). This crucial passage alerts us to recordings as technologies of imperial perception and prepares the way for important chapters by Philip Bohlman on the long history of the 'metaphysics of musical mobility', by Kofi Agawu on the import of Western tonality into 19th-century African contexts, and by Jairo Moreno on what he calls 'schizochronia', the annexing of the world's times at the inception of the US jazz archive. Sound reproduction technology, and recording especially, also appears in almost all of the other chapters, but the three just mentioned are among the few that deal with the era before sound reproduction became a global social fact (say, in the years around 1920), and so are best able to account for schizophonia as an historical and cultural technique.² By contrast, Michael Denning's chapter opens the book with an original argument on the coming of electronic microphones to recording studios, bringing about a 'popular music revolution' that echoed

¹ Steven Feld, 'Pygmy Pop. A Genealogy of Schizophrenic Mimesis', *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28 (1996), 1-35.

² Jonathan Sterne famously argues that sound reproduction technology depends on the development of a 'social belief' in the efficacy of sonic machines in the nineteenth century, but he does not discuss the geography of its spread; see his *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

around colonial ports world-wide in the 1920s and 30s. According to Denning, this revolution in recorded music fashioned ears, bodies, and minds in readiness for decolonization after 1945.³

The cover's use of fragmented musical notation suggests another aspect of the book. Alongside the split between sound and sources, it invokes the fissure between West and non-West that is key to most contemporary understandings of empire, audible or otherwise. This fact almost goes without saying, so well entrenched are disciplinary habits of mind according to which empire is something that the 'West' does to the 'non-West'—and then, as a result, to itself. A stronger version of this idea, which remains widespread in the social sciences, is that the West invented empire, or at least the kinds of empire most relevant to cultures of global modernity. Here systematic power imbalance (forms of economic exploitation, the brutal exercise of military power) makes itself manifest in countless ways beyond the obvious. While this idea—that the West is the chief agent and instigator of empire—is crucial in innumerable contexts, it must always remain an assumption. As some historians of empire have recently pointed out, it is also an assumption that, if unqualified, skews social realities in predictable ways. Scholars may overestimate the powers of the West, for example, or be tempted to ignore a multiplicity of empires, both historical and contemporary, that are ever-vying for supremacy. As the 2007 edited volume *Imperial Formations* points out, we need historical specificity when talking about empire(s) if we are to avoid reinforcing seductive illusions of a monolithic West.⁴

How, then, does *Audible Empire* approach its topic? I have already hinted at the gravitational pull of US empire as the force around which most chapters revolve. This emphasis is unusual; more frequently, at least in music studies as they are practiced on American soil, imperial baggage is laid at the door of Eurocentrism. The book's shift to a critique of Americentrism nevertheless remains oddly unmarked. The editors make sweeping reference to a 500-year history of 'Western' empire, but downplay the differences between, say, bible-and-gun-style colonization and the imperial tendencies of twentieth-century multinational capitalism. Of course, there are important historical continuities between these and other contexts (indentured labour, refugee crises, environmental devastation, uneven global development, and so on). But the editors approach warily the historians and political theorists who have sought out such connections—writers such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example. Their concern is understandable given the widespread criticism Hardt and Negri in particular have attracted.⁵ Yet the lack of history and theory of empire ultimately creates a vacuum, one that offers no resistance to fantasies of the monolithic West.

At the outset the editors caution against generalizing about empire, downplaying other problems associated with a failure to generalize. There is a danger, they write, of deepening postcolonial criticism's notorious tendencies toward abstraction at the expense of awful realities. They warn that a focus on sound could draw scholars further into the ether. Yet their fears are not borne out by the chapters, which take pains to specify the historical and cultural coordinates of particular aural dominions. Those by Josh Kun, Perry von Eschen, Marc Perry and Morgan James

³ In highlighting the anti-colonial possibilities of recorded sound, Denning offers a refreshing take on a familiar topic; yet the exclusively positive valence of music will provoke familiar musicological questions, along with more specific concerns about his lack of explanation as to how the ear was 'colonized' in the first place. See also a review of his book-length version of this argument by Shayna Silverstein in *this journal*, 14/1 (2017), 164-68.

⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds, *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007). Focus on the inter-imperial is rare in music studies, but is beginning to emerge: see in particular Yvonne Liao's chapter 'Empires in Rivalry: Opera Concerts and Foreign Territoriality in Shanghai, 1930-45', in *Operatic Geographies*, ed. Suzanne Aspden (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, in press).

⁵ See, for example, Gopal Balakrishnan, "Hardt and Negri's Empire," *New Left Review* 5 (2000), 142-148.

Luker, for example, present us with novel interventions on empire in music, and, more broadly, participate in ongoing attempts to renew postcolonial approaches. Kun probes the specific meanings of the politics of utopian elsewhere generated by migrant musical activities along the US-Mexico border; von Eschen examines Linton Kwesi Johnson's anti-imperial critique of the Cold War as received by particular communities in Jamaica and London; Perry considers the 'dollarization' of Havana that the Cuban Hip Hop Festival has brought about; while Luker homes in on the politics of local and nationalist claims for tango under the watchful ear of UNESCO rulings on intangible cultural heritage. The book exhibits a huge range in approaches to empire, and so it is not surprising that the editors are reluctant to single out a kernel that holds 'audible' and 'empire' together. However, some comments on recent disciplinary history would have anchored the second term especially and might have prevented its meanings from proliferating quite so much. For one thing, the book's imperial interests are patently different from those of thirty years ago. Old and venerable postcolonial problems are pushed aside: the subaltern and her speech are no longer central; nor is desire to break free from the colonial gaze, and its aural correlate. (That said, a creatively updated postcolonial approach to the archive, read against the grain, is deployed in Brent Hayes Edwards' chapter on Hugh Tracey's ethnomusicological collection of African music, thus pointing toward a growing body of work in sound studies that interrogates archivization of different kinds as an important political technique.) In other words, there is something distinct about 'audible empire', even if that distinction consists only in the absence of (or a resistance to) a core set of concerns. We should probably be grateful that the editors decided not to impose an updated theoretical canon. The closest we get to 'required reading' are the various publications of Hardt and Negri, although these texts are described as merely 'evocative' (16); they allow the editors to rehearse a practiced gesture toward the many and lively connections between imperial politics and multinational capitalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

It is within this evolving landscape of globalized capital that *Audible Empire* attempts a fresh intervention. The meeting of its key words ('audible' and 'empire') is unmistakably contemporary, the rise of sound studies being one of the main academic forces at work both in and on the volume. There are other forces too, notably ethnomusicology's longstanding entanglements with colonization (first as co-conspirator, now as leading critic), as well as recent changes in the history and anthropology of the senses.⁶ However, it is sound studies that *Audible Empire* elects as its guiding animus, with the editors arguing for the advantages of homing in on music in particular within an enlarged sonic realm. Given current fascinations with all things sonic, it is worth following their argument closely. First, they suggest that music's role in audible empire helps direct attention away from 'modern technologies of sound': technologies that are complicit with capitalism and neoliberalism and tend to obscure music's 'specifically human... modes of auditory action' (4). Second, it is music, rather than sound or sound technology, that has historically accompanied imperial violence, including military campaigns, missionary settlements, and systematic exploitations of labour—each of which furnished key aural components of late-19th - and early-20th -century music in the shape of military band repertoires, Tin Pan Alley songs and early jazz, and have gone on to inflect later popular musics in countless ways. Third, as a way of construing the audible, music has proved to be a potent filter enabling imperial listening over the past several hundred years. This is so not only because the Western

⁶ A key text is anthropologist David Howe's anthology, *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (London: Berg, 2004). Since then, the anthropology and history of the senses has become further institutionalised through Constance Classen's 6-volume *Cultural History of the Senses* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Vol 5 is devoted to 'The Age of Empire'.

diatonic system is suffused with metaphors that organize tonal space along imperial lines (for example, through remote tonal areas that strive toward their centres; on this topic, see also Agawu's chapter), but much more broadly because music has been a technique for sorting the civilized from the uncivilized. As a label that signals a mode of perception, the very word distinguishes those who make 'music' from others who produce 'noise'.

As this outline can suggest, the breadth of ethnomusicological synthesis performed in the introduction is impressive and vast. It is so wide-ranging in fact, that one begins to wonder, although the editors significantly do not say so outright, whether empire-critique could become an interdisciplinary paradigm for a new configuration of music studies, one that might exist alongside dominant frameworks such as that of evolutionary biology. Instead, the editors open with a disclaimer on the imperial tendencies of empire studies and remain understandably cautious about the wider disciplinary intervention they are seeking to make. Nevertheless, their ethnomusicological retrenchment around music (however provisional, however decentred) might provoke objections. In the argument just sketched, it could be that a simplistic opposition between culture and technology, the human and the nonhuman, lurks beneath the point about music's especially close ties with 'human auditory action'.⁷ What is more, are not 'modern technologies of sound' also integral to imperial violence, and sometimes the very means for the prosecution of such violence, as is the case with the torture of prisoners at US black sites from Kabul to Rabat? And what alternative models of domination and possibilities for critical opposition are obscured in the assumption that the category of music (as opposed to noise) is an imperial sorting mechanism? This last question takes us back to the fundamental tensions animating 'audible empire' as a conjunction, one enmeshed in both the global and local, general and particular, knowledge systems and emergent understandings. After all, aural epistemologies—imperial ones more than most—are not static but sites of contestation; there are likely to be endless battles over what counts as music, sound, noise, and silence (to name only those aural categories most aggressively pursued by Anglophone sound studies).

And so, despite the editors' claims, musicologists and ethnomusicologists should probably resist claims for the priority for music over other types of aural experience, perhaps especially when examining empire. Yet their more basic point—about the consequences of focussing on one or another category—is important and timely. In the wake of an initial (ethno)musicological rush to embrace sound studies, the editors invite us to think carefully about the politics of deciding between music and sound (or using the catch-all 'music and sound' now routinely invoked) as a disciplinary object. It is symptomatic of changes under way that half of the book's chapters are written by non-musicologists, mainly anthropologists, communication scholars, and historians of various stripes. The diversity of scholarly perspectives is, after all, in part attributable to the sound studies boom, and is one of the book's major strengths.

Among the historical studies, chapters on music in China by Nan Enstad and Andrew Jones provide examples of productive music-methodological estrangement. Enstad considers the

⁷ Yet it is easy to understand the editors' trepidation when it comes to sound studies: a field that routinely eschews the 'cultural and local' (4) in its discussions of large-scale transformations in perception supposedly wrought by technology. Along similar lines, Amanda Weidman's chapter in this volume contains a brief critique of sound studies from an anthropological perspective (316-7).

affective link between jazz and cigarettes amid elite colonial circles in interwar Shanghai. Her chapter showcases an unusual technique—using affective links to cut across common-sense distinctions between material things—for discussing musical cultures, one well-adapted to tracking the movements of people and goods occasioned by itinerant jazz musicians and multinational corporations such as British American Tobacco. Jones also matches historical method to musical subject matter with unusual spontaneity. His chapter derives the idea of ‘circuit listening’ from a study of film musicals from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1960s. He retraces networks through which singer-celebrity Grace Chang’s soundtracks moved, and failed to move, showing that Chinese diasporic fantasies of mobility responded to rigid realities of immobility and were the result of the inter-imperial (American, British, Japanese) constraints on the circulation of bodies, sounds and images. As these chapters—and also those by Micol Seigel (on ‘Brazilian’ singer Elsie Houston and the interplay between live performance and media presences in the ever-shifting construction of her racial identity) and Nitasha Sharma (on intersectional critique of US empire as articulated by desi rappers and mediated by the hip-hop industry)—suggest, musical cultures and sound technologies are inextricably entwined in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As a result it may be undesirable to decouple music from sound, or ‘human auditory action’ from capitalist forces of technological proliferation, perhaps especially when dealing with empires of recent times.

Rather than music vs. sound, an opposition that oscillates briskly and continually throughout the book, a more revealing polarity might be whether or not empire becomes audible at all. The various authors take radically contrasting positions over the extent to which empire is detectable to the ear in the form of music, sound, noise or silence, whether for listening scholars or for historical and ethnographic subjects. Might empire condition the audible in ways that evade human perception altogether? No chapter argues that empire and the audible bear no relation to each other, although Gavin Steingo’s comes close. He writes that empire cannot be heard in music, but that music—in particular, South African kwaito—provides a blueprint for empire in the age of late capitalism. His chapter shows that, within a political context that prizes immaterial forms of labour, kwaito provides a vocabulary for economic virtues of communication, creativity, and intellectual property. He concludes that empire, in its nationalist-corporate guise, may not be audible in kwaito songs, but it does configure

the relations through which kwaito becomes audible in the first place [...] Most intriguingly, those relations are musical or artistic in themselves, or at least exhibit certain *qualities* (in the Hardt sense) of artistic labour. As such, empire itself is almost unbearably loquacious. (262; original emphasis)

Here Steingo gestures beyond a scholarly romance currently in vogue across music and sound studies, which believes careful listening will unveil structures of oppression. The romance is staged in the coming together of sonic fields and listening scholars: a chiasmic epistemology in which aural objects and aural methods tend to rhyme too neatly. Typical is the formulation found in Philip Bohlman’s chapter for this book: that ‘the music of imperial encounter will not fall silent if we embrace our responsibility to listen *and* hear’ (181; original emphasis). Bohlman’s wider point, that empire produces a ‘metaphysics of musical mobility’ which inevitably tends to silence others, suggests further important reasons why empire might fail to become audible.

However, as in much recent scholarship, the chapter sidesteps the issue of what, beyond the usual work of historical excavation, scholarly hearkening might have to do with listening to music and/or sound.

A third wheel in the relationship between sounds and scholars, as Steingo's reference to empire's loquacity suggests, is discourse. And while imperial discourse does, of course, become audible—sometimes 'unbearably' so (262)—it ultimately belongs to a different order. Perhaps we need to go beyond 'audible empire', then, toward a more capacious understanding of 'imperial aurality': Jairo Moreno's term for the expansive political field involved in the US's expropriation of jazz as an autarchic national music. Moreno's chapter explains that for jazz to become American, a series of archival operations must be performed: certain sounds, and particular stories about their travels, must be remembered and treasured, while others are no less decisively forgotten. This interplay between remembering and forgetting—including, notably, the complex gesture of remembering-in-order-to-forget—is intrinsic to imperial aurality as it enfolds 'intersensory, affective, cognitive, discursive, material, perceptual, and rhetorical' domains (139). The audible does emerge within this enlarged network of aurality, but only as a moment within a larger structure that serves to scramble sounds, reassigning ownership and economic values. All this makes good sense when it comes to jazz history, and Moreno makes a convincing diagnosis of the effects of US empire here. His chapter also points to aurality as an emergent framework for dealing with empire more broadly. Ana María Ochoa Gautier's recent book is a case in point, as is James Q. Davies' 2016 essay 'Instruments of Empire', which, although it uses a different vocabulary, similarly probes the larger sensory, material and discursive networks that condition imperial orderings of the world.⁸

One of the many things that becomes clear in these studies of music and empire is the need to disrupt patterns of thought that romantically match sound scholars to audible objects, and the concomitant urge to seek out epistemologies and ontologies—sonic and political, historical and contemporary—that allow empires and auralities to emerge. In this sense, the central drama of *Audible Empire* might be described as the divorce between the title words: an inevitably messy split followed later by the establishment of newly amicable relations. This very disconnection may prove the book's signal contribution to musicology, ethnomusicology, sound studies and postcolonial criticism at large. It points beyond a scholarly paradigm in which human perceptions are forever held in empire's thrall: toward the not-always sensible domains across which empires unfold.

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⁸ Ana María Ochoa Gautier's, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Columbia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); James Q. Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', in *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789-1851*, ed. Davies and Ellen Lockhart (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 145-174.

