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Part I

Voice and occupation

Introduction to Part I

Jeremy E. Taylor

Part I of *Sonic Histories of Occupation* is entitled ‘Voice and occupation.’ The three chapters in this part address the extent to which voice – in its figurative and literal sense – has been discursively created and used to respond to conditions of occupation. Each chapter covers quite different temporal and geographic contexts, from the plantations of antebellum America to colonial North Africa and Japanese-occupied China, as well as contrasting interpretations of ‘occupation.’ In each case, a different emphasis is also placed on notions of ‘the voice.’

For Blake, the scientific study of the human voice in the nineteenth century was directly linked to, and reflective of, the ‘territoriality of [colonial] conquest.’ She develops this argument through her ‘voice-as-territory framework,’ highlighting the extent to which study of the human vocal apparatus took place in sites of, but also in parallel with, European colonial expansion in North Africa. In both the North African and North American contexts, study of the voice developed in parallel with the control of colonial territory.

In contrast, Cunningham’s interpretation of ‘occupation’ stresses the ‘interdependent colonization of both Indigenous land/people, and of the Black bodies of enslaved Africans’ in colonial America and the independent United States. Her study of ‘voice’ in such a context is twofold. On the one hand, she stresses the ‘hushing’ of Black voices under slavery and racism, so that song,

prayer and speech could be voiced beyond the ears of oppressors in the physical (and figurative) space of the 'hush harbour'. On the other hand, she explains how enslaved people used forms of vocal expression such as code songs to voice clandestine messages and meanings.

This latter interpretation of voice in Cunningham's Chapter 2 overlaps with the approach adopted in Geng's Chapter 3, in which songs and other forms of sonic expression that were used by European and American inmates in civilian camps in Japanese-occupied China are detailed. As Geng demonstrates, music could be used in such spaces to undermine Japanese control. But voice could also be used to establish some level of agency for people living in a state of captivity.

All chapters respond to some of the core questions which are addressed in this volume as a whole, such as how sound is implicated in controlling and disciplining colonized or 'occupied' peoples and aural spaces, and how listeners, under conditions of occupation, form new types of auditory or vocal expression. Be it under colonialism, slavery or military rule, the control or stifling of the voices of others was a crucial means through which to establish dominance – if only because it is through the voice that many forms of self-expression are made. By the same measure, the ability to harness the voice as an instrument of resistance, or to establish a 'voice' for oneself by circumventing or undermining the controls that are imposed on individuals and communities under occupation, represents a direct challenge to occupation regimes – a point that is stressed in a number of the works that were referenced in the Introduction to this volume.