

LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN

[inaudible]

A Politics of Listening in 4 Acts



[inaudible] is how transcribers and stenographers categorise human speech or any other sound that cannot be heard or could not be made intelligible. A voice that is impossible to write, a sound that cannot be transcribed, speech that does not form part of the historical record, except in its very inaudibility. The threshold of audibility is the threshold of the political. Those [inaudible] voices and sounds, not yet intelligible to the political ear, are the site of struggle in the politics of listening.

[inaudible] *A Politics of Listening in 4 Acts* is an artist's book, the first publication by Lawrence Abu Hamdan. It is designed like a publication of dramatic scripts. It comprises a series of transcripts of what was once live speech: sermons, monologues, testimonies, and interviews made over the last six years, in the course of Abu Hamdan's research into the long ear of the law. Each of the four acts was in some way the foundation of a major recent project by the artist: Act 1 is derived from the *The Freedom of Speech Itself* and *Conflicted Phonemes* (both 2012), Act 2 is an interview which formed the foundation for the performance *Contra Diction; Speech Against Itself* (2015–present), Act 3 is the script from the artist's video work *Rubber Coated Steel* (2016), a fictional narrative of an actual murder case in which the artist participated as a forensic audio analyst, and Act 4 is one of two Islamic sermons on noise pollution that became an intervention into the life of loudspeakers in Cairo, and the content for Abu Hamdan's video work *The All Hearing* from 2014.

In this sense, these four acts are neither works in themselves nor theoretical reflections. Rather, they are the conceptual raw materials for Abu Hamdan's projects. They exemplify the major themes in the development of his theory of the politics of listening and they are typical of the diverse set of interlocutors that his projects encounter. Each of the acts is introduced by a scenario briefly contextualising the works from which they are derived. Aside from Lawrence Abu Hamdan, the authors include some of his curatorial collaborators: Giovanni Carmine, Omar Kholeif, and Fabian Schöneich. The book begins with a foreword by Emily Apter, Professor of French and Comparative Literature at New York University, who uses translation theory and the works of Abu Hamdan to elaborate a politics of the voice and its policing by the ear.

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and Forensic Listening in Projects

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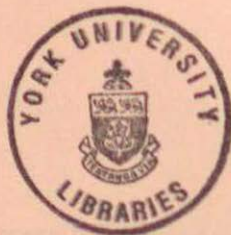
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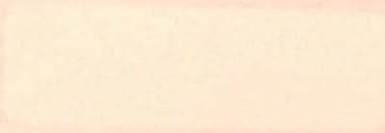
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This publication was supported as Catalogue No. 137 by the Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung under its support prize *Catalogues for Young Artists*.

Foreword

Shibboleth: Policing By Ear

and Forensic Listening in Projects

by Lawrence Abu Hamdan

– Emily Apter

The juridical and conceptual field of critical forensics, situated at the juncture of security studies, art, and architecture, has distinguished itself by the task of bringing “new material and aesthetic sensibilities to bear upon the legal and political implications of state violence, armed conflict, and climate change.”¹ Hailing “new visibilities” that “have emerged with the development and widespread accessibility of digital data derived from activist imagery and their accelerated dissemination via mobile phone, cloud, and social networks,” forensics has branched into the area of “new audibilities,” with a focus on the politics of juridical hearing in situations of legal identity profiling and voice authentication. Adopting investigative procedures and methods of analysis that mirror and appropriate those of forensic calculation, critical forensics reframes the issues of “free” speech, freedom of expression, and “free translation” not as, strictly speaking, issues of human rights, but as a technics of expression. Accent monitoring and audio surveillance, voice recognition, translation technologies, sovereign acts of listening, and court determinations of linguistic norms emerge as so many technical constraints on “freedom of speech,” itself a malleable term ascribed to discrepant claims and principles too numerous to summarise, yet taking on performative force in site-specific situations. Audio

politics are playing catch-up to visual politics in the diversified medial arena of critical forensics. In *Images à Charge. La Construction de la preuve par l'image* (roughly translatable as "Image for the prosecution: The construction of proof by image"), an exhibition at Le Bal gallery in Paris during the summer of 2015, visual politics remained uppermost. The show explored the historic use of visual metrics and protocols in the evaluation of crime scenes, the prosecution of crimes on the basis of visual evidence, and the mapping of borders under conditions of warfare, supranational surveillance, colonial occupation, and environmental violence. But in a pendant volume – *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, in which architecture is expansively construed as a "microphysical analysis in which the part or detail becomes an entry point from which to reconstruct larger processes, events and social relations, conjunctions of actors and practices, structures and technologies" – technologies of the ear are attended to through projects that deal with digital eavesdropping, the legality of noise intimidation (drone buzz, sonic booms), and judicial hearing in the double sense of court hearing and evaluative listening.² In an essay, for example, on the "aural contract," punctuated by subheadings like "just voices," "auscultation," "juris-diction," and the "right to silence," Lawrence Abu Hamdan tracks how the technics of forensics shades into the politics of unfree speech. What comes to the fore in his work on judicial hearing is the problem of the shibboleth, an accent test dramatically rendered in the Torah and reinterpreted for modern politics by Jacques Derrida. The shibboleth proves to be a locus of what is at issue in the travails of judicial hearing.³

In "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," initially presented in English at the International Paul Celan Symposium at the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1984, Derrida zeroed in on several lines of Celan's poem "In Eins" (As one): "Thirteenth of February. In the heart's mouth / An awakened shibboleth. With you, / People / de Paris. *No pasarán.*" ["Im Herzmund / erwachtes Schibboleth. Mit dir, / People / de Paris. *No pasarán.*"]⁴ Derrida was fascinated by the plurality of languages running into each other even as they orbited around the theme of obstructed border-crossing. There is notably the Spanish imperative *no pasarán*: You will not pass! This "barred passage," Derrida observes momentarily, "is what the *aporia* means" [S, p. 22]. And then the word *shibboleth*, written with a *sch* in French and an *sh* in English, as if in echo of the whisper-command

"Shhh! Don't ask, don't tell! Protect the secret! Keep your voice down!" Shibboleth literally denotes "river, stream, ear of grain, olive twig," and, more metaphorically, "password." In this last sense, it is a word whose pronunciation gives away the identity of a person or group. Consisting of inflections, catchwords, expressions, or marks of dialect – differences, as Derrida puts it, that become "discriminative, decisive and divisive" – shibboleths function as aural biopolitical signatures [S, p. 26]. The Biblical episode of the shibboleth describes an accent test administered by a military leader to weed out suspected enemy Ephraimites (who had difficulty pronouncing the *sh* sound) from his own men, the Gileadites. ("The men of the Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Saynow Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce *it* right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan; and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.") Derrida underscores the political consequences of the shibboleth's unpronounceability:

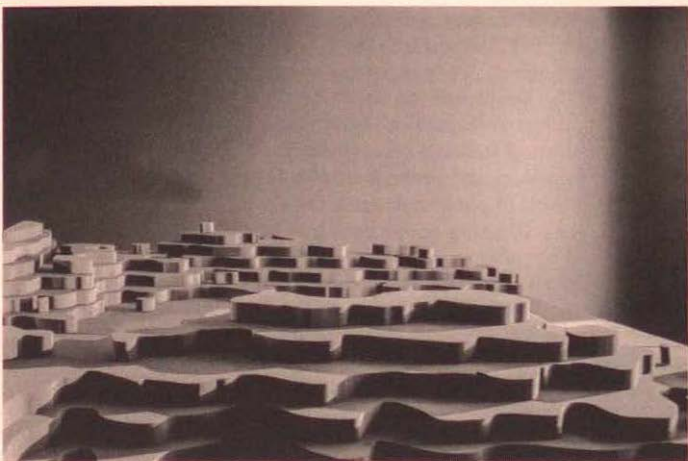
... *shib* is a word that is unpronounceable, in the sense that it *cannot* be pronounced by one who does not partake of the covenant or alliance. The Ephraimite *knows* how one *ought* to pronounce it but *cannot* pronounce it. ... It says the name of God, which *must* not be pronounced by whoever partakes of the covenant or alliance. The Jew *can* pronounce it but *must not*; he may not pronounce it. The law commands the fact – it says the name of the Jew, which the non-Jew has trouble pronouncing. [S, p. 50] Let the word pass through the barbed-wire border, through, this time, the grid of language. [S, p. 51]

Manifold discussions and controversies would issue from this reading of the shibboleth as the trace of acts of religion, as the arbiter of the friend/enemy distinction, as the separator of the proper from the foreign, as the circumfessional Jewish signature par excellence, comparable to the physical mark of circumcision (the word *shib*, Derrida writes, is the "sign of the covenant, of community before the law, doorway, place of decision for the right of access to the legitimate community" [S, p. 59]. Of particular interest here is the conjunction of the "ought to know" with the "what is able to be said," productive of multiple possible orders of relation between "oughtness" and "abling" within the governing strictures of speaking and hearing [S, p. 26]. There is the "ought-to/cannot"

conjunction, which fells the outsider with the wrong accent; there is the “can/but-must-not” condition of the Abrahamic subject, prohibited from uttering sacred names despite access to correct pronunciation; and there is the ion, which fells the outsider with the wrong accent; there is the “can/but- must-not” the arbiter of the friend/enemy distinction, of sovereign inclusion and exclusion. Because it bears the power of exception, much rides politically on the shibboleth, from the most generalized forms of “oppression, exclusion, fascism and racism” to the most site-specific “grillwork of policing, of normalization, and of methodological subjugation” [S, p. 30].

In medial terms, this grillwork refers us to technologies of what Eyal Weizman calls “prosthetic sovereignty,” or “political plastic,” or “politics in matter.”⁵ Such a politics includes translation and language tests administered at border stations, as well as the inchoate jumble of technologies and people routinely assembled at hot spots and checkpoints: activists, protesters, NGOs, international border monitors, humanitarian organizations, military personnel, settlers, cellular-network providers, architectures of security.

The projects of Lawrence Abu Hamdan, a British-Lebanese artist and researcher currently based in Beirut, propel the politics of the shibboleth into the field of creative and critical audio practice. His work since 2010, sometimes done in collaboration with Eyal Weizman and a group working at Goldsmiths, University of London, on forensics in military targeting and drone warfare, consistently investigates how language politics contributes to the contested sovereignty of border zones. *Language Gulf in the Shouting Valley* (2013), a fifteen-minute audio essay and audiovisual installation, explores how territorial borders introduce questions of translational inequality and injustice, focusing on members of the Druze community who live on or near the border between Palestine/Israel and Syria. Interspersed with recordings of Druze interpreters – an ethnicity commonly recruited for translation work by the Israeli military-court system in the West Bank and Gaza – is footage from the Shouting Valley in the Golan Heights, where Druze family and friends yell back and forth, producing an equivocal “oral border,” equivocal because it blurs the line between protest and collaboration. As Abu Hamdan notes, “In one voice we can simultaneously hear the collaborator and the traitor; the translator and the transgressor.”⁶ Allusions to topographic unevenness in the project’s caption – “gulf,”



The Freedom of Speech Itself 2012. Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Installation view at HKW Berlin 2014
Photo: Laura Fiorio/Haus der Kulturen der Welt

“valley,” “heights” – only reinforce the impression of translational inequality at checkpoint stations, calling up gulfs in communication, highs and lows of incomprehension, and a landscape dotted by checkpoint surveillance towers.

Abu Hamdan delves further into the politics of the broken oral contract in exploring juridical uses of “forensic listening,” a science (or pseudoscience) that took off in the early 1980s when it began to be used in cases like *James Vance v. Judas Priest*. The issue brought to light in the case was whether the rock band Judas Priest could be held accountable for encrypting a suicide exhortation in one of its albums. The sounds emitted when the album was played backwards were alleged to resemble a language worthy of being taken legally as speech. The idea that any sound or noise carries linguistic interpretability became the operative premise in the case, according potential evidentiary status to any kind of sound, sonic resonance, accent, or voice inflection. Under conditions generated by the site of the courtroom, acts of listening credentialed by the specialized ear training of the phonetic analyst became fully vested with the force of law.⁷

In the installation and documentary audio essay *The Freedom of Speech Itself* (2012), Abu Hamdan investigated the listening skills of the phonetic expert, critiquing them as technologically sophisticated versions of the shibboleth test applied by immigration officers to the vetting of asylum seekers. One dimension of the work involved making sculptural forms of voice-prints that model the frequency and amplitude of voices saying the word *you*. The cartographic rendering maps the origins of phonemes while the acoustically absorbent foam slabs become a listening agent; both give material form to the fusion of voice and territory.

The audio-essay portion of the piece includes interviews with language specialists who challenge the institutional practice (relied on by departments of immigration, courts of law) of speech analysis as it is applied to asylum seekers. Official interpreters, often employees of commercial agencies subcontracted by government agencies, analyse voice recordings from a distance, without the supplementary information provided by facial and bodily cues or nuances of affect. The aural document, literally disembodied, becomes a smoothed-out, partial object, navigating between the part-objects of the subject's vocal organs and the ear of the other, violating the principle of habeas corpus, which, as Abu Hamdan reminds us, stipulates that the body of the accused be brought physically before the judge in recognition of the fact that "the voice is a corporeal product that contains its own excess," an excess containing evidence "that may evade the written documentation of legal proceedings but does not escape the ears of the judge and of those listening to a trial in the space of the courtroom." [AC, p. 68]

It is not unusual for professional, subcontracted interpreters to have translation skills but no training in linguistics, putting them, as one commentator in the audio essay observes, in the comparable position of a tennis player with a skilled swing who is suddenly expected to offer an informed breakdown of how his muscles work. Many interpreters operate from distant locations and lack crucial information on the applicant's family, regional community, migration history, facility with languages, or degree of exposure to other languages via global media. They hail from countries where monolingualism is the standard and bring with them a reflexive tendency to regard hybrid speech as aberrant, outside the norms of language. Midway through the audio portion of *The Freedom of Speech Itself*, Abu Hamdan makes us aware of the complexities of

vocal biography when, in a teasing tone, he conducts a Q&A with a subject whose "native tongue" is virtually impossible to determine. Like a stand-up routine, the dialogue gives the lie to the presumptive correlation between mother tongue and nation of origin. The simple and seemingly innocent question "Where are you from?" opens up a wormhole to cosmopolitical worlds of constant migration, forced relocation, and infinitely possible configurations of cultural belonging:

So, where are you from?

I'm from Hackney.

But you're Danish, aren't you?

No, I'm Palestinian.

So where are you from in Palestine?

I'm not from Palestine.

So where are you from?

We're Palestinians from a refugee camp in Lebanon.

So you were born in Lebanon?

No, I was born in Dubai.

Why do you have an American accent?

What do you mean?

You speak English with an American twang.

It's because, you know, because of Eddie Murphy, Stallone.

So you're from Hollywood?

No, no, I'm from Hackney.⁸

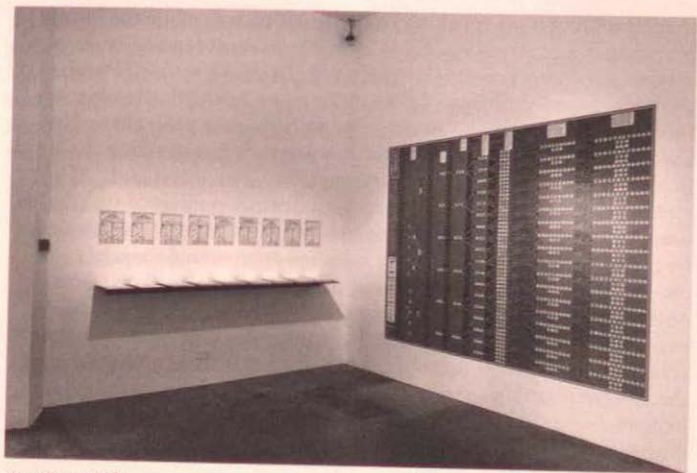
Where is the shibboleth in this no-man's-land of language histories and errant identifications? How could his consonants and vowels be held legally accountable as testaments to his origins? The young man's self-taught mastery of Eddie Murphy-style American English leads his bemused interlocutor astray, but the consequences of such proficiency in another situation could prove dangerous to the speaker, taken as proof that he could be an illegal resident of England or, worse, a spy or American jihadist ripe for questioning, detainment, or deportation. As the narrator says at the end of *The Freedom of Speech Itself*, "We are not free to choose the ways we are being heard." Abu Hamdan alerts us to the political unfreedoms of speech that arise from not being heard, or from the ironies of the petitioner who wants his or her speech listened to, only to find it evaluated without consent or foreknowledge. One thinks here of Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-Claude Milner's pamphlet *Voulez-vous être évalué*, which underscores a kind of absurd Stockholm-

syndrome logic in which the question "Do you desire evaluation?" is answered with a resounding "Yes! Absolutely! Evaluate me!" Exposed in this instance is the condition of unfreedom produced by a hypothetical evaluative demand predicated on the power of denied entry and withheld credentialization.⁹ Yet another unfreedom of speech arises from being *overheard*, as when the social order uses the social order use [garbled] to justify a lie, an act of censorship, or the commonly heard Western assertion that rigorist Islamic strictures appeal to would-be jihadists because they promise an escape from a Western surfeit or overburden of freedom.¹⁰

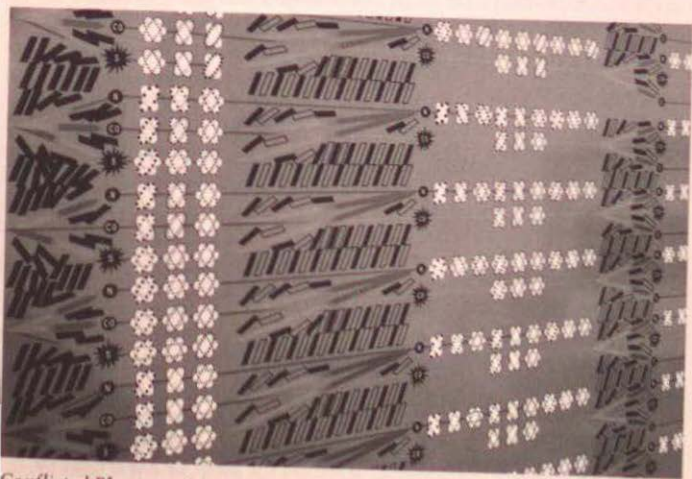
The reliance on a cadre of certified translators to vet accent authenticity dates back to the 1984 passage of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) in the United Kingdom, which mandated audio-recorded testimony in the place of textual transcription. As Abu Hamdan notes, the law "unintentionally catalysed the birth of a radical form of listening that would over the next twenty-eight years transform the speaking subject in the process of law. This legislation fundamentally stretched the juridical ear from simply hearing words spoken aloud to actively listening to the process of speaking, as a new form of forensic evidence" [AC, pp. 65-66]. Though PACE was intended to reduce opportunities for falsifying records, the fact that it bolstered a presumption of scientific accuracy in the measurement of accent authenticity turned it into a compliant technology for racial profiling and ethnic pigeonholing. In *Conflicted Phonemes**, a 2012 project that brought together linguists, researchers, activists, refugee and art organizations, graphic designer Janna Ullrich, and a core group of Somali asylum seekers, Abu Hamdan excavated these methods of policing by ear, drawing on the voice-maps of audio tests used by Dutch immigration authorities. The installation includes an atlas indicating how, despite adoption of a standardized version of Somali as an official national language of Somalia in 1973, the plethora of dialects together with politically induced mass migration has made it virtually impossible to classify people by accent or distinct usage.

The installation also includes diagrams coding circuits of language competence and cultures of linguistic exposure that, as in other projects, dismantle the presumption of a one-to-one correspondence between digital voice recognition and identity. The black-and-white maps show how the voice is a dynamic variable, shifting constantly

* See the *Conflicted Phonemes: Jama's voice maps* 2012 on pp. 32-33.



Conflicted Phonemes 2012. Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Installation view at Tate Modern, London 2013
Photo: Tate Photography/Andrew Dunkley



Conflicted Phonemes 2012. Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Installation detail at Casco - Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht 2012
Photo: Emilio Moreno

in relation to who is speaking or being addressed, while the large blue diagram presents voice as a living archive, compositing accents accumulated over time and in different places. *Conflicted Phonemes* challenges the legitimacy of data coding as a scientifically objective, forensic instrument, pointing up the political *non*-neutrality of its applications to the policing of recorded speech, and to the politicized uses of translation technics more generally.

Abu Hamdan's project emphasizes a distinct politics of translation, one that not only disqualifies the validity of quantitative equivalence by revealing the rank inequality between empowered speech interpreter and disempowered asylum seeker but also shows how politically consequential the power struggles between so-called experts whose judgments contradict each other can be for the asylum seeker. In reproduced documents culled from official case files, the spectator reviews the petition of "Abdi," a refugee claiming to be from South Somalia who is rejected, and "Abdirharan," whose diasporic biography earns him wait-list status.

The words ACCEPTED, REJECTED, WAITLISTED jump out in capital letters at the bottom of the application forms, grim verdicts on the balance sheet of x's and check marks delivered by the interpreters. What, one is impelled to ask, propels an application from the wait-list to the rejection pile? What part of the migrant's history – as measured in language and pronunciation – has been misinterpreted or elided? These unaccounted details compromise the terms of the "aural contract," the title rubric for a whole body of Abu Hamdan's work from 2010 focused on the politics of listening. They turn each application into a testament to the probability of unequal translation and miscarried justice.

Constant, unperceived acts of judgment performed on speaking subjects curtail and negate freedom of speech and, beyond that, freedom of translation. Translation and aural screening form part of a larger apparatus of injustice integral to human triage, misattributed citizenship, internment in holding pens, imprisonment, and deportation. Viewed through the lens of Abu Hamdan's work, the translation of natural languages into digitized voice-maps appears weaponised as forensic evidence and made ready for mobilization in a manhunt. Grégoire Chamayou identifies the manhunt with a "cynegetic power [that] extends itself on the basis of a territory of accumulation, over a space of capture. Whereas pastoral power is fundamentally beneficent, cynegetic power is essentially

predatory.”¹¹ Chamayou devotes a chapter on “hunting illegals” that goes from the blood sport of self-appointed border militias to the bureaucratic instruments used to deprive stateless people of the right to safe conducts. The “illegal alien” also becomes the site of a shift in emphasis in the criminal-justice system from the defendant’s act to who he or she is. As Chamayou observes:

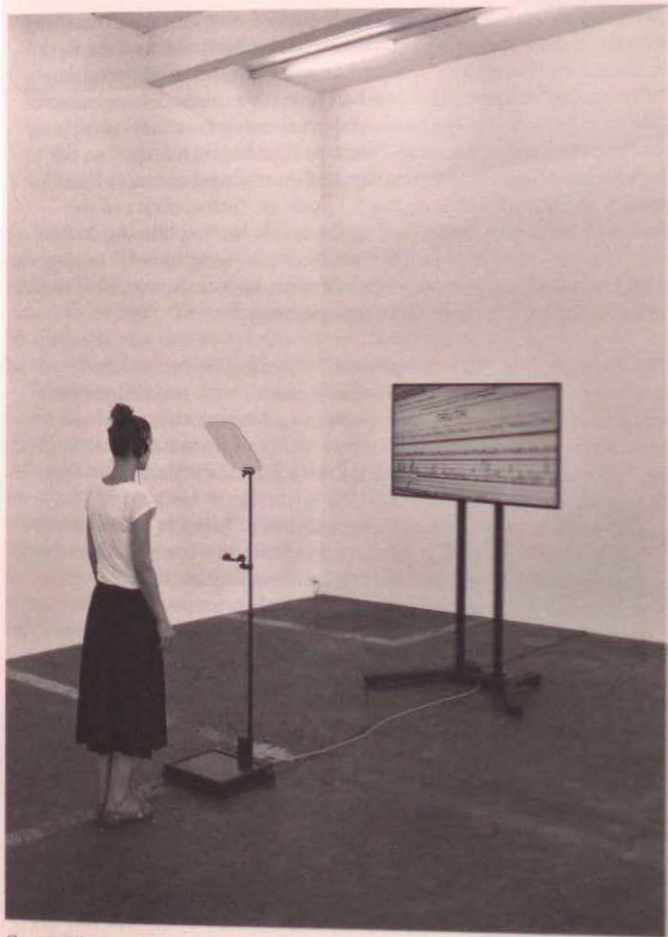
The legal exclusion of stateless people is no longer presented as punishment for a crime, but as a *status*, directly connected with the individuals’ political status. If the stateless person is excluded from the system of legal protection, that is not because he has *committed* an infraction: on the contrary, he *is* himself that infraction, by the simple fact of existing, by his sole presence on the territory of the nation-state. ... This new form of proscription is no longer so much an expedient testifying to the weakness of the sovereign power as, on the contrary, the basis for an indefinite inflation of a police power exercised on subjects deprived of legal protection. [M, p. 135]

One could say that in *Conflicted Phonemes* a similar kind of exclusionary justice is administered in the exercise of the judicial ear. As the status of a migrant’s speech is subject to evaluation, what is being judged is not an act committed but rather “who these people are.” It is as if an existential trial that will eventually culminate in a justified manhunt were taking place.

In the summer and fall of 2014, when forensic-listening experts were poring over clues to the identity of the Briton (or Britons) who beheaded journalists James Foley, Stephen J. Sotloff, and Kenji Goto and aid workers Alan Henning, Peter Kassig, and David Haines, one became acutely aware of how accents could be used to mark people politically; predators as well as plaintiffs who are on trial. The ISIS executioner dubbed “Jihadi John,” who also acted as judge and PR agent, seemed to brandish his accent as a signal both to willing followers and hostile auditors that the West is vulnerable to one who operates in their own language.¹² One could say that in this instance the shibboleth test has been turned back on Western security states, for in this case “speaking in British” confounded the voice-profiled typologies of “terrorist with an accent.” The executioner’s speech became a defiant enactment of vocal treason, weaponised in a viral video of trial and punishment.

Conflicted Phonemes does not venture into how the accent test cuts both ways in contests for power. Nor does it address situations in which the authentic pronunciation of a language is subject to politically motivated efforts at delegitimation, as when American “English-only” jingoists, abetted by the vatic trumpeting of Donald J. Trump, challenged the right of bilingual anchorwoman Vanessa Ruiz to roll her *r*’s when delivering “American” broadcast news. But it does illuminate how specific actors in the process of forensic listening – translator versus linguist, specialist in ear training versus legal adjudicator of voice and identity matches, asylum-seeking speaker versus authorized listener – are constitutive of the political stakes of translation. These political concerns are relevant to critical work in art and language insofar as critics are constantly performing as judges of the narrative authenticity of voice, or adjudicating, within university systems and arts institutions, the limits of freedom of speech and the violation of human rights. Abu Hamdan’s projects reconceptualise “free” translation as “freedom of speech,” though not in the sense of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or the spirit of the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* ruling, which perversely assigned money, in the guise of corporate campaign donations, legal recognition as a form of free speech. In *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself*, a live audio essay delivered at the 2015 New Museum Triennial *Surround Audience*, Abu Hamdan explores how “free translation” is affiliated with something silently freed from censorship or covertly translated under one’s breath in circumstances of coerced conversion by an occupying army (the specific context in *Contra Diction* was al-Nusra Front’s claim to successful mass conversions of Druze minorities in northern Syria). At issue in the project, once again, is the shibboleth, treated not as a biopolitical signature taken to truthfully represent the identity of the speaker, but as a correctly pronounced decoy that permits the utterer to survive unharmed.

The word is *taqiyya*, a term of Islamic jurisprudence meaning “fear” or “guarding yourself against danger” that serves as a legal dispensation absolving people from the offense of blasphemy in the case of renunciation of faith under duress.¹³ It carries the sense of keeping one’s own counsel, preserving faith inwardly despite the outward appearance of compliance with the enemy, or speaking truth to power in the medium of vocal dissimulation. Like a private



Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself 2015. Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Installation view at Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen 2015
Photo: Stefan Jäggi

password to an aural contract with oneself, *taqiyya*, Abu Hamdan stresses, grants the subject freedom from submission and the right to silence conceived as a self-authorized right to retreat from the "all-hearing" society. This is Abu Hamdan's rubric for societies that "listen in" invasively in the most diverse ways: from eavesdropping and auditory surveillance to "loudspeaker libertarianism" to the stipulation of aural transparency and guaranteed access to "free" speech as unconditional rights.¹⁴ "Both an "infrapolitics in the minutiae of human utterance" and a tactic for "reclaiming control over the very conditions under which one is being heard," *taqiyya* in Abu Hamdan's ascription is aligned with auto-response, itself posed as antidotal to fatal forms of autoimmunity.¹⁵

"Free speech," or "free translation," may thus be defined as heightened *responsiveness* to what is heard, with *responsiveness* understood in Samuel Weber's sense of a hearing that addresses a looking or, more precisely, an overlooking of something that might be "otobiographically" identified with Derrida's "ear of the other" that is also in you.¹⁶

The word responsive has a connotation of being sensitive to what has been overlooked. It involves weighing in a comparative sense, but without a universal equivalent. Weighing in this sense is irreducibly relative and relational. All there is, is a series of responses. There is no going beyond this. Being born is responding. From birth to death, you're responding. But there is no initial, founding statement – no "creative" word.¹⁷

Weber's relative and relational responsiveness brings us back to Derrida's description of immeasurable, debt-free translation and to the politics of friendship embedded in a sympathetic ear. In "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," it is Peter Szondi's ear that is the hearing aid of choice, belonging as it does to a brilliant critic who happened to be a close mutual friend of both Celan and Derrida. Thanks to Szondi's assistance as friend-translator-mediator, the shibboleth goes from oral passkey, exclusionary of asylum seekers, to a structure of poetic singularity that is *parlante* – "speakable" – at least to the ear of the translator gifted with a responsiveness un beholden to a universal equivalent.¹⁸ Derrida puts it this way: Szondi was the only one able to bequeath to us the irreplaceable passwords of access to the poem, a priceless *shibboleth*, a luminous and humming swarm of notes, so many signs of

gratitude for deciphering and translating the enigma. And yet, left to itself without witness, without a go-between, without the alerted complicity of a decipherer, without even the "external" knowledge of its date, a certain "internal" necessity of the poem would nonetheless *speak* to us, in the sense in which Celan says of the poem, "But it speaks!" beyond what appears to confine it within the dated singularity of an individual experience [S, p. 17].

Szondi's ear would presumably make it impossible for the translator-interpreter, sitting in Sweden, Switzerland, or London, with his or her normative earphones on, to apply audio forensics neutrally to a vulnerable target. The administration of predatory cynegetic power on the basis of a shibboleth test would forfeit its legal standing and be classified as an infringement of free translation.

Taken yet further, "free translation" would amount to a call for a new kind of aural contract, or sonic citizenship, according to which translation ensures entitlement to asylum, access to citizenship, the right to sovereign passage, and freedom of movement. Here, we would be tempted to turn from Derrida's "Shibboleth" essay to his piece "Force of Law," where he famously affirmed "that law (*droit*) may find itself accounted for, but certainly not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable."¹⁹ Following this distinction, legal translation, based on voicemaps, audio forensics, and other medial technologies of micro-calculation, belong to Derrida's definition of force of law, at a distinct remove from justice. "Just" translation, by contrast, strips out the force of law embodied in forensic instruments of analysis and steers the listener into position to encounter shibboleths that elude techniques of policing by ear.

- 1 *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth* ed. Forensic Architecture (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014). Further references to this work will appear in the text abbreviated F.
- 2 *Forensis* includes an essay by Susan Schuppli, titled "Uneasy Listening", on drones and the sonic dimension of remote-controlled warfare. It takes up questions of judicial hearing in relation to the mental-health impact of drone noise on targeted populations in Pakistan, and the illegality of sonic booms deployed by Israel in Gaza as a weapon of intimidation and collective punishment. *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, pp. 386-87.
- 3 Lawrence Abu Hamdan's "Aural Contract: Forensic Listening and the Reorganization of the Speaking Subject", in *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, pp. 65-82. Further references to this essay will appear in the text abbreviated AC.
- 4 Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan", trans. Joshua Wilner, in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 21. Further references to this work will appear in the text abbreviated S.
- 5 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 144-46.
- 6 Lawrence Abu Hamdan, description of *In the Shouting Valley: About the Voice and the Border*, <http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/#/language-gulf-in-the-shouting-valley/>.
- 7 Lawrence Abu Hamdan, "The Freedom of Speech Itself", *Cabinet* 43 (2011), p. 83.
- 8 This is an approximate transcription of the interchange; <https://soundcloud.com/forensic-architecture-1/the-freedom-of-speech-itself>.
- 9 Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-Claude Milner, *Voulez-vous être évalué? Entretiens sur une machine d'imposture* (Paris: Grasset, 2004), p. 55.
- 10 Roger Cohen, echoing the assertion by Mark Lilla in his review of Michel Houellebecq's novel *Submission* in *The New York Review of Books*, April 2, 2015. See Cohen, "Why 1515 Trumps Freedom", *New York Times*, August 15, 2015.
- 11 Grégoire Chamayou, *Manhunts: A Philosophical History*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 16. Further references to this work will appear in the text abbreviated M.
- 12 "Jihadi John", possibly referring to the nickname "The Beatles" used for the 1515 commandos in charge of prisoners, had his accent closely analysed by forensic voice and speech analysts. Sometimes his accent is identified vaguely by the media as multicultural London English, sometimes as West London, sometimes South London. One expert diagnosed a South London accent, with English as a first language and possible inflections of Farsi, suggesting a family link to Afghanistan. This would seem to undermine the surmise that the prime suspect is Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary, a rapper from West London, whose father is the Egyptian-born refugee Abdel Bary, extradited from the UK when "John" was six years old, and still awaiting trial in New York for the 1998 American Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Elizabeth McClelland, a specialist in voice-identification techniques cited in the *Daily Telegraph*, acknowledged that it is far from being an exact science: a computer is unable to produce a unique voice-print, and the trained human ear, while an important supplement to technology, is also far from infallible.
- 13 An exhibition titled *نقبة (Taqiyya) - The Right to Duplicity* ran at the Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, Switzerland from July 11 to September 13, 2015.

- 14 *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself* was made with the creative production and video direction of Nesrine Khodr. lawrenceabuhamdan.com/#/contra-diction/.
- 15 Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *The All Hearing*, <http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/#/the-all-hearing/>.
- 16 Jacques Derrida, "Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name", trans. Avital Ronell, in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference*, trans. and ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken, 1985).
- 17 Samuel Weber, blog-post interview with Aaron Levy, https://slought.org/blog_posts/on_the_ethics_of_responsiveness.
- 18 Jacques Derrida, *Schibboleth: Pour Paul Celan* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1986), p. 35.
- 19 Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'", in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfield, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 25.

Act 1. Listening to Yourself

SCENARIO

In the early 2000s, many northern European countries began implementing a screening technique for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, called 'Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin' (LADO). This attempts to determine if the accent of an undocumented migrant corroborates their claim of national identity. For example, they want to know – based on accent alone – if a Somali is from Mogadishu (a legitimate place from which to claim asylum) or actually from northern Somalia (considered a safe place to live and thus to be deported back to). The tender to carry out these tests was mostly won by Swedish companies, Sprakab and Verified. These companies conduct phone interviews with asylum applicants in the target countries, using Sweden's largely unemployed former refugee population as a resource of informants to listen in on calls and conduct interviews. These informants' non-scientific assertions on where they thought people 'really' came from were then reworked by linguists, who bolstered the claims with international phonetic symbols and turned them into forensic reports for use in court in the target countries. When academic linguists throughout the world were alerted to LADO they began to contest its ideology of monolingualism. Linguists insisted that the voice is not a bureaucratic document, but rather a biography, and an index of everyone you have ever spoken to. The itinerant lives of refugees meant that their voices in particular should not be used as a national identifier. They argued that while the informants conducting the interviews may speak the same language as the applicant, they frequently were not from the same place. This could obviously affect the dialogue and the quality of the data. After hundreds of wrongful deportations, governments finally began to listen to these campaigning linguists. Yet rather than scrap LADO, they insidiously incorporated the critiques, deciding that since dialogue was rendering the tests unscientific, they would use monologues instead. Now, rather than soliciting speech in an interview, asylum seekers were expected to simply speak for fifteen minutes non-stop. They were free to say anything they wanted, because nothing they said had any relevance. Only their accents mattered. It is these words, emptied of their voice, that are reproduced on the following pages. What seems at first like an anxious stream of consciousness is in fact a precise account of the weaponization of freedom of speech, which is reaching its nightmare conclusion in today's liberal democracies.

– Lawrence Abu Hamdan

AUDITOR

Off you go.

ASYLUM SPEAKER

Umm... Good morning. I am a married woman. I have two children, *[breathes in]* that is I have two daughters, very pretty *[breathes in]*. One of them is fifteen years old, the eldest, *[breathes in]* and the youngest is still twelve years old. My daughters, I feel are the most precious thing in my life. *[Sharp intake of breath]* Umm... I feel that happiness and the whole world come from them. *[Breathes in]* How much I love them I cannot possibly describe to anyone at all, because they are the soul and spirit inside of me and my body. I wish for God Almighty to keep them for me and that I be destined to be able to raise them as best I can so they are productive in society. *[Breathes in]* I would like to talk a little, I am remembering now, and often remember, my school. How I used to go to school when I was little, how they used to treat us in school. *[Breathes in]* Maybe there are some very nice things that one can remember, but there are also some very painful things. I studied and learned and was very good at school, I always liked going to school. Even if I was sick, nothing mattered *[breathes in]*,

whatever it was. I used to always go to school, even if I was tired and sick. Although I went through some very difficult experiences [large sigh], I experienced some difficult health issues, I was very distressed as I had to undergo surgeries [breathes in], but in spite of that, to me, school was always the core of my life. [Breathes in] And I was very studious, I never missed a class. Umm... one time, and I can never forget this... One time I was at school and I was in tenth grade, [breathes in] I was a little late one morning. In order to make it on time and not be very late, I started running. I ran and ran [stretches word] from my parent's home until I reached school. I went in, our first class was Arabic language [breathes in]. I entered, I got there and I entered, I knocked on the door and I entered. Our teacher was there, and she had started giving the class. So she looked at my face and said [imitates a stern tone], *What's up with you? Where were you?* I told her [imitates an innocent tone], *I am very sorry teacher, I apologize, but I am late because the alarm didn't ring at home.* She looked at me and started berating me, using nasty words, I can't repeat them because when I remember them and repeat them, I feel a lot of pain and a lot of pressure that I don't need in my life. [Breathes in] Anyway the important part of the story is that she said, *So you are late to school and you have makeup on?* I told her, *I am not wearing makeup teacher,* because my mom and dad were very strict about this, [raises the pitch of her voice] *it's shameful for a girl to wear makeup, a girl should not dress this way, a girl should not speak this way.* [Breathes in] So all the time, thank God, they had raised us in the best way. I swore to her by the Quran that I hadn't done anything, that I wasn't wearing makeup on my face, that I had never used any [breathes in]. She opened her bag and took out a Kleenex tissue, and the color of the tissue, I remember, was white. [Breathes in] And she started rubbing and rubbing [stretches word] and rubbing my face, and my face was getting redder and redder. She'd rub and look at the tissue and see that it was clean, there was nothing on it, nothing that indicated that I had makeup on my face. But because my skin is white, and I'd been running, and I felt very hot from running, my face and cheeks turned very red [breathes in]. She looked at me and said, *go [short pause], get out of my face and sit in your place [breathes in].* Although I was one of the best students in her class, [swallows] but what she thought at the time, I have no idea [breathes in]. Unfortunately some memories are painful [discreetly clears throat, swallows],

but nevertheless, some experiences that a person goes through are very difficult to forget [*fingers tapping on table*]. [*Breathes in*] Another thing, also one time at school [*exhales*], umm ... the teacher responsible for discipline at school. I came to school, and my mother had forgotten to wash my trousers the day before, my school trousers, the uniform that we all wore. So I had to wear other trousers. And I went to school. The teacher saw me, or the supervisor. She said to me, *come here you why aren't you wearing the complete uniform?* [*Fingers tapping on table resumes*] I told her my mother didn't have time to wash it, what could I do I had to wear whatever trousers I had...

TYPIST

[whispers something inaudible to the auditor]

ASYLUM SPEAKER

[Breathes in, catches breath], or different colour trousers [*resumes breathing in*]. In order to punish me, she made me take off my shoes...

TYPIST

[Whispers to the auditor, louder this time but still hard to make out]

ASYLUM SPEAKER

...and stand in a pool of water, and the water was very very cold, *it was ice cold, I remember that very well, because I was in the ninth grade then* [*breathes in*]. It was very cold, and she made me take off my shoes, as well as my socks, everything, and to stand in the pool. When I got very cold and I felt that I could no longer stand there with my feet in the cold water, I started shouting and crying. When I shouted and cried, she took me out of the pool. Then, and as a result of this, I had a renal colic because I was suffering from a kidney stone. If I caught cold, I would have an episode, the pain wouldn't stop until I would be admitted to the hospital and given tranquilizer and painkiller shots [*sighs*]. Of course the director came out because of the sound and noise we made in the schoolyard. She said, *what's wrong with you?* [*voice hardens*] I told her, *I have a pain in my kidney, [raises pitch of voice] I can't take the pain anymore, I need medicine. Call my dad so he can come and take me to the hospital.* Of course the

school director knew my father well and had a very good relationship with him. And she used to visit us at home sometimes. *[Breathes in]* When she saw me like this she told her, *couldn't you find another student than this one to punish*, she spoke to the teacher, *she's one of the very polite students in school this one*, *[breathes in]* *she doesn't neglect her duties, she's well raised by her parents, why did you do this to her today?* The supervisor told her *[imitates a belligerent tone]*, *because she has changed her trousers, she's wearing different trousers*. She thought of course that I had liked to embellish and beautify myself and that sort of thing, but I didn't have that intention or thought at all. It was just that I didn't find other trousers to wear because the other ones were dirty *[discreetly clears throat, breathes in]*. Anyhow she took me to the administration, to the administration room *[breathes in]*, the director, she sat me down there for a bit, she brought me a hot cup of tea, and gave me a pill, a painkiller from her drawer. And she called my dad. Of course my dad came and took me from there in the car to the hospital. As a result, I spent the night at the hospital, and they had to do a surgical operation. *[Foot tapping on floor]* Now I'd like to speak a little about my childhood memories. *[In the background, the sound of a key turning in a lock]* I was living happily, I remember, with my parents, my sisters, and brothers. *[Breathes in]* We are, praise God, a large family, may the evil eye be shamed. I had many girlfriends at school, and also in the area I was living in *[swallows]*, but the dearest one to my heart and best friend, she's my lifelong friend, her name was Serene. May God ease her way and give her happiness wherever she goes. She was someone a person could really trust *[breathes in]*, a person who deserves all my appreciation and respect. *[Breathes in]* Because she is someone who stood by me through many difficulties and through life's trials, that one naturally goes through. Of course life is full of them, and every person has certainly gone through a lot, and yet, this person I would always feel standing by me. I remember, even in 1980, when I had my operation, how she stood by me, how she cried *[pronounces word emphatically]*, when they took me to the operating room, how when I came out and woke up from the anesthesia, I felt her standing beside me, waiting for me to open my eyes. She felt with my pain, and laughed with my laughter. She used to be with me the whole time, we went to the same school, the same class, even the same bus *[catches breath]* where we sat together. A wonderful person, I can't describe her.

But I also had another friend, we used to be together all the time the three of us, our parents used to call us 'the merry trio'.
[Breathes in] We used to hang out together, we slept over at each other's house sometimes. Once, she and I, on New Year's Eve, I told my parents that I would like to spend it at her house [breathes in], to hang out just the two of us. Her parent's weren't home, they were going out somewhere [breathes in]. We sat together, she had prepared food, she had made *mulukhiyyeh* and other delicious dishes that we liked, we stayed up late just the two of us, there was nobody else there at all at all [swallows]. We stayed up almost until the next morning [breathes in], we didn't sleep until maybe after six o'clock in the morning [breathes in]. [Chair leg scrapes on the linoleum floor] We would talk about how our school day went, what our childhood was like, we talked about our shared memories, the bitter and the sweet, and sometimes laughed at each other. Anyhow, we spent the whole night drinking juice and drinking tea, and smoking also of course, smoking was forbidden, it was shameful for a girl to smoke, but maybe to me it was something new, and I felt like trying it. But now that I'm grown up, I feel that my parents were right, they used to always tell me, [imitating strict tone] *don't smoke, it's shameful*. Maybe they said it was shameful for a girl to smoke, but at the same time, they shouldn't have just said it is shameful, they should have explained to me why it was shameful, maybe they could have said that it is dangerous for the health, maybe I could have been more convinced, but just that it's shameful, that I shouldn't do it because it's shameful, why not tell me from the beginning that it is dangerous, healthwise, that it hurts the lungs, that it harms a person's health, even fitness decreases with time because of it, with the years and with age, you can no longer breathe normally, it causes constriction in the arteries, it could lead to heart attacks God forbid, it could cause many health problems. [Breathes in sharply] But unfortunately this health education was not at all available to any of our parents. Maybe, when they forbade us to do certain things, they thought, first and foremost, that it was shameful, because society said it was shameful, because it is shameful for a girl to go out, it is shameful for a girl to come in, it is shameful for a girl to smoke, it is shameful for a girl for example, to do this or that. At least explain to us, you're supposed to raise some kind of awareness in us, [breathes in] something that I used to read about a lot in books, and it was a hobby of mine,

reading, I liked books. *[Breathes in]* I read many books. Until now, the story that I can never forget as long as I live *[breathes in]* is *The Mother*, by Maxim Gorky. I liked his novels a lot. I also read, with my friend that I am speaking about, Serene, I read a lot of books by al Manfalouti. Until now I remember one of the stories, it was called *Majdaline*, it was very beautiful. Praise God books were always accessible to me *[breathes in]*, I loved reading, I liked, what I liked most of all was to sit on the couch and just read. *[Breathes in]* I wasn't that much into watching television, because I always felt like: so what are all these programmes? *[Breathes in]* They are just entertainment, but not useful mentally, there's no culture in them, no educational value, whether in terms of health awareness or any other kind *[breathes in]*. So I wasn't too interested in sitting and watching TV series, very rarely, although I felt that the rest of the family was. And maybe that's the time that we as a family would sit together, we'd sit, eat together, and watch television together *[breathes in]*. Especially during the evenings of Ramadan, may God allow it many returns, always in prosperity and good health for all. It was a month that brought together the family. Our customs during Ramadan were very enjoyable, we used to prepare a variety of dishes, *[swallows]* my mom used to always cook *sayyadiyyeh*, which the whole family *[breathes in]* loves. We'd sit, gather together and eat, she used to like making *tabbouleh*, and we liked it a lot, especially when we were little, and I still love it and prepare it for my children, and my girls like it very very much. They always tell me, *mom cook for us, make us umlukhiyyeh, make us tabbouleh, make us fattoush*, the dishes that they like and enjoy very much. I try as much as I can to make the food that they like, always. *[Breathes in]* Anyway the nights of Ramadan were the most beautiful nights of the year, especially on the night of Eid when the Takbir for the feast would begin, it was a very very beautiful thing. We would sit and make the *kaak* biscuits together, the *kaak* for Eid, we'd get together with the neighbours *[breathes in]*. These were the beautiful moments and occasions. *[Sharp intake of breath]*

AUDITOR

OK, thank you, that is enough.

AUDITOR

Off you go.

ASYLUM SPEAKER

Hello? [*Sharp intake of breath*] Now I [*short pause*] want to talk about where I come from. Yeah, we, in the city that I come from, we have, well it is an old place, with many tribes, or clans as they are also called, we have many well-known tribes, such as: we have the Jaafaris, we have the Ajlunis, we also have among them the Rajabis, and also the smaller ones like Natsheh and Abu Sneina and others. [*Breathes in*] Our area now is different from the other areas in the West Bank. [*Breathes in through nose*] Those who want to get out of the city, of Hebron, they can go to other locations in the West Bank, you need to take the bypass, and the Jews make it difficult for them there at the bypass, at the checkpoints and what not [*pitch of voice undulates*]. In our city now, in our governorate, there are some nice places too, you can go from the north of al Khalil, down to Ras el Joura, [*pitch of voice undulates*] you can go down to Ain Sara, down to al Haouz, the first and second etc. there are other places, sector 2 which is under Israeli control, you have the Fahs region and Jabal Johar and Tarek bin Ziyad, then you

go to the northern areas. Now there, in that area, there are a lot of checkpoints, they make life very difficult for people, they crucify guys at the checkpoints too. Our area is different from the rest of the places there. [Typing sound is heard] [short pause] We also have feasts and what not, people try to celebrate them but it's kind of difficult because of the situation they are in, people are not happy or joyful or anything like that anymore, because of the situation they are in. [Hesitant tone] We have weddings there, they hold weddings, but how? Since Hebron is a conservative place, the guys are on one side and the women on the other. People sit, you have dabkeh, songs and celebrations, all the usual wedding ceremonials. And the following day they go out, have gatherings, they invite people, acquaintances and relatives and so on, and there are popular dishes like *mansaf* and *qidra* but mainly *mansaf*. They sit, eat, it's a ten-minute affair then people leave. [Breathes in through nose sharply] There's a festive atmosphere and what not. We also have the other feasts, of course they don't celebrate them much, because as I said there is no festive atmosphere and what not. There's also of course, we have the dabkeh and songs and other, the usual Palestinian things. Umm... in the city we have the old town, we have famous places such as souk al Haram, and the Haram itself, the street of the Haram. It's an old site, a long time ago, during the time of my grandfather and grandmother, the elite used to live there, high class people used to reside there. [Sighs] It's an old town until today, and they try to preserve its old architecture. But you know what, Hebron is known for its stone. For its stone, and shoes. They make shoes too. The stone of Hebron, and its marble, are very famous. From there, there is, for example, there is, we have the area of al Fahs. The al Fahs area is the southern area, west of Hebron. This area, you could say all of it, all of it has quarries, they cut stones there and such, and prepare them so people can use them to build houses. [Sharp intake of breath] And Hebron stone and marble are known, and also famous. We talked about the old town, the old town is there, it is now taken by the settlers. There are also settlements there and they mistreat people something fierce every day. You enter al Shallala Street, there are settlements there too. They hurl stones, they throw dirty water and I don't know what, in short it's an ordeal. Anyhow, God help us [swallows], God help us. There's, to go back to the houses and the built environment there, the area is old, it has small apartments, built in the old style, that is, small houses, you could

call them vertical, the apartments in them are small also. The souk we are talking about, the one in al Haram Street, the old souk that is, in the old town that is *[breathes in]*, long ago, this souk was very active, you'd enter the souk and have nowhere to step. If you wanted to walk in the souk it would take you a long time from the Haram to the end of the souk, to al Shallala and what not, it would take you a long time, it would take you an hour or two until you're done, why? Because there are shops, coffee, all sorts of places and things, it takes a long time to do the whole souk. But what about now? With the IDs, *[breathes in]* the checkpoints and what not that the Jews have now put up, it's very difficult to pass through there. And even if you did go through there is nothing, there is nothing there now. Now if you go up Thia Street you might find a shop or two that is open, and there's nothing else, just enough to make do. And the municipality too, you give them a small amount of money let's say... yes, people are living, so to say, in spite of difficulties, people are living, there is nothing... to help them. In any case God help them. *[Breathes in]* Also if you go to Ras and other places, it's also an area that used to be nice. In any case it's different now. We have also... the life there in that area... it's kind of a normal life, you go... despite as we have said that Hebron is an area, a conservative city, it has customs and traditions, people there are very very strict. Yeah. Now if you go out, you can see... after we are done with work of course, we would go out, go to the café, smoke nargileh, play cards with friends and such things, and so... days go by in this way, we take walks, go down to the street, to Salam *[swallows]* Street, to al Haouz, to spend the time. In any case there's nothing there, there's nothing, people are repressed, there are lots of negative points. In the old days, they say things were easier. Anyhow the events and what didn't happen, it's become difficult to move around, it's difficult to... *[takes a deep breath]* go out and move around or do anything. Now I have some hobbies, I have... I like football, I like football. We have a field nearby, near *[voice thins from fatigue]* our area, we go out and play football after studying, and now school has ended, and there's less interest in football... you know, people go in time, time goes by. *[Breathes in]* Anyway football was my favourite hobby, one of the nicest thing that I... I used to enjoy it a lot. Sometimes, we'd go out, my friends and I, we'd go to Bethlehem and to other places, and as I said we'd take the bypass, *[breathes in]* you go there... There's nothing really... most of the time you can go there without problems but

you see the Land Rovers and Jeeps parked on the road, they can ask you for ID and I don't know what, then you are on your way again. *[Clears throat quickly]* Normally, like in every city that has tribes and clans and what not, naturally there the man rules. He says his word and that's it. Like in every conservative society that follows old ways, so to say. *[Sharp intake of breath]* There are popular dishes that I like a lot like *musakhan*, we have *musakhan*. *Musakhan* is basically chicken, and they put sumac and onions on it and what not, and bread, *[breathes in]* and it's grilled. And you have of course as usual the *mansaf*, the *mansaf* is very well known but you have to know how to make it, and there are a couple of places, *[breathes in]* very good restaurants that make *mansaf* well. And you have sweets. Sweets like *knafeh*, the one that... it's true that *knafeh* is delicious there, there are a couple of places that make a *knafeh* to your taste, just the way you like it, such as Hulwayat al Andalus and al Diplomacy *[voice creaks]* and others. Now those are well known. And you have lots of restaurants that make very decent stuff. Excellent stuff. *[Swallows]* The areas, as we said, are as follows: you have places where we just can't, I mean you can't walk there or take a stroll, go this or that way, you can't. We have the centre of the town, now the town centre, you can go there, we have... we have... It's more active there, people gather there. In the afternoons and evenings you can go there and meet your friends, you walk around with them there, it's a nice place, but there's nothing else to do, there's nothing. *[Voice sounds as if throat is clogged]* You try to work, to get things done, but it's all for nothing, all for nothing.

AUDITOR

Thank you, that is enough.

ASYLUM SPEAKER

[Swallows, clears throat].

ACONFLICTED PHONEMES
LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

APPLICANT : JAMA

MAY

'no'

QAXOONTIGA

'refugee'

MUUS

'banana'

ISKUUL

'school'

KUHRAD

'vegetables'

Origin according to the applicant:
The applicant was born and raised in South Somalia.


 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst
Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en
Koninkrijksrelaties

#1

Origin according to the expert:
The applicant is definitely traceable to the
speech community in North Somalia.

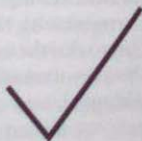
Result of language analysis in 2008: NEGATIVE


 DE
taal
STUDIO

#2

Origin according to the contra-expert:
It is highly certain that the applicant was
socialized in a speech community in South Somalia.

Result of language analysis in 2008: POSITIVE

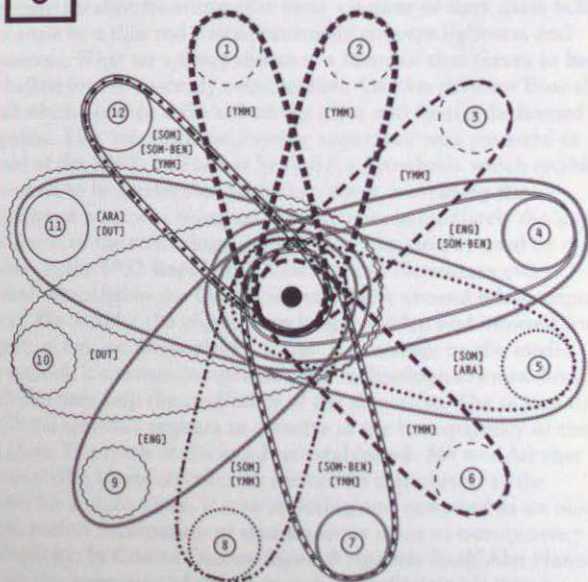
**B**
 STATUS
10 / 2012
REJECTED

Conflicted Phonemes: Jama's voice maps 2012. Lawrence Abu Hamdan

C

CONFLICTED PHONEMES
VOICE MAPPING

VOICE : JAMA



- - JAMA
- - PERSON SPEAKS WITH
- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 10 SOMALIA: | NODE KRUIS | [SOM] | STANDARD SOMALI |
| 1 MOTHER | BRICES | ===== [SOM-BEN] | BERADIER (SOMALIA) |
| 2 FATHER | VLOCHTELING NL | ----- [YHM] | HAAT (SOMALIA) |
| 3 SOMALI TEACHER | CENTRAAL ONGAAR OPVANG | ~~~~~ [ARA] | ARABIC |
| 4 ENGLISH TEACHER | ASSILTOEKERS (COA) | ===== [ENG] | ENGLISH |
| 5 ARABIC TEACHER | GENEETELJKE | ~~~~~ [DUT] | DUTCH |
| 6 FELLOW PUPIL FROM SM SOMALIA | GEZORNEIDSOICENT (060) | | |
| 7 FELLOW PUPIL FROM COASTAL SOMALIA | REFUGEES/ASYLUM SEEKERS: | | |
| 8 FELLOW PUPIL FROM SM SOMALIA | 11 EGYPTIANS | | |
| | IRAQI | | |
| | LIBYANS | | |
| | SYRIANS | | |
| 10 THE NETHERLANDS: | TUNISIANS | | |
| 9 DUTCH (ARRIVAL IN NL) | 12 SOMALI | | |
| 10 SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY | | | |

- [SOM] STANDARD SOMALI
- ===== [SOM-BEN] BERADIER (SOMALIA)
- [YHM] HAAT (SOMALIA)
- ~~~~~ [ARA] ARABIC
- ===== [ENG] ENGLISH
- ~~~~~ [DUT] DUTCH

Part C (Voice Mapping) of CONFLICTED PHONEMES
Lawrence Abu Numan & Janna Ulirich
Utrecht, 2012

Commissioned by Casco - Office for Art, Design and Theory
in collaboration with Sticobring LOB

Act 2. The Readiness to Listen



SCENARIO

Over the years, one particular device has crept into everyday media life. It appears time and again on news programmes and in newspapers, like two parentheses or quotation marks framing a prominent speaker. Its minimalist form – a pane of dark glass held at an angle by a thin rod – simultaneously conveys lightness and seriousness. What we are not shown is a monitor that serves as base and ballast for the unsteady construction. On this monitor flow the words which are then reflected on the glass and finally declaimed to the public. This 'television prompting apparatus' was patented at the end of the 1940s by Hubert Schlafly: a prosthesis which enabled eye contact to be established with the viewer, increasing the credibility of what was being said. Politicians immediately discovered the benefits of the technology – the device was already used by many speakers at the 1952 Republican Convention. Nowadays every political campaign in the United States is built around teleprompter devices. No wonder the object is no longer hidden and omitted from the picture but, on the contrary, is put centre-stage by the media. As a symbol, it conveys competence and technological know-how, which can only help the credibility of the discourse. The fictionality of political speeches appears to dissolve in the transparency of the dark glass. The truth of the words is established. No wonder that Lawrence Abu Hamdan takes an interest in this object: as the medium for a video piece, it is stimulating and new, and as an object, it is the perfect incarnation of simultaneous ideas of transparency and duplicity. In *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself* Abu Hamdan misuses this apparatus of public speech, transforming it into a two-channel video installation. While the glass is used to superimpose two video screens, the voice of the artist explains the concept of Taqiyya. A concept often incorrectly understood as the right to lie, it first came to the artist's mind through a discussion with a Druze theologian, reproduced on the following pages. It is an unorthodox situation, with an unconventional duo exchanging ideas about freedom of speech, the right to silence, the secret life of Arabic phonemes, and what it means to speak the truth in the age of mass surveillance, algorithmic voice analysis and presidential teleprompters.

– Giovanni Carmine

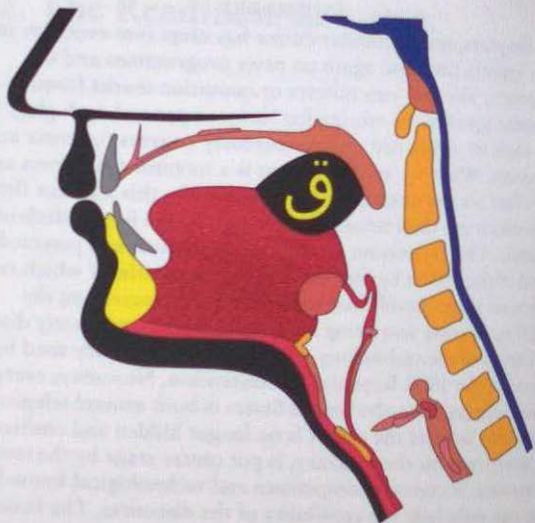


Illustration showing where the Arabic letter ق is located in the human speech apparatus. The ق sounds like the latin letter "Q" if it were pronounced much deeper in the throat and at the very base of the tongue.

LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN [LAH]

I'm currently working on my PhD and as an artist I'm making audio works and art installations. My research focuses a lot on speech and the different ways of thinking about free speech and the politics of speech.

DRUZE THEOLOGIAN [DT]

What do you mean by 'free speech'?

LAH

I'll give you an example from my research: In the UK the Home Office and Border Agency have a policy for an accent test for asylum seekers. If you are an undocumented migrant coming to London, for example, they do a test to see if the accent matches

the place where you claim to come from. But it is a very bad system.

DT

Why do they do it?

LAH

Because the Home Office wants to reject people's claims for asylum. It is bad, as it doesn't take into account the itinerant biography of the refugee and the multilingual space of the refugee camp s/he might just have come from. The border authorities base their evidence on only a few spoken words in a fifteen-minute interview. The main story of my documentary on the subject, *The Freedom of Speech Itself*, is about a Palestinian guy named Mohammed who in one of those kind of interviews used the word *benadoora* [Arabic for tomato] instead of *bendoora* [which is considered as the correct Palestinian pronunciation of the word]. Based on this one little 'a' sound his request for asylum was rejected, on the assumption that he was lying about his origins and that he was Syrian.

DT

And they do the interview in their native language?

LAH

Yes, this is what the company that conducts these interviews says it does, but actually Mohammed told me it was an Iraqi person who interviewed him. They didn't understand each other well and he had to shift his dialect in order to communicate, which makes the test even more questionable.

When you treat the voice as if it is a birth certificate or passport, it affects the whole meaning of the freedom of speech and expression. It is no longer about what we say but about how we say it; the form of speech itself is under investigation. By the border agencies not listening to what the person is saying but instead to their accent, this puts into question the way voices are policed and the way borders are being made discernible.

I'm also looking at other ways the non-verbal parts of the voice are used in legal cases. For example, there is now a lie detector that

works by measuring the physical tensions of the vocal cords. I have thoroughly researched this issue and produced a documentary on the subject called *The Whole Truth*.

Within the context of the broader research into speech, the freedom of speech and its politics, I became very interested in Taqiyya, as it is a legal right with some parallels and differences to freedom of speech. The various religious doctrines that relate to speech, phonemes, and self-representation within the Druze faith all link back to the concept of Taqiyya and that is why I wanted to speak with you.

Taqiyya seems to be one of the most misinterpreted aspects of the Druze doctrine, right?

DT

Definitely.

LAH

It is often wrongly attributed to concealing and lying in order to protect oneself from discrimination. What is your definition of Taqiyya?

DT

Let me ask you a very simple question, which I ask everybody in all the lectures I do. In our part of the world, mothers talk to their newborn babies in a language called INGHH APOO. It is a two-syllable word composed of INGHH and APOO. It means nothing; it has no meaning. It is just two sounds – INGHH and APOO – used to communicate with the newborn child. The newborn baby perhaps does not understand, it doesn't have any way of processing this information in its brain to really understand any meaning other than just an abstract sound of the mother's voice. So what does the INGHH APOO communicate? What is flowing through these two syllables? It is love and care. So the child receives these two sounds that don't make any linguistic sense but transmit the mother's love, care, and unity. The language will grow with the child as the mother raises the communication skill to a higher level. When the child has grown older, the mother will say, 'Let's go for breakfast.' Then when the child grows older again and goes to school, the mother will instruct, 'Take your sandwich with you.'

When the child becomes a student in the college, there is no way the mother will say to her child INGHH APOO. If the mother would do that, the child would say, 'Mum is crazy.' So Taqiyya is the means of communication that you adapt to any person, based on the amount of knowledge that s/he is capable of understanding.

The communication skills that you as a speaker adapt to transmit your message in the best possible language in order for the receiver to create the link, comprehend and behave accordingly: that is Taqiyya. In the attempt to translate the word 'Taqiyya' into English, the late Druze scholar Dr. Makaram used the word 'conformity'; to conform, to create intimacy.

Let me give you a concrete example: if Einstein and Galileo, or Einstein and Newton, or Stephen Hawking and Brian Greene would be sitting together and they would be talking about something very complex like black holes, and then I would walk in, then they would tune their language for me so that I could comprehend the discussion. Why would they tune their language? Not because they are superior or egotistical – if that's the motive, then you're not really practicing Taqiyya, you would be practicing a superiority complex upon others. Tuning means here unifying. If Taqiyya is not based on unity, then it is a total misconception. You have to prepare people to be ready to listen to your knowledge.

LAH

And if they are not ready yet?

DT

You speak to them on the level of the other's readiness to listen. This is the way Taqiyya is explained in the Druze faith.

LAH

So you feel the big misinterpretation is that Taqiyya is thought to be only used by the minorities of Islam, when in actual fact everybody, in one way or another, practices Taqiyya?

DT

One of the mistakes of the Druze minority is that they are not practising Taqiyya properly. If you take the case of the Druze community worldwide today, or the Ismaili or any other minority,

one of the mistakes that those minorities make is that they take on a group ego; they make a sign above their head saying, 'Hey, look at us; we are a minority.' In the understanding of Taqiyya, you have to blend into your surroundings; taking on a collective ego is a breach. And in any minority, if they really are practising Taqiyya, they should not label themselves as an identifiable community, because the majority always wants to impose their ideas upon the minority. Look at what is happening with ISIS in Syria [ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliated rebel groups fighting in Syria are said to be forcing entire Druze villages to convert to Wahabi Islam]; they want to enforce their mindset upon my beliefs. This is rape; they are raping me – they are raping my society. Just in the same way, nations and states force their beliefs on people through mass media and money; they are just invading the universe with their culture without preparing me for their culture. Any extremist who does not respect my level of education and who does not educate me in order for me to accept his, is abusing my freedom.

LAH

There is a quote from Dr. Sami Makarem: 'If we put Taqiyya [which he translates as 'dissimulation'] in its right context, then it would become totally in line with the core of human freedom; the freedom of speech.'¹ Could you explain the relationship of Taqiyya to today's idea of the freedom of speech and expression?

DT

In the freedom of speech you are given the security that, when you speak out whatever you think, you are guaranteeing me that you will not take this legally against me. This is the fundament of the freedom of speech; I'm legally allowed to say anything, to say whatever I want. When we think about this in relation to Taqiyya, it is more like the freedom of speech is the freedom to remain silent; if I want to express my freedom by being silent, this is my speech. Silence is also a way of communication. So Taqiyya means that I'm allowed not to speak. And when I speak, I am guaranteed that whatever I say will not be taken legally against me.

LAH

So you think Taqiyya is less like the freedom of speech and more like the legal 'right to silence'?

DT

Yes. Freedom of speech should not force you to speak. Silence is also a form of speech. If silence is not part of the freedom of speech, then speech will not be free. If you force me to talk, you abuse me.

LAH

This is what is happening with ISIS?

DT

Yes. Because by being silent, I'm respecting the community. Any minority that is seen by itself as a unit isolated from its surroundings is regarded a cancer cell. And with Taqiyya it is a cell that allows a community to blend in with its surroundings, to interact and to be continuous with it.

LAH

When Fuad Khuri talks about Taqiyya in his book, *Being a Druze*, he says: 'From a very early age, Druze learn how to pronounce correctly all the Arabic phonemes, which is not done to my knowledge in any other Arab group from the Gulf to the Atlantic.'² He then goes on to show how in most places these phonemes are in fact mispronounced; the major example of course is that throughout the Middle East the letter ق [qaf] is dropped from the spoken language. And then he says: 'one of the main pillars of the Druze faith is to speak the truth, in this context, *Sidq* [truthfulness] has a double meaning: speaking the truth and speaking correctly, i.e., pronouncing the words properly'.³

So my question is, what is the relationship between speech, the phonemes, and the form of speech? Why do the Druze teach the phonemes, and how is the correct pronunciation of the phonemes a part of practicing Taqiyya?

DT

I understand, good question. Because *Sidq* means: the truth. Truth means that you have to respect the words. When you respect the truth of the language, you have to pronounce it as it is. To elaborate your pronunciation properly as the language intends also carries a meaning within it on the level of truthfulness. We pronounce all the Arabic phonemes correctly in order to stick to

the basic rules of the language itself. Because if I pronounce the Arabic letter ق [qaf] as ʕ [ʕaf] [replacing the qaf with a glottal stop; similar to the cockney 't' which in the word 'butter' would be pronounced 'bu'er'], I'm not saying it correctly, so I am also not speaking the truth.

LAH

So that means truth is more embedded in the form of the language than in its content?

DT

Yes, the pronunciation is linked to truly revealing the truth without causing any misconception to the listener's ears.

LAH

But because the Druze are the only ones to speak the phonemes as properly intended, it has become an identifying feature of the Druze community. It is interesting in relation to Taqiyya: if you feel that it is your duty to keep something to yourself, to not reveal the full story of something, or to not reveal the knowledge – but at the same time you speak with the full pronunciation of the Arabic phonemes, you are also revealing something of yourself and your identity as a Druze.

DT

You are reflecting your identity.

LAH

Exactly. It becomes complex if you reveal your identity through your speech, which you are trying to conceal for the purposes of conformity. So one should not emphasise one's Druze identity, but at the same time it is a religious precept to pronounce the phonemes correctly. So to put it in another way: if it becomes a mode of expressing one's ego, then why wouldn't we pronounce the letter as ʕ [ʕaf] [with glottal stop] like the majority of the Lebanese, instead of ق [qaf]?

DT

Yes, if pronounced ق [qaf], it is being used as a Druze. According to Taqiyya, if I am a Druze living in Beirut, I should pronounce it ʕ [ʕaf]. If I'm living in the mountain, I should not pronounce it

ء ['af] unless the ء ['af] would be accepted there, I should vocalise it ق [qaf]. But in general, if I speak ء ['af] or ق [qaf] in any community in order to get the attention to my ego, under Taqiyya, I'm doing something wrong. So it's a very fine line, because speech is really interconnected and entangled with the ego. We have to add another value to the equation, which is intention. What is your intention when you pronounce the letter ء ['af] or ق [qaf]? I could pronounce it ق [qaf] in Beirut for ten years, but with a good and humble intention.

LAH

The intention to speak the truth by pronouncing the phonemes correctly?

DT

Yes, I am trying not to create a disturbance to the ear of the listener. So my intention plays a huge role in how I carry this language forward.

LAH

The other day when I was in Ashrafieh [the majority Christian area of Beirut], someone asked me for directions, 'weyn Gemmaizeh?' [where is the area called Gemmaizeh?]. I answered, 'qedam shuay' [down the road a little further in front of you]. I had just come down that day from the mountains with my grandmother, we were sitting and talking, and so I got used to speaking with the ق [qaf]; the lady who had asked me for directions looked at me and she said, "adam?" [repeating what I told her, but omitting the qaf phoneme] in a very condescending tone. And then she drove off. What she wanted to do was to correct me. Yet, my intention was not wrong, I didn't have an egoistic intention.

DT

Your intention in that case was not egoistic. But you were not aware that in Ashrafieh you should not speak with the ق [qaf]. Because the Ashrafieh people are French-educated; they speak half French, half Arabic. They have a problem with Arabic culture in general and want to move away from it. The ق [qaf] is one of the phonemes that is really very traditionally Arabic and is not found in any European language. So that is why that lady told you "adam?", by making this glottal stop she imposed her ego and

intention upon you. In Taqiyya you have to have enough knowledge within you to know how the other person will react, and prevent that reaction. On that level, you have to be aware.

LAH

The microlevel?

DT

Yes.

If I put myself in your shoes again, and that lady stops to ask me where Gemmaizeh is, I would say it "adam"; I would not say 'qadam'. The question with Taqiyya is always: how do I live without identity?

LAH

OK, but what about when Walid Joumlatt [the political leader of the Druze community in Lebanon and leader of the Socialist party] speaks with *ق [qaf]* when he is on TV or in parliament etc.?

DT

Yes, and why does he speak with *ق [qaf]*?

LAH

He has to because he is speaking on behalf of a community that is identified as a community of people who pronounce properly the Arabic letter *ق [qaf]*.

DT

Yes, and he also wants to tell the other parties and politicians, 'I am Druze. To the heck with it.' When Walid Joumlatt is speaking out in public with the *ق [qaf]*, he is representing his community properly; and he is communicating, 'I am not superior, neither inferior. I am on an equal level with you.'

LAH

It could also be that for him speaking the truth is more relative to pronouncing the phonemes correctly than what he is actually saying?

DT

We could say that.

LAH

But isn't he revealing a collective identity, a collective ego?

DT

I don't think that when Walid Joumblatt speaks in public with the ق [qaf], he is breaking the rules and concept of Taqiyya as a principle.

LAH

But I was breaking this principle when I said 'qadam' to the lady asking me directions in Ashrafieh?

DT

Yes. And here I need to introduce something else into the discussion. Taqiyya is also being practiced because of fear. For example, Ashrafieh is a hostile environment for the Druze, if you pronounce the ق [qaf] there, you could be killed – I am putting it in a very realistic scenario. But my awareness that I should be pronouncing the ق [qaf] as ء [af] in the Ashrafieh community will protect me and it will keep me safe. So Taqiyya is also about safety. But when Walid Joumblatt is speaking in public as a Druze community leader, he does not fear for himself or his community because he is the one protecting the community.

But to be frank with you, the question should be whether the Druze need to be represented and known at all? And my answer would be 'no'. A Druze person should be well accepted anywhere in this world by just being an ethical person, not because of being a Druze. Mispracticing Taqiyya in the last one thousand years in this part of the world brought us many problems that we are still facing today. The Druze don't need a collective ego and don't need a country of their own; Taqiyya allows a Druze to live peacefully in any state.

1 Sami Nassib Makarem, "Remarks on Anis Obeid's 'The Druze and Their Faith in Tawhid'", http://samimakarem.com/pdf_files/Remarks_on_Dr_Obeid's_book25082008.pdf. Accessed 11 February 2014.

2 Fuad Khuri, *Being a Druze* (London: Druze Heritage Foundation, 2004), p. 188.

3 Ibid.

Act 3. Expert Listening

SCENARIO

Set in a facility designed with one specific function – to fire ammunition and silence the sound of the bullets fired – Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Rubber Coated Steel* (2016) is a video work which presents the fictitious trial of an actual murder case. Spectrograms appear where targets usually hang. They move back and forth in a way corresponding to the transcribed testimony of the witness, who testifies in front of a court that is not a court, about a crime that never was publicly acknowledged as a crime. The following transcript is drawn from a case focusing on an incident in May 2014, in which two unarmed teenagers, Nadeem Nawara and Mohamad Abu Daher, were shot and killed by Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank (Palestine). The case never came before a civil court. Instead, it was made public by the human rights organization Defence for Children International. Through Forensic Architecture, a Goldsmiths College-based agency that undertakes advanced architectural and media research, this organization worked with Lawrence Abu Hamdan to publish a report, including detailed audio analysis of the gunshots fired. Which ultimately proved the guilt of the soldiers.

Abu Hamdan presented the video for the first time at Portikus in Frankfurt. The piece acts as a kind of tribunal in absentia for these murders, transforming the exhibition space into a new kind of legal scenography and a form of presentation of the evidence. Entering the space without introduction, visitors found themselves directly in a setting resembling the basic architecture of the shooting range where the video was filmed. Panels hanging from the horizontal beams at various widths show spectrograms of various kinds of ammunition. Panels covered only with foam support [represent] and highlight the idea of silence within *Rubber Coated Steel* itself, but also support [represent] the acoustic qualities of the Portikus space.

Rubber Coated Steel is a concept-based rather than a theory-based work. Accompanied by the installation, it becomes a kind of physical evidence, transforming the visitor into a juror. Emotions, dead bodies, loud sounds, ammunition sounds, and even the voice itself are all removed from the video and therefore from the exhibition. And even though sound is foregrounded, silence dominates the scene. This is a silence that forces us to listen to sound which would be incomprehensible to most visitors, even if they were to hear it. The result is a levelling of the playing field between what is voiced and committed to language, and what is suppressed or willingly silenced.

– Fabian Schöneich

JUDGE

Please be seated.

[Wood creaks. Chairs scrape on the ground]

JUDGE

Defence, the floor is yours.

DEFENCE

Your honour, we categorically deny all charges and have no further comment.

JUDGE

Very well. Prosecution, the floor is yours.

[Paper shuffles]

PROSECUTION

The Israeli Defense Forces claim they fired only rubber-coated steel bullets on the day Nadeem Nawara and Mohamad Abu Daher were murdered. And yet Nadeem Nawara's father presented us with the fatal bullet, a live round that pierced through the body into his backpack. This too was denied by the witness for the

Defence who claimed that Ben Deri's rifle was fitted with a rubber-bullet adapter, therefore it was impossible for him to fire live ammunition. Your honour, I quote from the manufacturer's catalogue of this rubber-bullet adapter. Contrary to what the witness for the defence claimed, it clearly states: 'Immediate lethal firing capabilities without removing adapter.'

I will now call my first witness your honour.

JUDGE

Would the witness for the prosecution please take the stand.

[Audience shuffles. Footsteps]

JUDGE

Please listen very carefully to the questions that are asked of you. Speak loudly, clearly, slowly.

PROSECUTION

Please tell the tribunal your role in this investigation?

WITNESS

I made the forensic audio analysis of the gunshots that killed the two boys.

PROSECUTION

Let us begin with the death of Nadeem Nawara. Two gunshots were recorded by the CNN news crew. Can you please tell the tribunal which of these two shots killed Nadeem Nawara?

Is it this one?

Or is it this one?

WITNESS

It is the first shot we heard.

[Audience murmurs]

WITNESS

The first shot has a subtle high pitched crack like a

[imitates sound].

PROSECUTION

In your expert opinion, what is this crack sound that we hear?

WITNESS

It is the bullet breaking the sound barrier.

PROSECUTION

So only one of these two shots breaks the sound barrier?

WITNESS

Correct.

PROSECUTION

Can a rubber-coated steel bullet break the sound barrier?

WITNESS

No, a rubber bullet travels at around half the speed of sound.

DEFENCE

Objection you honour. I hear no difference in the sound of the two gunshots.

JUDGE

Objection sustained. I must admit I have somewhat of a tin ear when it comes to these things.

PROSECUTION

In that case your honour we will now move to visual evidence. In this photograph we see Nadeem Nawara being carried off to the ambulance. If we look closely we see that a rubber bullet has been captured here in mid-flight.

JUDGE

Do you mean this black blur?

PROSECUTION

Yes, your honour, and we have the sound of this shot recorded by the CNN news crew.

JUDGE

What am I looking at here?

WITNESS

These are the visualizations of the sounds of the two gunshots.

JUDGE

These are sounds?

WITNESS

Yes your honour, images of sounds. Along the bottom axis is time, the vertical axis is pitch from low to high and the colour temperature shows the loudness of that pitch at that time. The shot that killed Nawara is on the left. The shot on the right is the rubber bullet we saw in the photograph. The shot that killed Nadeem is louder in the higher frequencies, which accounts for the high pitched crack of the bullet breaking the sound barrier. The shot on the right is considerably louder in the lower frequencies, which is consistent with the deep thud of a rubber bullet.

PROSECUTION

Of all the gunshots you analysed on that day were there any other gunshots that you heard breaking the sound barrier?

WITNESS

Yes, there is one other occurrence.

PROSECUTION

Is that the shot that killed Mohamad Abu Daher?

DEFENCE

Objection your honour, leading question.

JUDGE

Sustained. The typist will strike that from the record.

PROSECUTION

So, when did this second shot happen?

WITNESS

At the moment Mohamad Abu Daher was killed.

PROSECUTION

Your honour there has been no autopsy of Mohamad's body, we only have the sound of the shot that killed him as eviden...

DEFENCE

Objection. The family is withholding evidence.

PROSECUTION

Your honour, the family believed that this is an open-and-shut case as the only armed person present was an Israeli soldier, an autopsy was for them an unnecessary measure.

DEFENCE

Objection! Your honour the family has invoked their right to silence, any remarks on what they think is merely speculation.

PROSECUTION

We don't need their testimony because we have the sound of the shot that killed him. The sound was recorded by the Palestinian news crew. They also captured the sound of four other gunshots. Do all of these shots have the sonic signature of a rubber-coated steel bullet?

WITNESS

All except the shot that killed Abu Daher. It is the only shot that is loud in the very high frequencies.

PROSECUTION

Are the shots that killed the two teenagers live ammunition?

WITNESS

No. Well yes.

[Judge sighs]

WITNESS

They are definitely not rubber bullets but these two shots don't sound like an M16 firing live ammunition either.

PROSECUTION

Your honour, this is the sound of an M16 firing live ammunition.
[Audience wince at the loud sounds]

JUDGE

Order!

PROSECUTION

What is the difference between the shots that killed the two boys and the normal sound of an M16 rifle?

WITNESS

An M16 rifle is very loud across the frequency spectrum, but the shots that killed the two boys are significantly quieter.

PROSECUTION

How would one reduce the sound of gunfire?

WITNESS

The most obvious method is to use a silencer, an adapter that is fitted onto the end of the barrel that traps and cools the hot combustion gas before it reaches the outside air.

PROSECUTION

Would any other type of adapter, say a rubber-bullet adapter fitted onto the end of a gun, have a similar effect?

WITNESS

Yes, but the rubber-bullet adapter would not silence the shot, rather it would make a normal gunshot sound like a rubber bullet.

PROSECUTION

Your honour, in Ben Deri's calculated attempt to disguise the sound of live ammunition with the rubber-bullet adapter, he has incidentally revealed to this tribunal a signature method for killing. The murder weapon in this investigation is not only the M16 rifle but the rubber-bullet adapter fitted to its barrel. The legal use of rubber bullets provides a cover for these soldiers to suppress the sound of live ammunition and kill with impunity. Ben Deri is not the only one using rubber bullets as his alibi. I quote from an Israeli military blog. 'When I was in Gaza somebody told me about a common trick, you shoot a rubber-bullet and are left with the empty adapter on the rifle. Then you shoot live fire when the officer next to you thinks that you are shooting rubber. In any case the Palestinians take the body and

there is no investigation so who cares?

[Audience murmurs]

DEFENCE

Objection your honour, this is hearsay!

JUDGE

Objection sustained.

[Paper shuffles]

PROSECUTION

In your expert opinion, can you please identify this sound?

WITNESS

It sounds like a sound bomb.

PROSECUTION

Correct! And what is a sound bomb?

WITNESS

A grenade that makes a very loud, non-lethal explosion to disperse crowds.

PROSECUTION

Now can you please identify this sound?

WITNESS

Can I hear it again please?

Once more?

Sorry aga...

JUDGE

Please now answer the question that is asked of you.

WITNESS

I hear the ricochet of a bullet, but no gunshot.

PROSECUTION

Your honour, this is a recording of an Israeli soldier firing at unarmed protesters with a rifle that is completely silenced.

Please explain to the tribunal which gun fired this inaudible shot?

WITNESS

It would have to be the Ruger 'dingo' rifle. It is the quietest gun on earth, if used with subsonic ammunition that travels just below the speed of sound.

PROSECUTION

Can you explain why these weapons are classified by the Israelis as 'non-lethal' force?

WITNESS

Well, the sound bomb, although deafening in volume, cannot kill anybody, but the Ruger is very quiet and very deadly. These rifles have the nickname 'hush puppy' as they are used to silently eliminate disturbing dogs prior to stealth operations.

DEFENCE

Objection. Are we now on trial for animal cruelty your honour?

JUDGE

Sustained.

PROSECUTION

Your honour, I have one last question for the witness. Is it true that you could not initially hear the difference between the sound of live ammunition and rubber bullets?

WITNESS

Yes, I could only hear the difference in the sound after I examined the visualizations.

PROSECUTION

Your honour, true experts don't need visualizations of sounds to distinguish subtle differences. The true experts in this case are the young protesters who can identify these sounds instinctively. Mohamad Azzeh testified that he heard the fire of live ammunition at the protest and ran. Some moments later he started to feel something burning in his stomach. His hearing was so acute that he could identify the sound of live ammunition that was cloaked by a rubber-bullet adapter and react before he even knew the shot had hit him.

DEFENCE

Objection your honour. Mr Azzeh is not a sworn witness.

PROSECUTION

Your honour, the young people's expertise at detecting sounds has led the Israeli military to find innovative methods to conduct their killings. At first, they tried to confuse the protesters masking the sound of live ammunition with rubber bullet adapters. When they noticed that the protesters could hear the difference they tried to deafen them with sound bombs and use a totally silenced weapon that neither film crews nor protesters on the ground can detect.

DEFENCE

Objection your honour. Does the prosecution have a witness who can testify to this?

PROSECUTION

I do not your honour, but some of the youth are here with us today in the audience. I implore any one of you to step up here and testify to these serial killing sounds.

[Inaudible]

JUDGE

Clerk, please summon the interpreter.

PROSECUTION

You may now speak in your own language.

[Inaudible]

PROSECUTION

Do you hear me?

[Inaudible]

DEFENCE

Why don't you come forward and speak under oath?

[Inaudible]

JUDGE

Can you hear us at the back?

[Inaudible]

JUDGE

Can't they hear me?

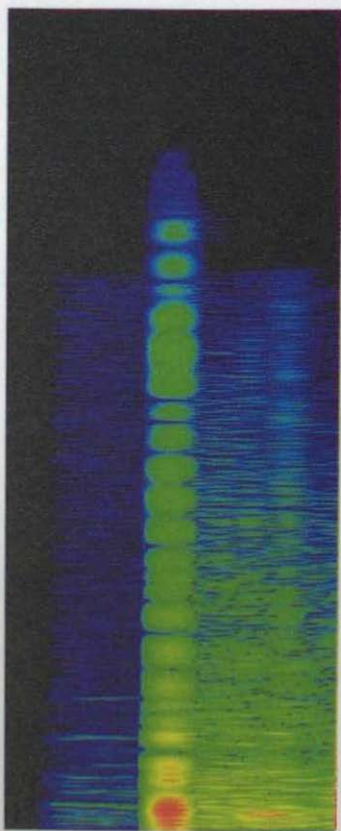
[Inaudible]

WITNESS

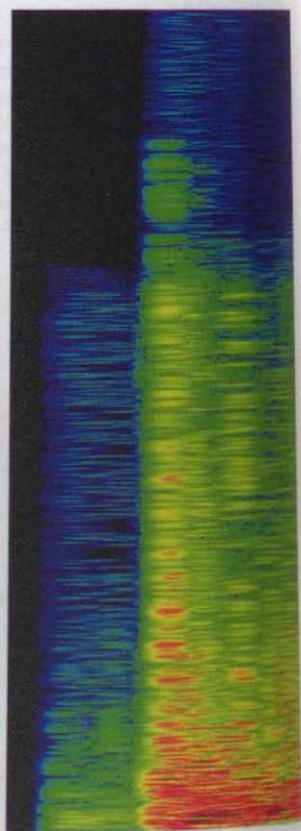
It doesn't seem there is anything medically wrong with their hearing your honour.

[Inaudible]

[Gavel strikes]

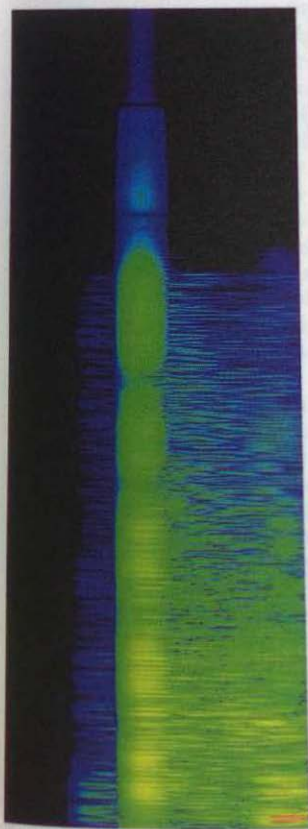


Rubber-coated steel bullet

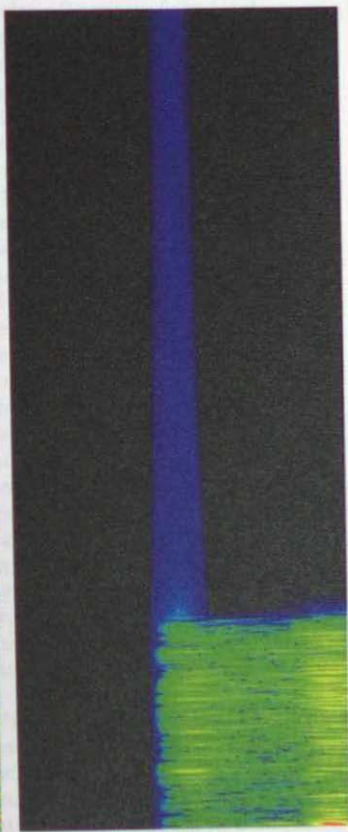


Live ammunition

Spectrograms of the sound of 4 different types of gunfire. Along the bottom axis is time, the vertical axis is pitch from low to high and the colour temperature shows the loudness of that pitch at that time.



Live ammunition suppressed
by rubber-bullet adapter



Silenced live ammunition

Act 4. Listen to Me

SCENARIO

'I am not speaking from a medical perspective', begins the narrator in Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *The All Hearing* (2014). The subjective admission seems an appropriate analogy for most of the legal precedents recently laid down in Egypt. Indeed, the social, political, and judicial contexts from which everyday Egypt derives its legislative processes seem increasingly a product of personal subjectivity: a product of make-believe, fiction, and caricature. For example, in 2016, after a number of appeals, a novelist named Ahmad Naji was sent to prison for two years, supposedly because his literary descriptions of sex and hashish made an elderly man's heart rate slow down, inducing a near-fatal experience. The complaint, in other words, was that the novel was a public threat. Around the same time, many of Cairo's contemporary art spaces were closed, due to the precarity of legal protection for NGOs in the country, while elsewhere, academics, anthropologists, and philosophers have had their liberties curtailed. Sexual and religious minorities are concerned that they too will come under attack, given the state's desire to maintain an imaginary status quo.

Yet Egypt, and its capital city Cairo, is no backwoods area. It is a pulsing web of contradictions; thousands of years of civilization, in the form of museums and monuments, sit amidst contemporary urban sprawl: Hardees and KFC, fake designer clothing stores, upscale hair salons and luxury hotels. These sites are also often surrounded by poverty, which exists cheek by jowl with the city's economic and intellectual elite: Egypt's greatest scientists, doctors, and professors. But this polyphony is often flattened out in the public image of Egypt overseas; too often the nostalgic romance of ancient civilization is juxtaposed only against the avid gestures of revolutionary Tahrir Square.

However, with his film *The All Hearing*, Lawrence Abu Hamdan has achieved perhaps the most accurate evocation of this cellular metropolis. Abu Hamdan takes Cairo's cacophonous aural landscape as a starting point: from here, he stages an epic two-hander between two Muslim clerics, whom he has asked to speak on – what else? – the ills of noise pollution. But the sermons are absorbed and echoed back into the city's deafening sonic jungle, on chinese sound systems which boom from every street corner of downtown Cairo. This feedback loop speaks to Cairo's impossible situation: a city torn between aspirational desires for the future and its inevitable contradictions.

– Omar Kholeif

SHEIKH SAYED RAMADAN

[with slight echo effect on voice throughout]

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds. Praise be to God, who gave you your hearing, your sight, and your hearts in order that you might give thanks. The topic of our talk today, oh brothers under God Almighty, is the position of Islam on noise pollution *[microphone distortion]*. Though noise pollution has become a very popular topic these days, and many people are discussing laws to protect our hearing from the noise that pervades our society, in truth, Islam preceded all of these laws, beginning with the Revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Mohamed, peace be upon him. The purpose of Islamic law is to make people happy in this life and in the afterlife, but people subjected to noise, vain speaking, and complaining will not find happiness in this life or the next *[sound of latecomers to audience arriving]*. That is why, when the Lord Almighty speaks of Heaven, He says, 'They hear no vain speaking nor recrimination.' [56:25] So, although there is vain speaking and clamour in this life, on account of some people's behaviour, in Heaven there is none. And let us consider the word of God Almighty that 'the hearing and the sight and the heart - of each

of these [*emphatically elongated word*] it will be asked.' [17:36] This means that on Judgment Day you will be asked about your hearing. What did your ears hear? Did you protect the blessings given to you by God Almighty, or did you misuse them for purposes He did not intend? Did you spoil them with noise, complaining, and vain speaking? You will be asked on Judgment Day about the blessings that God Almighty has given you [*rhythmically enunciates every word in sentence*]. God Almighty confirms this message through the words of the Prophet Luqman, who offers advice and wisdom to his son: 'Be modest in thy bearing and subdue thy voice. Lo! the harshest of all voices is the voice of the ass' [31:19]: when you speak with people, do so politely and do not raise your voice above theirs; [*microphone pops*] do not lord over them in conversation; do not brag and do not boast. This is all prohibited in Islam. And ever more scathing is God Almighty's subsequent description: if you must raise your voice do not let it become like a donkey's bray, for 'the harshest of all voices is the voice of the ass.' [*Emphatically drops pitch*] Do not raise your voice without cause. The donkey has an excuse: he is a donkey and does not know when to raise his voice and when to lower it. But human beings, exalted by the Lord Almighty, how can they possibly allow themselves to be like donkeys, raising their voices whenever and wherever they wish? God Almighty, the Prophet, peace be upon him, and Islamic law all command us to keep our voices down, [*audience member sneezes*] for this is part of politeness. When speaking in a group, it is most polite to keep your voice calm and controlled. God says that most of those who raise their voices above the voice of the Prophet have no sense. Those who speak over the Prophet, peace be upon him, have no sense. God Almighty even considers keeping one's voice down in the council of the Prophet, peace be upon him, to be an act of piety. 'Those that lower their voices in the presence of Allah's Messenger, their hearts has Allah tested for piety.' [49:3] [*Emphatically undulates pitch*] So the pious believer is he who keeps his voice down. The Lord Almighty says, 'Lo! those who call thee from behind the private apartments, most of them have no sense.' [49:4] Why? Because they have raised their voices to call to the Prophet, peace be upon him, so God Almighty says that 'most of them have no sense.' So let's say that, one day, I was walking down a street and came across a friend's apartment – this happens often in the poorer neighbourhoods – and I did not want to go up

to the third or fourth floor, so I just shouted up to my friend and bothered everyone else on the street just because I did not want to go up a few flights of stairs. Is this in accordance with the teachings of Islam? It is certainly not [*emphatically drops pitch*]. Similarly, when God Almighty blesses you with a car, you must only use the horn for its real purpose. Should you drive around, happy and proud that you have a car, bothering everyone, honking whether you need to or not? The Prophet, peace be upon him, refused loudness even in worship. How so? Look what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did when he wanted to announce to Muslims that it was time to pray. He sat with his companions and asked them for their suggestions on how to announce to everyone that it was time to pray. Some of them suggested using a horn, but the Prophet, peace be upon him, refused. Others suggested using a bell, but the Prophet, peace be upon him, refused. But when Abdallah ibn Zaid brought the words of the call to prayer, the Prophet, peace be upon him, agreed. We find that the Prophet, peace be upon him, agreed to the words. And they are sweet and fine words: 'God is great, God is great; God is great, God is great. I bear witness that there is no god but God; I bear witness that there is no god but God. I bear witness that Mohamed is God's Prophet; I bear witness that Mohamed is God's Prophet. Hasten to prayer; hasten to prayer. Hasten to deliverance; hasten to deliverance. God is great, [*voice breaks*] God is great. There is no god but God.' But that is not all. The Prophet, peace be upon him, told Abdallah ibn Zaid, 'Teach it to Bilal.' [*audience member coughs*] He responded, 'Why, oh Prophet? I am the one who saw the vision, and you confirmed it, so I should be the one to recite the call to prayer.' But the Prophet, peace be upon him, justified his instruction: 'His voice is more beautiful than yours.'

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Allah!

SHEIKH SAYED RAMADAN

'His voice is more beautiful than yours.' Such is true for the muezzin. Muezzins have great merit, but if one is reciting the call to prayer and sees someone with a better voice, then he should allow the other to call. It is a sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him, that the person who recites the call to prayer should have a good voice [*Microphone handling noise*]. We have all had such

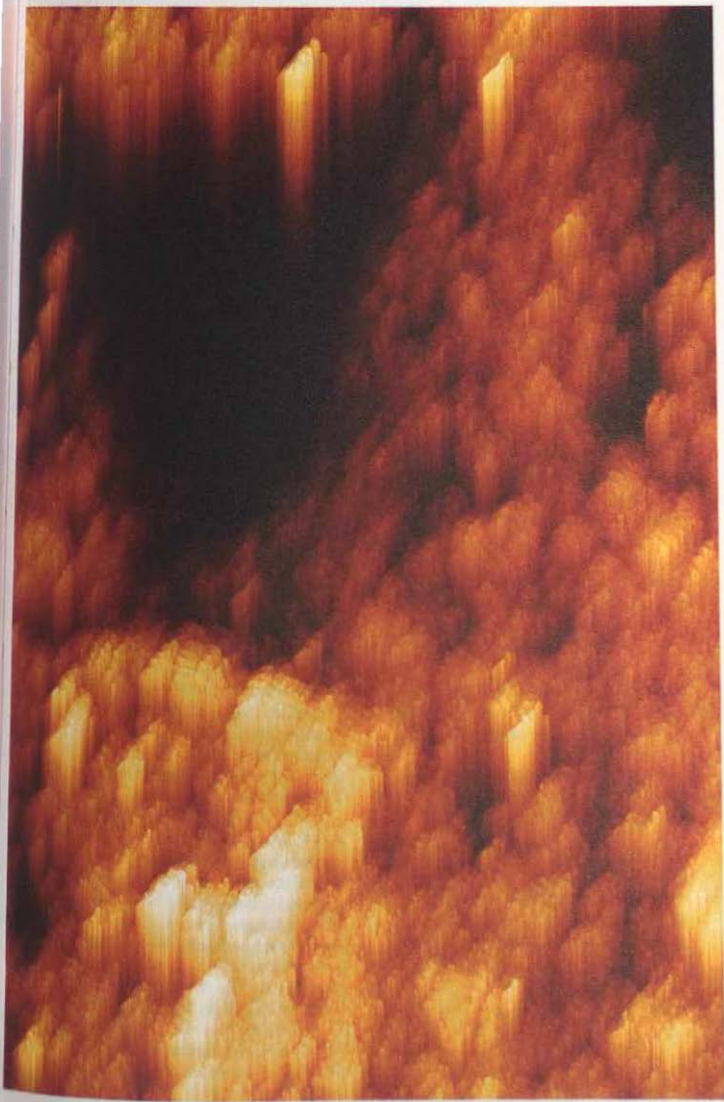
experiences. In a nearby mosque you hear fellow believers whose voices are anything but mellifluous. When they recite the call to prayer people complain and are upset by the loud noise. But that is not all. The Prophet, peace be upon him, taught us to be moderate and not to raise our voices when we pray to God Almighty. Abu Musa, God be pleased with him, tells us, according to the Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim collections, "We were with the Prophet, peace be upon him, on a journey, and as we reached a high place we cried "God is great!" The Prophet, peace be upon him, told us "Restrain yourselves. Contain yourselves. For you are not praying to one who is deaf or far away, but rather to the All-Hearing and All-Knowing." *[Rhythmically enunciates every word in sentence]* The Lord is closer to you than your own jugular vein, so there is no need to raise your voice when praying to God Almighty or at other times and bother your fellow Muslims. *[Emphatically drops pitch]* The Lord is all-hearing and is close to you, so look to how you beseech Him. Every one of you, look to how you beseech the Lord Almighty, for He is close to you. Do not raise your voices above one another in prayer. So if the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the Holy Qur'an command us to be moderate even in our worship and to contain ourselves and not to raise our voices *[microphone handling noise]*, then is it appropriate for us to raise our voices at other times? If we are taught to do so in worship, then should we not act the same at other times? Of course we should. How would you feel if your neighbour were to turn on his television, tape player, or radio when you were at home or when your son had a test? What if he turned the volume up? Would that make you happy, or would it not leave you annoyed, irritated, and worried? Science has proven that loud noises cause a number of medical conditions. If a person is exposed to loud noises for an extended period of time, they can suffer hearing damage or even hearing loss. There are also psychological and physical diseases caused by the noise in our society. Islamic societies ought to be like those described by the Lord Almighty, pervaded with tranquility, serenity, and politeness *[mobile phone interference into the loudspeaker system]*. When a situation or a person provokes you to raise your voice, you should refuse. What has become of us today? What do we allow to happen at some of our funerals and weddings? People hold weddings and funerals in the street, bring speakers, and turn the volume up as much as possible, bothering and irritating everyone

else. They forget about their fellow Muslims, including the elderly man who has trouble sleeping and needs quiet. They forget about the students who have to study and need quiet. They forget about the teachers, scientists, and doctors who have lessons to prepare. Nor is it ever right to harm our non-Muslim neighbours with speakers and the like. What has become of us today? What has become of our society? When you take a taxicab, the driver turns on his tape player. In any taxi you take, the driver plays very irritating music at a loud volume, and if you ask him to turn it down he refuses and does not even deign to respond. Is this in accordance with the teachings of Islam? It is certainly not.

[Emphatically drops pitch] People turn up the volume in mosques and on the speakers on the minarets. For example, in a village, there might be two mosques near each other. During the holy month of Ramadan, you might go there to pray and find that the microphone or speakers project outside the mosque. While praying in one mosque you hear the sheikh of the other mosque reciting the Qur'an. Is this in accordance with the principles of Islam? It is certainly not. As Muslims, we cannot allow our society to be so bad and so filled with noise, vain speaking, and recrimination, by which we insult Islam even more than we insult ourselves. We pray to God Almighty that we may hear His word.

[Fades out]

Right. Atomic force microscopy of the palimpsest of sounds stored on the surface of a second-hand, home-duplicated Islamic cassette sermon bought at Cairo's Friday flea market. *A Conversation with an Unemployed*, 2013. Lawrence Abu Hamdan



Listen to me

This publication accompanies the exhibitions *Lawrence Abu Hamdan – Earshot* at Portikus, Frankfurt/Main, 13.02.–10.04.2016, and *Lawrence Abu Hamdan – تقية (Taqiyya) – The Right to Duplicity* at Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, 11.07.–13.09.2015

Edited by Lawrence Abu Hamdan & Fabian Schöneich

Texts by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Emily Apter, Giovanni Carmine, Omar Kholeif, Fabian Schöneich

Copyediting by Brian Hanrahan

Graphic design by Colophon.info – David Bennewith, with assistance from Bram van den Berg

Printing and binding by Robstolk, Amsterdam

Published by Portikus, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, Sternberg Press

ISBN 978-3-95679-241-0

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Sternberg Press
Caroline Schneider
Karl-Marx-Allee 78
D-10243 Berlin
www.sternberg-press.com

Foreword.

Written by Emily Apter
Originally published in *October*,
Spring 2016, No. 156, pp. 100–15.
MIT Press Journals

Act 1.

Scenario by Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Translation by Masha Refka
Transcription by Masha Refka
& Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Illustration from *Conflicted Phonemes*, 2012 by Lawrence Abu Hamdan

Act 2.

Scenario by Giovanni Carmine
Interview originally published in *HLYSNAN – The Notion and Politics of Listening*, a Casino Luxembourg exhibition catalogue
Illustration by Colophon.info

Act 3.

Scenario by Fabian Schöneich
Script written by Lawrence Abu Hamdan for his video work *Rubber Coated Steel*, 2016. Commissioned by Portikus, Frankfurt/Main
Script assistance by Rayya Badran
Illustrations by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, originally made for the *Nakba Day Killings* report by Forensic Architecture and DCI Palestine's *No More Forgotten Lives* campaign

Act 4.

Scenario by Omar Kholeif
Translation by Jason Lyle Reeder
Transcription of sounds by Ghalas Charara
One of two sermons that form the basis of Lawrence Abu Hamdan's video work *The All-Hearing*, 2014. Commissioned by Beirut in Cairo & Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Illustrations by Lawrence Abu Hamdan *A Conversation with an Unemployed*, 2013; part of a body of work titled *Tape Echo*, 2013–14.

The exhibition and this publication
were made possible with the financial
support of



Alfried Krupp von Bohlen
und Halbach-Stiftung

**hessische
kultur
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Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen is kindly
supported by: Stadt St. Gallen,
Kulturförderung Kanton St. Gallen,
Swisslos, Raiffeisen

Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen
Davidstr. 40
CH-9000 St. Gallen
www.k9000.ch

Front Cover Image:

*Contra Diction: Speech Against
Itself*, 2014 (live audio essay
version), Lawrence Abu Hamdan,
Performed at Cornerhouse,
Manchester

Back Cover Image:

Optical microscopy of the
palimpsest of sounds stored on
the surface of a second-hand,
home-duplicated Islamic cassette
sermon bought at Cairo's Friday
flea market. *A Conversation with
an Unemployed*, 2013,
Lawrence Abu Hamdan

Kunst
Halle
St. Gallen

ISBN 978-3-956792-41-8



9 783956 792418

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Sternberg Press

A POLITICS OF LISTENING is a politics that moves away from classic notions of advocacy and of giving people a voice. It is not a call for free speech or to have an equal platform for all voices to be heard – it is an intervention into and a reorganisation of the ways in which we listen to speech. A politics of listening does not simply seek to amplify voices but attempts to redefine what constitutes speech itself.