"The Native Ear"

Accented Testimonial Desire and Asylum

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INTRODUCTION

The video installation *FF Gaiden: Delete* depicts a synthetic computer voice played over scenes of a video game avatar moving through a virtual landscape.[1] The work is the product of a collaboration between British artists Larry Achiampong and David Blandy, undocumented migrants in Oslo, and the self-organized migrant group Mennisker i Limbo (People in Limbo). The thirty-three-minute video tells the story of two undocumented migrants living in Norway with whom Achiampong and Blandy collaborated.[2] The narrators speak of staying in reception centers in Norway and detention centers in Iran, trying to obtain passports and work permits, and receiving threats of deportation. Their stories detail experiences with infrastructures of crossing, precarious mobility, and the stoppages of state identification and migration regimes that are accompanied by the virtual video game environment of Grand Theft Auto V. Rather than showing a densely populated urban space and speedy car chases, however, here the virtual environment depicts deserted train tracks, tunnels, and mountain roads. One story is an autobiographical account of Sara, who details her experiences during the Eritrean-Ethiopian war; her flight to Saudi Arabia, where she performed precarious domestic migrant labor; and the bureaucratic limbo of asylum administration to which she is subjected in Norway.

The video game landscape and the synthetic voices function as a form of obfuscation that arguably makes this migrant testimony possible. In an interview, cocreator Blandy said that "the avatars and computer voices becom[e] like masks for [the speakers] to wear in order to speak without fear."[3] This form of masking points us to the precarity experienced throughout asylum proceedings, during which applicants fear both repercussions from persecutors in their countries of origin and the state surveillance mechanisms they are subjected to in Norway.

I am a voice of the undocumented woman.
I tell this story in place of those who cannot.

FIGURE 10.1. Still from the video installation *FF Gaiden: Delete* (2016), by Larry Achiampong and David Blandy.

Moreover, the use of synthesized voices functions to obscure the speakers' identities, thus ensuring their anonymity. Tellingly, Blandy suggests that in the video "the cold computer voice and stilted animation actually forces viewers to listen more intently, to understand the words rather than blank them out as just another testimony."[4] While Blandy's comments on the anonymity and protection afforded by this kind of masking suggest that synthesis makes the voice nonlocatable, one critic rightly points out that the synthetic voice is not *un*accented, but is instead a "strangely-Americanised synthetic voice," which leaves the narrations of flight, political violence, and struggle void of emotion and tone.[5] The absenting of tone, affect, and accent is part of the work of obfuscation and in turn highlights what Blandy refers to as "just another testimony," the routinized accounting and retelling of violence and persecution in the context of asylum, refuge, and forced migration. By masking the voice and identities of its speakers, *FF Gaiden: Delete* exposes the demand and desire for what is constructed as an authentic migrant story, identity, and voice.

Testimony, therefore, becomes valuable currency for people seeking asylum. In the video, Sara, one of the narrators, reflects on the act of storytelling as she describes giving testimony as (re)opening a wound. In a revealing moment, she says, "I am a voice of the undocumented woman. I tell this story in place of those who cannot" (see figure 10.1). Embedded in this statement are the differentially produced vectors of speaking and listening at work in migration and

asylum regimes. While the equation of voice with presence and agency has been critiqued as inhering a logic of liberal forms of recognition in which minoritarian subjects need to make claims to inclusion into the nation-state,[6] Sara's statements and the obfuscation of the synthesized voice in *FF Gaiden: Delete* point us to the (im)possibilities of testimony operating in asylum determination proceedings. While people seeking asylum need to speak of their experiences of persecution to gain access to humanitarian forms of protection, *FF Gaiden: Delete* dramatizes how their testimony is routinely scrutinized. As such, testimony can become a liability when people seeking asylum do not capture the right tone, affect, and accepted narrations of persecution. As the reviewer quoted above notes and I explore in this chapter, accent is among the features of speech under scrutiny in asylum determination.

FF Gaiden: Delete demonstrates how migrant voices, identities, and testimonies are caught in demands for authenticity to become legible to state-sanctioned forms of recognition. Building on the example above, this essay considers how migrant testimony functions as a precarious referent for identification, how accent emerges as a site of state identification that can be forensically observed and analyzed, and how accent is treated as an index of identity, or what I term *accented testimonial desire*. To this end I examine the use of linguistic analyses in asylum proceedings enacted by European states as an instance of state-administered identification that makes use of, incites, asks for, and desires accented speech. These linguistic analyses, commonly called Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin (LADO), are used to verify and determine the origin of people seeking asylum based on the language or dialect they speak. As such, LADO functions as a technology that reinscribes border and migration regimes into accented voices. Linguistic analysis used in asylum proceedings considers that context, movement, kinship relations, and biography all impact what can be gleaned from someone's speech. I contend, however, that accent, rather than indicating the identity of the speaker, is produced through the state's desire to use accent as a site of authentication.

This chapter draws on interviews conducted with linguists and LADO practitioners, linguistics scholarship, state and court documents about LADO, and debates about the use of native speakers in linguistic analyses. By examining these debates I show how accent emerges from and is rooted in the listener rather than the speaker. In doing so, I focus specifically on what practitioners of linguistic analyses call the native ear, or a native speaker's ability to recognize attributes of their native language in other speakers, and develop the concept in order to illustrate how LADO points to the ambivalence about scientific objectivity and naturalized assumptions about the relationship between origin and accent. On the one hand, LADO's development can be characterized by processes of scientification and the desire for the categorization of accents that persist in administrative and juridical systems of asylum determination; on the other hand, the very concept of *the native ear* assumes a natural link between accent and origin. This accent is

not, as LADO claims, located in the speaker but in the listener, whose embodied knowledge is assumed to allow for a natural recognition of accent.

By showing how accent operates as a site of desire for state identification and classification and how it resides in the listener, I emphasize accent as an embodied, rather than a purely semantic, phenomenon. While scholarship on asylum, borders, and migration has shown that migrant voices, narratives, and testimonies are routinely devalued and, further, that the body as an evidentiary object becomes the means through which recognition can be accessed, the voice is typically considered as a purely semantic phenomenon separate from the body. I demonstrate how accent must be understood as an embodied event by situating LADO within a generalized suspicion of asylum claims in border and migration regimes and technologies that target the body to identify and verify asylum claims, thereby devaluing testimonial content and valorizing the form of classifiable and analyzable individual phonemes.

Moreover, my analysis of accented testimonial desire illustrates that accent and voice become framed as stabilized indices of identity. My analysis shows how the accented voice is called upon, desired, and valorized, whereas scholarship on accent and voice has focused on how accent alternatively becomes a naturalized, globalized, or stigmatized marker of racialized and gendered identities.[7] Accent becomes an indicator of geographical origin, citizenship, or socialization, and in turn it can be used to access political and legal recognition and protection. Different from the phenomena of globalization and naturalization through which accented speech is attempted to be neutralized to create nonlocalizable speech, LADO attempts to localize speakers through their accent.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS AND ASYLUM

In the early 1990s Scandinavian countries started to conduct crude linguistic analyses as part of asylum procedures. Later termed LADO, these analyses were introduced to determine the origin of asylum seekers, specifically in cases where people seeking asylum could not provide identification documents or when their testimonies were thought to be untrue. This practice was adopted in other countries, including the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, Australia, Belgium, and Canada. The premise of the analyses is that the language or dialect spoken by someone indicates where they were socialized and, in turn, can function as evidence about their country of origin, nationality, and citizenship, which are crucial categories in determining whether someone has a "well-founded fear of persecution."[8] Relevant linguistic information for these analyses includes morphology, syntax, lexis, intonation and pronunciation, and phonetics as well as geographical, cultural, and geopolitical knowledge.

The premise of LADO that someone's origin can be inferred from the language they speak has been critiqued—prominently by linguists, migrant rights groups

and activists, and immigration lawyers—for falsely tying language to territorial and geopolitical boundaries. Common critiques of LADO are that the premise of using language and dialect as an indicator of someone's origin, socialization, or even nationality is based on commonplace and lay assumptions about language as static, monoglossic, and a stable index of identity. These assumptions produce the idea of a linguistic passport for which language is supposed to function as a form of official state identification that distributes possibilities and impossibilities of movement and mobility. This notion of a linguistic passport is also a reason why LADO became an attractive method of state identification; while passports can be lost or forged, accent supposedly gives access to the identity of a person that is innate, unchanging, and tied to the body. In a 2010 paper the director of the Office for Country Information and Language Analysis (OCILA), the Dutch department in charge of all LADO cases in the Netherlands, describes this affordance as follows: LADO "is a form of evidence that cannot be taken away, stolen or left behind very easily, as documents can."[9] Part of the allure of accent is that it is supposedly less easy to fake than documents are, signaling a discourse of veracity and truth claims central to asylum determination.

This conception of a linguistic passport assumes that language is intimately tied to a place of origin according to a language ideology that maps linguistic boundaries onto geographical boundaries.[10] This ideology neglects how dialects are distributed independently of geopolitical borders as they are often the product of colonial forms of border making. Colonial powers divided up territories that did not adhere to linguistic communities. The premise of LADO further assumes immobile languages and immobile people and does not account for migratory movements, heteroglossia, multilingualism, and the immersion of people in different linguistic communities. All of these factors complicate the assumption that one can infer origin from accent. Especially in the context of asylum determination, these aspects are very common as migrant biographies often involve spending months or years in transit, which means that people become immersed in different linguistic communities and contexts.

All of these aspects show crucial limitations of LADO's premise that origin can be determined based on accent. Therefore, while LADO claims to be a method of state identification that ties accent to identity, I suggest that accent points us to the state's desire to classify accents. This desire demands that people seeking asylum offer their voices and stories, which become scrutinized and classified to reinforce border and migration regimes by mapping linguistic boundaries onto territorial borders. Lawrence Abu Hamdan has argued that LADO transforms the relationship between jurisdiction and territoriality by attempting to establish a correlation between voice and citizenship.[11] My analysis of LADO shows that this assumed naturalized link between identity and accent in processes of state identification valorizes the locatability of accent to access recognition and resources. By focusing on the state's desire, my analysis examines the listener rather than reproducing the racialized and gendered dimensions of accent in the speaker.

The example of LADO here departs from other dominant examples discussed in accent scholarship. One of the areas in which accent and globalized economies are most discussed is in the literature on international call centers. For instance, A. Aneesh argues that neutrality is "crucial to understanding the unhinging of accents from places, identities from persons, and persons from their biological clocks."[12] Accents are repositories for information about origin, class, gender, and race. So-called accent neutralization trainings attempt to neutralize these markers of identity and locale and remove locatable accents, or at least make them less audible to the listener. As Aneesh argues, "[w]ith the construction of a neutral accent, we can imagine the development of placeless accents—placeless, not in the sense that it is from no place, but rather that hearers cannot place it."[13] The task in LADO, however, aims at localization rather than neutralization: the observation of language properties cannot be definitively tied to someone's place of origin but can nevertheless result in the denial of asylum claims. My analysis of LADO, therefore, points us to processes of accenting other than neutralization that become valorized.

THE NATIVE EAR

LADO was first introduced by states as a measure to determine the origin of asylum applicants who did not have any identification papers or whose papers or testimonies were considered fraudulent. Interpreters informally commented on the way asylum applicants spoke and noted what they considered to be inconsistencies in the language, dialect, and accent of the speaker. These informal observations hint at what were perceived as irregularities or inconsistencies concerning people's claimed origin, which would then be added to asylum files and enter the decision-making processes of asylum cases. As LADO developed it came under the purview of linguists who are regularly employed or commissioned to conduct linguistic analyses, and critiques of these informal practices of listening were formulated. Problems with this approach include bias, judgment, and prejudices of the interpreters. One important critique of LADO is that it disregards the process of accommodation in which speakers adjust their accents and other aspects of language to accommodate their conversation partners.

Accommodation can be particularly common in asylum interviews because interpreters do not necessarily speak the same dialects as the people seeking asylum. Despite this critique, interpreters are commonly asked to note what they perceive as inconsistencies in the accents of asylum applicants. In Germany this has been a standard but informal practice for decades. Interpreters are instructed and obligated to pay attention to, and report, any conspicuous irregularities during or after the asylum interview, which will be become part of the record of the interview.[14] These inconsistencies could include uncertainties a speaker displays in speaking a specific language that could suggest there are doubts about an applicant's statements about their country of origin, nationality, or citizenship.[15] Instructions

for caseworkers also show that any such indication of language inconsistencies should be pursued and clarified in the asylum interview. The persistence of this practice suggests that despite the professionalization of LADO, native speakers are considered to have an innate ability to recognize and place someone's accent.

LADO practitioners and linguists I interviewed commented on this history of LADO and emphasized the subsequent scientific development, professionalization, and research in the field attempting to establish a scientific and, therefore objective and legally defensible, methodology. For instance, a group of linguists came together under the name Language and National Origin Group and published a set of guidelines for the use of language analysis in asylum cases. Those guidelines included the claim that language can only indicate a person's socialization, not their national origin, nationality, or citizenship, as those are "political or bureaucratic characteristics, which have no necessary connection to language."[16] This understanding of language coincides with that of some linguists I interviewed, who lament the inadequacy of the term *LADO*, claiming that it misleadingly suggests that a language analysis could unproblematically indicate someone's citizenship.

To offset the problem of accommodation and the unscientific nature of early LADO analyses, the field started to professionalize, resulting in different approaches to implementing LADO. However, the matter of who should best conduct analyses remains highly contested and debated among LADO practitioners. Some linguists working on LADO have described this debate as "the most prominent debate in the field"[17] and as "reflecting a serious rift among scholars and practitioners."[18] In particular, the use of so-called nonexpert native speakers in LADO receives regular scrutiny.[19] The 2004 guidelines argued that "judgements about the relationship between language and regional identity should be made only by qualified linguists," and they explicitly distinguish between the ability to conduct language analysis acquired through linguistic training and expertise from the ability to speak or translate a language.[20]

Other practitioners, however, consider native-speaker involvement in LADO as beneficial or even superior to linguistic expertise. One linguist I interviewed referred to the importance of "hav[ing] someone who has the native ear" to pick up on nuances and specific features that can be found in the dialect of the asylum claimant.[21] He elaborated that academic training in linguistics might pose a hindrance to effectively identifying features in the native dialect, as such training could "taint the native ear."[22] This perspective is further illustrated by the Swedish company Sprakab, one of the primary companies contracted to provide LADO analyses to several countries.[23] A post on the FAQ section on the company's website explains Sprakab's reasoning for employing native speakers rather than trained linguists as analysts, noting how that even without linguistic training, native speakers are the best analysts of language, as they "normally know whether the asylum seeker is speaking the claimed dialect in a matter of minutes. This is

perfectly normal. It is no more strange than a native Cockney-speaker being able to distinguish another native Cockney-speaker from someone speaking 'Mockney' almost instantly."[24]

The suggestion by Sprakab and my interlocutors that native speakers can identify features and attributes in their native language relies on an ideology of dialect and language analysis that reproduces naturalized perceptions about the ability to place people by the way they speak. One linguist I interviewed referred to this assigned ability of the native ear as a "gut feeling" that, while likely accurate, does not necessarily allow for a correct and effective description of specific attributes found in someone's speech.[25] The linguist explained further that these features must be described and built into an argument that must be defensible in court. Therefore, some linguists have claimed that the accuracy of nonexpert native speakers is too low to be used in asylum cases.[26]

The use of native speakers as analysts and the methods of linguistic analyses more generally have also been debated in court cases. A 2014 judgment of the U.K. Supreme Court commented on the expression of certainty in Sprakab reports, arguing that rather than relying on the relative conviction expressed by the reports, courts should judge on "the strength of the reasoning and expertise used to support them."[27] Sprakab reports indicate different levels of certainty, including "the person speaks a variety of x found" and ticked boxes indicating "1) with certainty not in x, 2) with certainty in x, 3) most likely in x, 4) likely in x, 5) possibly in x."[28] The judgment further challenged comments made by linguistic analysts as providing "evidence [going] beyond the proper role of a witness."[29] In the Sprakab report, the analyst included comments indicating that the applicant's "knowledge sounds rehearsed for the occasion since she does not give any detailed descriptions of the area she says she is from. She often hesitates and gives short answers to the questions she is asked."[30] The tribunal argued that it should not be the role of language analysts to judge the credibility of claimants beyond expertise on language use.[31] The tribunal also commented on the length of the recordings utilized for the Sprakab report and concluded that "in any event it was doubtful to what extent such issues (general view on credibility) could be properly explored in a telephone conversation lasting only 18 minutes and dealing also with other matters."[32]

The debates about native speakers in LADO scholarship and practice reveal a fundamental tension between the need and desire to establish a scientific and standardized method to properly conduct LADO and categorize, research, and classify accents and the simultaneous claim that native speakers are best suited to hear linguistic variations. *The native ear* describes this simultaneous need to be made legible in a juridical system. In other words, as the court case reveals, LADO operates under the idea that the right methodology will produce a more objective way of placing accents, through linguistic training, research, and method, which in turn will result in fairness and justice. This desire for scientific objectivity is in tension with the reliance on the intuitive knowledge of native listeners, or what

one of my interlocutors described as "gut feeling"—that is, the embodied, localized knowledge of language. However, this ability to hear an accent needs to be made legible to the legal system. As such, *the native ear* describes this ambivalence about the status of science and expertise that becomes negotiated through debates about native speakers working as LADO analysts. Secondly, the concept of *the native ear* also implies that accent is located in the listener, not the speaker, because the listener's ability to hear accent is naturalized. The listener's locatability, experience, and history become equated with the ability to hear accent intuitively.

My analysis of LADO thus shifts an understanding of accent as an index of identity to accent as it is perceived by listeners. Following Jennifer Stoever's concept of the listening ear "function[ing] as a modality of racial discernment" and Nina Sun Eidsheim's argument that voice does not correspond to an innate essence or identity of a vocalizer, but rather tells us about the assumptions made by listeners, my analysis of LADO further shows that accent functions as a localizer of identity and place, arguably telling us more about the listener than the speaker.[33] The native listener can hear and recognize different language attributes that produce an accent. In what follows, I show that the ambivalence illustrated by *the native ear* reveals the precarious status of testimony that the opening example of *FF Gaiden: Delete* poses. Specifically, I illustrate how it is not testimony's content that becomes desired, but its form.

ACCENTED TESTIMONIAL DESIRE

In a decision of the Upper Tribunal Immigration and Asylum Chamber in the United Kingdom from February 26, 2010, we can observe what I call *accented testimonial desire*, or how a localizable accent becomes desired by the state to determine asylum cases. Before the court was the appeal of a Somali woman who arrived in the United Kingdom in June 2007 and applied for asylum. Her asylum claim was rejected in part because a LADO report conducted by the Swedish company Sprakab concluded that she was not Somali.[34] After a first appeal her case was rejected because the immigration judge concluded that the linguistic analysis found "that the Appellant is an educated Kenyan woman [who] tried to pass herself off as Somali."[35] The second appeal to the U.K. High Court confirmed this decision, but the case nonetheless gives insight into how accent is desired. The court considered four analyses conducted by Sprakab and one contra-analysis conducted by an independent analyst to ascertain whether the applicant spoke a variety of Kibajuni found in Somalia rather than in Kenya. The Sprakab reports all indicated that there was strong evidence that she is not from Somalia and not Bajuni but from Kenya, noting that "although she does use some Kibajuni words, her pronunciation, intonation, and grammar are typical of Kenyan Swahili, indeed with a level of grammatical rectitude which shows her to be highly educated."[36] The independent analysis, however, found that the applicant was Somali Bajuni

from Koyama and indicated that the interviewer "spoke broken Swahili with a very heavy Kikuyu accent," which likely led to the applicant accommodating the interviewer and speaking Swahili as well.[37] The court finally concluded that the applicant was not from Somalia as she claimed, but from Kenya.

The court case shows that the testimonial desire of the state ties accent not only to origin but also to socioeconomic markers such as education. As such, this case reveals the testimonial desire of the state that becomes accented. There is an insistence on the confessional and truthful as the only registers available to asylum speakers and the conditions of their speech more generally. Further, the case illustrates the same desire for authentic migrant testimony posed by *FF Gaiden: Delete*. LADO demands that people seeking asylum speak, while their testimony is desired not in content, but only in form, and that form needs to follow scripts of authenticity. In other words, accent becomes testimony. LADO functions as a technology that puts this accented testimony into a form that becomes legible within an administrative system of asylum determination.

These scripts of authenticity also become placed onto the accented form of testimony. Decisive in this determination that the applicant was from Kenya, not Somalia, were indications found by the Sprakab analysts that the applicant "appeared to be putting on an accent."[38] One analyst wrote that she sounded "as if she [was] trying to alter her speech in order to sound like she speaks Bajuni."[39] Another analyst wrote that she "trie[d] to use linguistic features typical of Somali Bajuni, but often g[ot] it wrong."[40] Finally, the court explained "putting on an accent" in the following way: "Many of us who have tried to amuse ourselves and others by assuming an accent for the purpose of telling an anecdote (for example) will understand exactly how the assumed accent can so easily slip away and let the natural accent reveal itself. Unusual words can be learned. Distinctive speech patterns are very much harder to copy and even harder to abandon."[41] Here, the court slips back into commonplace assumptions about accent, language, and identity as closely tied to locality and geography that become the basis for decisions about access to political and legal recognition and protection. The listener's role then becomes to be able to hear those signs of "putting on an accent." Like Sprakab's position on Mockney, native accent is believed to come through eventually, thus reinforcing the naturalized link between accent and territory emblematic of the linguistic passport. The invocation that distinctive speech patterns are "even harder to abandon" creates a link between accent and the body. This conception of speech patterns points us to a crucial way in which accent becomes embodied. By naturalizing accent, accent itself not only becomes tied to the citizenship and identity of a person, but it is considered a part of their body available for scrutiny, classification, and objectification. We therefore need to theorize accent as part of the body and not merely a semantic phenomenon.

Linguistic analyses are practiced among many operations that nation-states use to identify, classify, and valorize citizenship, origin, and belonging that target

different areas of the body. In the absence of identification papers, the body becomes captured in different ways in border and migration regimes that take the form of ubiquitous fingerprinting databases, visual forms of surveillance, and forensic assessments of the body.[42] These technologies developed while claims for refugee status or asylum are increasingly regarded with suspicion. In many European countries, the right to asylum has been consistently restricted since the early 1990s. The hermeneutics of suspicion produce the body as one source through which immigration agencies have attempted to locate or supplement the absence of (state-approved) identification documents supplementing what Didier Fassin has called the "regime of recognition" of asylum procedures.[43] In this regime, authenticating and verifying asylum seekers' claims to legal and political recognition becomes framed not as a political or ethical problem, but as a matter of using the right technique or technology of calibration.[44] These "technologies of suspicion" are not entirely new.[45] In her 2004 essay "Affective Economies," Sara Ahmed argues that such suspicion is created through the distinction between genuine and bogus asylum seekers, which effectively works to put all migrants under suspicion while also framing the nation as hospitable to genuine and deserving migrants. National boundaries become reinforced through the ability to determine the difference between the genuine and the bogus. This necessity to differentiate, and the constant possibility of that failure, turns a suspicious gaze and ear onto everyone, which means that all voices and accents are under suspicion from the start.

LADO enters into this frame as a "technology of suspicion."[46] As one LADO practitioner argues, "The forensic context of LADO implies that we may be dealing with less than fully cooperative speakers, who may be hiding knowledge of a language, presenting a second language as their first language, or adding speech features that do not belong in their natural speech variety."[47] Similarly, the task of LADO, as exemplified in the court case described above, is to distinguish between natural speech features and those that are "put on," which reveals how the testimonial content of people seeking asylum is generally not trusted.

Although the voice's embodied materiality is a central part of the body, it has not received much attention as an important phenomenon in the literature on asylum and migration. Accent, specifically, remains largely absent from considerations of the role of testimony in asylum proceedings. Asylum proceedings are often multilingual settings in which different linguistic communities interact with each other, including state or suprastate representatives, people seeking asylum, translators, lawyers, and other advocates. As such, asylum procedures are highly complex and dynamic linguistic and communication contexts. Scholars have highlighted different dimensions of these linguistic and communicative encounters including interpretation and transcription,[48] multilingualism and bureaucratic and institutional talk and speech,[49] and processes of de- and recontextualization.[50] In other words, talk is everywhere in asylum procedures, from the moment of first officially seeking asylum, to administrative and legal procedures, asylum

interviews mediated by lawyers, interpreters, and/or social workers, and judicial rulings on asylum appeals.

As my analysis shows, LADO makes use of the ubiquity of speech in asylum proceedings and turns accent into an embodied index of identity. These indexes, however, are abstracted. Jan Blommaert has argued that testimony given in the context of asylum proceedings provides sociolinguistic profiles and repertoires that "index full histories of people and of places."[51] In asylum proceedings people are typically asked about their reasons for seeking asylum in another country and are asked about their history and fear of persecution in their countries of origin. These histories and biographies, Blommaert argues, are evaluated by institutional procedures that are "dominated by frames that refer to static and timeless . . . orders of things," therefore reducing the complexity of transnational processes.[52] As I argued above, the accented testimonial desire of the state targets testimonial form, which demands a consideration of the embodied elements of voice and accent.

Despite these critical demands, the voice is rarely considered part of the body or embodied in scholarship on migration and refugees. In voice studies, the voice is understood as part of the body, materially produced by the larynx, the vocal cords, the mouth, the throat, and the lungs. In LADO, the embodied materiality of the voice becomes the basis to objectify migrant testimony. Analysts listen to phonemes and correlate these to territorial belonging and native speakers' embodied knowledge, supposedly allowing for a more intuitive and natural recognition of accent. At the same time, as my opening example of *FF Gaiden: Delete* shows, there is no unaccented migrant testimony that can be authentically heard. The accent is the testimony.

CONCLUSION

The figure of *the native ear* in linguistic analysis used in asylum proceedings functions as a shorthand for the argument that native speakers are able to recognize attributes and features of their native language in other speakers. I suggested that *the native ear* reveals how accent emerges and is located in the listener rather than the speaker. In the absence of other forms of identification and the presence of generalized suspicion of asylum claims, accent accumulates value while the content of testimony becomes devalued. Engaging with scholarship on accent and voice as well as migration, asylum, and testimony, I show how accent becomes an indicator of geographical origin, national belonging, and socialization, and in turn it is valorized to access political and legal recognition, or what I have called *accented testimonial desire*. This desire therefore functions as an operation of state-administered identification that makes use of, incites, asks for, and desires accented speech. Through this analysis, I have made three interrelated arguments. First, I have shown that localization of accent, rather than its neutralization, becomes

valorized to access recognition and resources. Second, I have argued for a conceptual shift from thinking about accent as inherent to a speaker's often racialized and gendered identity to focusing on the perception of accent by the listener. Lastly, through conceptualizing accented testimonial desire, I have suggested moving from considering voice as a semantic phenomenon to acknowledging its embodied materiality.

As my theorization of *the native ear* shows, LADO is situated between contradictory demands for scientific objectivity that is legible for the law and the naturalized construction of the intuitive listening of native speakers. This ambivalence places people seeking asylum in a predicament in which they are repeatedly asked to speak of experiences of persecution while this speech is simultaneously turned into an objectified index of identity. As such, my analysis of LADO challenges the equation of the voice with agency, presence, and identity in liberal and Western political thought—a belief that, as I have shown, is also central in procedures of asylum determination. As my opening discussion of *FF Gaiden: Delete* illustrates, asylum applicants are placed in a double bind, simultaneously being incited to speak during asylum procedures and having their testimony scrutinized and placed under general suspicion. Detaching the voice from racialized and gendered notions of identity and essence and understanding accent as embodied both highlights the precarity of testimony and asylum and might point us to alternative political possibilities. How could we listen otherwise?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Cheraine Donalea Scott for pointing me to this work.

2. The work is part of the *FF Gaiden* series by Blandy and Achiampong. The videos in the series were made in collaboration with incarcerated people and veterans, paperless migrants, female refugees, and youths. "FF" here stands for "Finding Fanon," another collaborative series of video works by Blandy and Achiampong that engages with the lost plays of Frantz Fanon dealing with questions of postcoloniality, migration, race, and racism. *Gaiden* is Japanese for "side story" and stems from gaming lingo, in which it designates a spin-off of an existing video game. The side stories told in the *FF Gaiden* series take place in the virtual space of the video game Grand Theft Auto V.

3. Trigg, "David Blandy."

4. Trigg, "David Blandy."

5. Di Vito, "FF Gaiden."

6. Rangan, *Immediations*.

7. Aneesh, *Neutral Accent*; Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*; Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*.

8. UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*.

9. Cambier-Langeveld, "The Role of Linguistics," 68.

10. Irvine and Gal, "Language Ideology."

11. Abu Hamdan, "Aural Contract," 72–74.

12. Aneesh, *Neutral Accent*, 3.

13. Aneesh, *Neutral Accent*, 4.

14. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 3.1.3, Dienstanweisung-Asyl 21 2 2019.

15. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 3.1.3, Dienstanweisung-Asyl 21 2 2019.

16. Language and National Origin Group, "Guidelines," 262.

17. Wilson and Foulkes "Borders," 224.

18. Solan, "Identifying," 384.

19. Patrick, Schmid, and, eds. *Language Analysis*, 8.

20. Language and National Origin Group, "Guidelines," 262–63.

21. Personal interview.

22. Personal interview.

23. Sprakab has provided language analyses for several countries for decades. The Home Office in the United Kingdom used Sprakab services since 2000, until they suspended their services after a highly publicized scandal about one of their analysts who had lied about his qualifications. For more information, see www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sprakab-agency-misled-home-office-over-checks-on-asylum-seekers-10089311.html

24. Sprakab, "Questions and Answers."

25. Personal interview.

26. Fraser, "The Role."

27. *Secretary of State for Home Department v. MN and KY*, UKSC 30 (May 21, 2014), 29.

28. *Secretary of State for Home Department v. MN and KY*, 7.

29. *Secretary of State for Home Department v. MN and KY*, 22.

30. *Secretary of State for Home Department v. MN and KY*, 8.

31. *Secretary of State for Home Department v. MN and KY*, 21.

32. *Secretary of State for Home Department v. MN and KY*, 22.

33. Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, 13; Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*.

34. *Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber), RB (Linguistic Evidence—Sprakab) v. Somalia* (2010), UKUT (IAC), February 26, 2010.

35. *Upper Tribunal, RB (Linguistic Evidence—Sprakab) v. Somalia*, 3.

36. *Upper Tribunal, RB (Linguistic Evidence—Sprakab) v. Somalia*, 5.

37. *Upper Tribunal, RB (Linguistic Evidence—Sprakab) v. Somalia*, 5.

38. *Upper Tribunal, RB (Linguistic Evidence—Sprakab) v. Somalia*, 32.

39. *Upper Tribunal, RB (Linguistic Evidence—Sprakab) v. Somalia*, 5.

40. *Upper Tribunal, RB (Linguistic Evidence—Sprakab) v. Somalia*, 6.

41. *Upper Tribunal, RB (Linguistic Evidence—Sprakab) v. Somalia*, 32.

42. Several techniques used in asylum determination to identify people, including DNA analysis in family reunification cases and different forms of age assessments, have received critical attention.

43. Fassin, "The Precarious Truth," 44.

44. Fassin, "The Precarious Truth."

45. Haas and Shuman, *Technologies of Suspicion*.

46. Haas and Shuman, *Technologies of Suspicion*.

47 Cambier-Langeveld, "The Validity," 22.

48. Jacquemet, "Transcribing Refugees."

49. Jacquemet, "Crosstalk 2.0."

50. Maryns, *The Asylum Speaker*.

51. Blommaert, "Language," 416.

52. Blommaert, "Language," 415.

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