2. *Colonialism and Resistance: A Brief History of Deafhood*

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THE FIRST PHASE in the emergence of Deaf Studies as a discipline has been characterized by remarkable developments across a wide range of domains, from linguistics to psychology, from history to culture. We now face the challenge of bringing about the second phase, to search for more explicit Deaf epistemologies and ontologies that can frame these developments in a more holistic way, so that Deaf Studies can become a more conscious model for Deaf-centered praxis. In this chapter I will utilize the new concepts of postcolonialism and Deafhood to examine aspects of the Deaf Culture concept and suggest how these can be used to ground just such a liberatory praxis.

Colonialism and Deaf Communities

Lane and Wrigley were the first to draw attention to parallels between the Deaf experience and colonialism.[1] Ladd presents the first sustained examination of the idea and provides a tentative frameworking.[2] Four forms of colonization can be identified: *economic, welfare, linguistic,* and *cultural*.[3] This chapter is concerned primarily with the latter two features.

Linguistic and cultural colonization can be understood as a formal, structured network and set of processes whereby, as Merry has it, one group "not only controls and rules the other, but also endeavours to *impose its cultural order* on the subordinate group."[4] In the case of Deaf communities, traditional ideas concerning the superiority of majority (spoken and written languages) over sign languages developed into a worldwide policy of active suppression of the latter during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the central agents of colonialism is its education systems; in the Deaf domain this was embodied in the concept of oralism, taking two forms. One was the banning of sign language from education with its subsequent high rate of illiteracy,[5] and the other was the virtual removal of the prime means of transmission of Deaf cultural traditions—Deaf principals, teachers, and auxiliary staff.[6] The consequent diminished confidence and achievement levels, together with the delayed entry into Deaf community life and exposure to the Deaf cultural heritage, left the community vulnerable to refinements in the development of welfare and economic colonization that were then used to administer the Deaf colonies.

Colonization and Deaf Cultures

Seen from this perspective, and mindful of the extent to which this pattern of cultural suppression intensified as generation succeeded generation, one can understand that Deaf Cultures experienced a diminution in the scope and range of their cultural beliefs and visions. One way to begin to appreciate this is to adopt a simple exercise—imagining what the Deaf world would look like if oralism had never happened.

It is not impossible to assume that there would have been one hundred years of literate, strong, proud Deaf people, many Deaf superintendants and administrators, teachers and professionals. Or that there would have been many more interpreters, that many more hearing people would have been using British Sign Language (BSL) and be part of the Deaf community. As a consequence, Deaf public prominence and the ensuing political issues would have attained much greater recognition, and a larger amount of sign language and Deaf presence would be seen in film and on television. Relationships with parents of deaf children would have been very different indeed. Deaf arts would also be far more developed. Such a listing could continue, amounting effectively to a different world, one consisting not of a few elite Deaf people with better jobs, but whole communities living another dimension of existence, with very different relationships to majority cultures.

Instead of this, as Ladd describes, one finds Deaf communities positioned defensively, operating with an almost "underground" mentality via cultural patterns formed in reaction to that oppression, and with the loss of an overt and positive vision of the Deaf state of being, both in the communities and among most of their leaders.[7] Although the last twenty-five years have witnessed a Deaf Resurgence, at least in the West, the process and effects of that colonialism have not been directly addressed, leading to the continuation of cultural patterns that are counterproductive to a full decolonization.

"Deaf Culture" vis-à-vis "Deafhood"

A simple way to summarize the process above in respect to decolonization is therefore to draw a metaphorical line under *Deaf Culture,* acknowledging that this represents Deaf traditions, which must be learned, understood, and respected. But they should not prevent us from the search for our largest Deaf selves, which I term *Deafhood.* These distinctions form the basis for the explorations of the rest of the chapter. Holding such a dual focus enables Deaf peoples to open up new worlds of meaning, while still maintaining awareness of our traditions, both negative and positive, how they still operate on us, and which aspects of each we might wish to attempt to change in the decolonization process.

These larger Deaf selves can be observed beginning to manifest themselves during the last twenty years of the Deaf Resurgence. However, for a fuller understanding of Deafhood it is vital that we seek examples from history, notably the eras before oralism.

Deafhood in Precolonial History

Because sign languages could not be recorded, much evidence has been lost. But there do exist examples of Deaf discourses that encompassed such questions as "What is 'Deaf'?" "Who are we and why are we here on earth?" "What might our roles here on earth be?" which developed positive answers and drew powerful conclusions.

Although there are traces of such discourse within the United Kingdom,[8] the most prominent examples can be found in the printed records of the thoughts and perceptions of French Deaf people, from just before the French Revolution in 1789 through the postrevolutionary period to the "Paris Banquets" inaugurated by Berthier and colleagues from the 1830s onward.[9] All these reveal an elevated sense of self and community, much of which appears to have been lost during the oralist century.

Berthier and his colleagues' belief in what we now call bilingual education saw them involved in an intense struggle with the Parisian deaf school that was taking its first steps toward oralism. One of his group's political and cultural strategies was to establish annual banquets to which the press were invited. These became so famous—in an age of limited international communication—that Deaf people travelled from as far away as the United States to attend. Indeed as we shall see, this international-signing dimension represents an important aspect of Deaf epistemology. At those banquets, speeches were given in sign that were conveyed to print and thus have remained (potentially) accessible ever since.[10] The tone of these speeches is very impressive:

> [Sign language] easily wins out over all the separate limiting languages of speaking humanity. . . . Our language encompasses all nations, the entire globe.[11]

Berthier and those like him were clear about their own ontological status:

> The language of Deaf-mutes, that sublime universal language given to us by Nature.[12]

The Nature trope is vital because the group's concept of "the Supreme Being" stressed that Nature was in effect a manifestation of that Being in all its varied forms. Thus, all that was "natural" existed because it was intended to exist. It would appear that they perceived themselves in some ways as akin to what we now call First Nation peoples, who were viewed as equally "natural," or living in harmony with Nature or their "natural state."

An earlier example occurs in de Ladebat's account of Massieu and Clerc's visit to London in 1815, which is centered around the lectures they gave there. When Clerc was asked to compare English and French ladies, his lengthy reply surprised them in its frankness, to which he replied:

> It [such a frank reply] is the privilege of a Man of Nature.[13]

Clearly "Nature" was not merely an abstract concept, but one that was enacted in daily cultural praxis.[14]

Mottez draws attention to a report from a non-Deaf newspaper reporter at the 1849 banquet:

> None of the orators we most admire could even remotely compete with Berthier, Forestier or Lenoir for the grace, the dignity, and the correctness of their gestures. In truth, seeing the speeches that these three young men deliver is enough, I think, to make us wish we could unlearn speech.[15]

The Deaf were very clear in how they perceived this reporter:

> An "incomplete man" according to these gentlemen, a "wretch," deprived of the language of mimicry. . . . An expression of ineffable pity could be read on their faces at his approach. "The hapless one," the celebrants said. "He won't be able to make himself understood."[16]

What can be extrapolated from such examples of Deaf discourse? I suggest that seven basic principles can be identified that give an indication of what Deafhood meant to those Deaf participants.

1. Deaf communities possess a gift of languages so special that they can be used to communicate things that speech cannot.
2. They are even more special because they can be adapted to cross international boundaries where spoken languages fail.
3. Consequently, Deaf people manifest *in potentia* the ability to become the world's first truly global citizens, and thus serve as a model for the rest of society.
4. Deaf people were intentionally created on earth to manifest these qualities, and the value of their existence should not be called into question.
5. Non-Deaf people unable to use these languages are effectively incomplete, "sign-impaired" citizens.
6. The languages are to be offered to non-Deaf people, so that if they joined with Deaf people and learned them, the quality of their lives would be improved.
7. Although the banqueteers represented what might seen as a Deaf elite, they were well aware that most Deaf people had not yet had the chance to attend Deaf education or develop their talents within Deaf communities. Instead of being content to be an elite, they instead pledged themselves to continue to fight to ensure that all Deaf people had the right to such opportunities—in effect, they perceived all Deaf people as of equal worth.

This belief in "Naturalism" became Deaf communities' downfall during the rise of science, industrialization, imperialism, and colonialism, where they were seen merely as "natural" as all the other "savage" races of the earth, as not fully human, and thus fit only to serve the western non-Deaf colonialist interest.[17] As yet, however, modern Deaf communities have not indicated an overt awareness of these ontological dimensions, which is unsurprising given that many of the Deafhood principles above have been lost during the oralist century.

The importance of the "discovery" of these dimensions lies in the extent to which they disrupt the subsequent colonialist narratives, in particular, their implicit assertion

that, far from being the passive recipients of medical treatment and social welfare charity, Deaf peoples actually embody skills that the non-Deaf world can learn and benefit from. Confirmation of this can be found in the recent research by Garcia that use of sign language with non-Deaf babies enhances their cognitive skills and the speed of spoken language acquisition.[18] Further research will almost certainly reveal other benefits.

Likewise further research into precolonialist Deaf discourses, not only in France, but in the United States and elsewhere, will enable us to identify whether other Deafhood characteristics existed. Finally, we should note that Berthier and his colleagues also posited the concept of the "Deaf-mute Nation," and a belief that this Nation should be able to elect its own members of Parliament, far-sighted ideas that also have the potential to disrupt colonialist policies. From this basis we can move forward to examine other aspects of Deafhood in the oralist century and beyond.

Deafhood in the Twentieth-Century United Kingdom: Deaf Children's Acts of Resistance

The rise of oralism was initially resisted by an international Deaf movement but gained hegemony by 1900 in some parts of Europe and the United States, while other Deaf communities resisted up until the 1920s.[19] However, once the number of Deaf teachers declined, and Deaf illiteracy spread, the quality of Deaf leadership diminished and the maintenance of earlier Deafhood principles became increasingly difficult.

My research into early to mid-twentieth-century Deaf Culture, centered around the two key sites of enculturation, schools and Deaf clubs, indicated that the existence of all seven principles could no longer be confirmed. In the case of deaf schools, this was hardly surprising given that the children had to virtually re-create their own language and culture with minimal access to Deaf traditions. However, it was possible to identify characteristics of resistance that could be interpreted as strategies by which deaf children tried to create their Deaf selves, and maintain a semblance of Deafhood, one of which I identify as "1001 (small) Victories."

Chapter 7 of my *Understanding Deaf Culture* illustrates the range of these strategies, as well as indicating the extent to which oralism negatively influenced the Deaf Culture that those children then brought into their adult lives. These strategies and their subsequent effects indicated that although the range of meanings deaf children were able to give to their actions was more limited than in preoralist times, they were nevertheless able to hold fast to a sense of collective identity through which they could implictly or explicitly define themselves from, as Padden and Humphries put it, a "different centre,"[20] which is the core requirement for cultural survival, however diminished, and thus a basis for a similarly diminished, but nonetheless valuable, Deafhood.

Deafhood in the Twentieth Century: Deaf Resistance to Missionary Colonialism

Examination of UK Deaf clubs and Deaf social and cultural life during the period of missionary/welfare-officer colonialism up to 1970 revealed sets of patterns through which some Deaf people kept their Deafhood alive.

In the UK, Deaf clubs operated on three levels. The first was the Management Committees, which consisted almost solely of hearing people. The third level was the Deaf social club committees. In between these two levels, the second, the missionary level, was the sole link between the two committees and their cultures. The missionaries surrounded themselves with a small group of Deaf people, mostly of middle-class parentage. As part of their strategy, they invited some of these parents onto the Management Committees, in order to help attract funding and support to the club. The missionaries relied on this Deaf comprador class to carry out their decisions and impose their ideas on the third level, the ordinary Deaf members whom I term the "Deaf subalterns." It is important to remember that the missionaries were all powerful. If one crossed them or their Deaf acolytes, one could be punished in a variety of ways, including banning them from the club or from the missionaries' services—both terrifying prospects for Deaf people back in those days.

Chapter 8 of my *Understanding Deaf Culture* showed that there were major differences in how those two "classes" of Deaf people behaved. The subalterns, known to the others as "the Deaf," consciously or semiconsciously maintained their Deafhood by the "1001 Victories," in their interaction with hearing people, with the missionaries, and with the middle-class Deaf. By challenging hearing people as they did, they in effect fought to make life better for all Deaf people, not just themselves—an essentially *collectivist* cultural response.

They saw the middle classes as "hearing," in that on leaving school and coming under more direct influence from their wealthier hearing families, they gave up much of their own Deafhood, avoided social challenges, and tended more toward *individualist* cultural patterns. Their behavior was not conventionally middle class, however. Because of their particular situation, their reactions to being caught between two cultures manifested in essentially petit bourgeois behavior, full of fear of what others might think of them and with a striving for respectability. What was interesting about these classic social patterns was the rendering of them in the terms of "Deaf" and "Hearing": clearly each group had their own ideas of what constituted appropriately "Deaf" beliefs, values, and behavior. Both groups were undoubtedly culturally Deaf persons, both were BSL users and both equally ill educated; there was none of the later social divisions along axes such as "more/less educated," "BSL/Signed English users," or "Deaf/hard of hearing." Therefore the most helpful way to construct their self-image may be to say that each operated from *different beliefs of what constituted Deafhood*.

Finally it is important to make clear that these differences did not prevent the development of a powerful social and cultural unity. Indeed, such differences provided both groups with the implicit challenge to ensure that their own social interaction was positive and fruitful, because unlike most members of majority society, where different classes were not forced to occupy the same social spaces, let alone the same rooms, Deaf people had to find positive ways to creatively coexist. And indeed they did so, so that Deaf life, in the clubs through strategies like reciprocity,[21] in Deaf sports, and elsewhere, became a powerful positive cultural resource for future generations of Deaf school–leavers.

Deafhood in the Twentieth Century: The Pub Rebels

During the same time period, there was also a small number of Deaf people who did get banned from the clubs, or who chose to rebel against the missionaries. They met in local pubs (perhaps importantly, these were often "rough" ones) and developed meaningful relationships with the hearing people they met there, via writing and fingerspelling. (It was much easier to teach people twenty-six "signs" than several thousand.)

However, for many reasons, there were still conflicts and misunderstandings between the club subalterns and the pub rebels. Much of this had to do with different ideas about Deafhood. The subalterns still kept up the model learned at school: "1001 Victories." The pub groups had a different focus. Some of them wanted to enlarge the idea of what the Deaf world might become. So they brought to club members ideas they had learned about hearing struggles and rebellions in history, or ways in which Deaf clubs could become a more lively and outward-looking place via different activities and debates. But when they brought those ideas into the clubs, they found them dismissed as "hearing ideas" or "hearing ways." Their own response was to say, effectively, "If you call these hearing ways, what about about you? You're the ones who follow the hearing ways of the missionaries." But the subalterns also had a good point. Many of the pub rebels had good English skills, and the others were very sensitive to any sense that they might be being looked down on, which in some instances seems to have been the case.

This issue is crucial for our understanding of Deafhood, because it illustrates two different approaches to Deafhood. One is based on trying to *maintain* Deafhood within the boundaries of the oppressive Deaf world as it then was. The other is based on trying to stretch the boundaries, to *enlarge* the idea of what Deafhood might mean, taking ideas from anywhere and adapting them to Deaf life.

It is especially interesting to note that Deaf families (who were rarely members of the petit bourgeois group) did not join the pub groups, feeling that if they did so they would be abandoning their parents, uncles and aunts, cousins, and so on. They had to stay in the clubs and contest the issues arising there. Their fight was important, but nonetheless embodied a confusion between what might be interpreted as Deafhood and the changing, perhaps even diminishing, Deaf Culture. This was because over time, as oralism bit deeper and the missionaries gained more power, the vision of what being Deaf meant was shrinking. Thus by the 1970s, even the norms and values of both the petite bourgeoisie and the subalterns became identified as *true Deaf ways*.

Deafhood and the Deaf Resurgence in the 1980s

The UK Deaf Resurgence of the late 1970s and 1980s appears to confirm the cultural patterns identified above. Once transportation and communication became easier, the groups of pub rebels made regional, then national contact with each other. By 1976, they formed the radical National Union of the Deaf (NUD)—Deaf run but with active hearing allies—whose first convention took place above a pub.

Similarly when BSL was first acknowledged, Deaf families from the subaltern Deaf club members found their skills and heritage recognized for the first time and obtained

posts as BSL tutors, university researchers, television presenters, and so on. By 1980 the British Deaf Association (BDA, which had been run along the same lines as Deaf clubs—controlled nationally by the missionaries and locally by the Deaf petite bourgeoisie—for most of the twentieth century) appointed a radical Coda as CEO. He took on board the NUD agenda and began the process of changing the BDA accordingly. Thus the two "rebel" groups had started to make good, albeit very separate, progress in redefining Deafhood.

However, between 1981 and 1983, the "old guard" of missionaries and the petite bourgeoisie tried to resist the changes and forced the CEO to resign. This resulted in the first successful national UK Deaf rebellion—the first time both rebel groups became consciously aware of each other as groups. Working together, by the BDA Congress of 1983 they were so well organized that they defeated the old guard. The CEO was reinstated, the first Deaf chair was elected, and the Executive Council became all Deaf from that point onward.

And thus two streams of Deafhood came together, using their very different skills to create a combined force that raised many possibilities for what "Deaf" could mean in the future. Nevertheless, these steps toward Deaf decolonization revealed a further set of distinctions.

Colonialism and Modern Deaf Culture

My research found that by 1996, even though the BDA was Deaf run, its range of sociopolitical actions and "depth" of cultural activity were still very constrained. I was able to trace backward and forward the cultural patterns, as described earlier, and found that, even though the missionaries had gone, the limited Deaf cultural values and Deafhood self-definitions of that era still lived on inside those prominent Executive Council members of the BDA who had willingly taken part in the first wave of changes.

It is important to note that the BDA (or in the United States, the National Association of the Deaf [NAD]), unlike national colonialist organizations "for the deaf" in the UK, such as the Royal National Institute of the Deaf, is a *culturally Deaf entity.* As such it cannot change its organizational culture as swiftly as the latter, who with each new CEO simply brings in a new administration of "expert" hearing professionals. Culture is of course a living, breathing, organic force that can only change slowly. In this sense, the BDA or the NAD are the *embodiment* of traditional Deaf Cultures—our cultural heritage as it manifests itself politically.[22] Change can only be accelerated when a culture examines itself, learns to understand the forces acting upon it, and initiates changes based on its findings—in other words, employs essential features of the decolonization process such as found in the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa during the 1970s.[23]

In this respect the concept of Deafhood is again helpful. By schematizing the influence of oralism and the missionaries as colonialist cultural characteristics that then negatively influenced Deaf Cultures, it is possible to confirm the idea that some majority cultural features became part of Deaf Cultures.[24] Moreover, aspects of the colonizing culture that were not widely practiced in their own majority culture, but were used on

the Deaf-colonizing "front-line" itself, were also absorbed into Deaf Culture. There are many examples, but a few may suffice here.

Informants made reference to the characteristics of praise and criticism in Deaf Culture. "It's the Deaf way to criticize rather than praise" was a common theme, and a few were even able to identify this as a cultural feature learned under oralism. Another common "Deaf way" feature is known both in the UK and the United States as the "crab theory," wherein Deaf persons who appear to be moving into a position of leadership or engaged in other potentially "separating" developments are subjected to severe internal criticism and restraint. Similar features can also be identified in other colonized groups.[25]

Another set of examples concerns the widespread defensive or negative cultural attitudes toward hearing people. These become more understandable when we note that for almost a century Deaf people were largely unaware that oralists were actually not typical of hearing people, and that there were in fact many thousands of other hearing people not directly involved in the colonizing process who were either fascinated by sign languages or willing to engage in friendship.

Colonialism also severely affected Deaf languages and art forms. One set of examples can be found in Deaf club–based theatre, where very few plays were set within the Deaf community, utilized Deaf characters, portrayed Deaf cultural themes, or even used "strong BSL." Examples such as Bergman and Bragg's (1981) *Tales from a Clubroom* are very much the exception.[26] The Deaf gaze is clearly outward toward majority culture, indicating an inability to conceive of their own lives as valid cultural material for art.

It is perhaps noteworthy that the Deaf cultural forms to survive relatively intact, such as storytelling, are those that do not require interaction with majority society artform concepts. But in the UK even today many of the best storytellers and comedians, usually "strong Deaf" community members, lack confidence in their own skills and do not believe those who praise them. This contrasts with others who are more English-orientated, with less impressive signing skills, but who take the lead in any domains concerning formal theatrical art.

Deaf Cultures and Colonized/Minority Cultures

Although I identify Deaf Cultures as colonized cultures, I posit also that certain Deaf cultural patterns suggest that a new concept of minority cultures can be developed. Space does not permit a detailed exploration, but the essence of the concept lies in the fact that members of minority cultures have to deal with enculturation into two unequal cultures, whereas members of majority cultures have only the one to contend with. One key aspect of this process is bipolar tension for minority members—between resistance to or compliance with that majority culture. This process plays itself out constantly on many levels—within individuals in everyday situations, within groups of those individuals, and indeed across the whole range of both minority and majority cultural domains. In the absence of conscious, formal examination of these relationships, minority cultural members contend with what Bhabha has termed *hybridity,* an existential condition containing a mixture of characteristics of both cultures without a clear under-

standing of how these processes work upon us and within us.[27] Thus the idea that we might find Deafhood in a clearly comprehended biculturality is not as yet explored, let alone understood.

Internationalist Aspects of Deafhood

However, one site in which we can locate some of the deepest manifestations of Deafhood is on the international level, remembering that this was a key theme in the nineteenth-century scenarios described earlier. On that level, for maximum communicative effectiveness, signed discourse must be kept as visually clear, as "pure" as possible. If one uses too many features that are specific to one's own national culture, communication breaks down. Linguistic examples of these are fingerspelling and much of one's own national sign vocabulary, while ethnocentric examples of names and concepts from one's own culture also have to be watched for and guarded against.

In setting aside one's own two national cultures in this way, one enters what has been characterized elsewhere in postmodernist writing as a Temporary Autonomous Zone.[28] In these settings, one's national identity begins a process of "enlarging" itself into a transnational commonality of Deafhood. As yet we know very little in the formal sense about this phenomenon, although we are aware that the remarkable syntactic similarities between sign languages is a crucial factor. It is possible to understand such linguistic similarities as implying a set of deeper existential similarities; if languages do indeed shape our thinking processes, then it is possible to recognize powerful similarities within Deaf people from different nations. Moreover we can factor in other sets of similarities, Deaf peoples' existential living situations in audist and oralist societies, which also enable them to relate to each other across international boundaries.

In considering this construction, we should note another key linguistic feature. Sign linguistics, in what we might term the "first wave" of Deaf Studies, concentrated on identifying how sign languages displayed linguistic equivalents of spoken language features, an inevitable first step toward validation and thus decolonization. However, if we are to progress further, a formal move toward identifying the *differences* between signed and spoken languages (especially the positive powers within signed languages) is necessary if we are to delineate the full dimensions of the Deafhood experience. Nineteenth-century Deaf writers wrote of sign languages as an *art* rather than a science, making reference to the *plasticity* of the language, its unique mutability. It is this plasticity that engages with the syntactic similarities to enable communication beyond national cultures.

This potential cannot be fully realized unless one leaves behind the national culture and reaches within into a "Deaf place" that exists beyond them. In this respect, therefore, it is possible to identify that deep "Deaf place" as being the repository of an equally deep Deafhood. If internationalist Deafhood is properly researched, it may well be that, in years to come, the genius of sign language may be appreciated for its underpinning of the remarkable feelings of global citizenship that can be felt in the "new" dimension of transnational Deaf interaction. And to reiterate, it was precisely this internationalist dimension that fuelled the Deafhood principles developed by the Paris Banquets.

Specific National and Continental Deafhoods

Comparative Deaf cultural research has barely begun, but there are extensive unrecorded Deaf discourses around such themes. Some of the themes I have noted indicate that much of this discourse is ethnocentric. Thus one hears from Europeans that "American Deaf people are not really [behaving] Deaf. At international gatherings they do not mix, and their communication remains firmly within American Sign Language (ASL). They seem to be Americans first and Deaf second." Deaf Americans on the other hand observe that European Deaf people seem to be more "oral," and as a consequence somehow less "Deaf."

Such comments suggest that both sets of Deaf people construct the meaning of "Deaf" differently. Rather than become compelled to concur with either perspective, we can utilize the Deafhood concept to posit that the *Deafhood of each Deaf nation is constructed around different cultural priorities.* Thus to the Deaf foreigner visiting the United States, the most obvious cultural difference is a greater "Deaf pride," a greater self-belief and confidence in the idea that "Deaf people can do anything but hear." The foreigner who stays for any length of time knows that continued exposure to this experience results in a feeling of internal Deaf growth, a larger Deafhood developing.

A major priority within American Deafhood is the much greater appreciation of "good signing" or "beautiful signing," which is so extensive that people can become Deaf leaders to some extent simply *because* they are powerful signers. By contrast, this feature is a very low priority within UK Deafhood. One effect of this priority is that many young Deaf Americans work hard to improve their signing skills, possibly in accordance with nationally understood models. Another effect is that Deaf signing art has many more skilled formal and semiformal practitioners, in poetry, storytelling, cabaret, theatre, and so on. Clearly for Deaf Americans, the deeper one's ASL skills, the deeper one's Deafhood.

Returning to the international gatherings, the observations of the non-Americans can now be interpreted as a belief that for their own Deaf nations, their Deafhood is based on acting out their identity as global Deaf people—in effect their commitment to the global Deaf world. This is clearly not a cultural priority for most Deaf Americans. Such beliefs of course involve ranges and degrees of meaning, for some European Deaf people have opined that British Deaf people are not that different from Americans in resisting immersion into international Deafhood.

Further examples can be found in the political arena, in which it appears that Deaf Americans have little involvement. The Gallaudet Deaf President Now campaign of 1988 was almost a one-off, in that direct action has rarely been subsequently utilized, in contrast to numerous other Deaf nations.[29] It would seem that U.S. Deafhood is not strongly linked to political action.

This stands in contrast with the UK and much of Deaf Europe, where national struggles, including marches to obtain official recognition of sign languages, are a significant feature of the cultural landscape. There, Deafhood seems to be much more closely linked to political service to the community, and the quality of one's signing skills (or school background) can become secondary to what else one can bring to the struggle.

We know from Philip and elsewhere that American Deaf cultural values were once centered on active work for and responsibilities to the local community, through the Deaf clubs.[30] At one time, therefore, it seems that both U.S. and UK Deafhoods were similar in this respect. In the UK the pattern still continues in the present day, but in the United States there appears to be a growing influence from the majority culture of a belief in individualism and certain patterns of status, rather than the older models that either stressed or paid lip service to Deafhood concepts of equality and community. Thus, to give one simple example, it appears that if in the United States one is born to a Deaf family, one inherits a "cultural crown." In the UK the same offspring still have to earn their cultural capital by working hard to serve the Deaf (club) community. Again these can be read as different types of Deafhood—the latter being focused on the idea of individuals having to work to achieve Deafhood, and the former almost seeing Deafhood as an inscribed status.

Another example is the European Deafhood prioritizing of the struggle for sign language TV programming. In the United States, the equivalent battle is only for English captions. One might ask with mock innocence whether this means that all Deaf people in the United States can read English unproblematically. Since this is clearly not the case then it would appear that in Europe Deafhood cannot (or will not) countenance the idea of taking action that does not include all sign language monolinguals—another manifestation of the strength of the cultural feature of collectivism. By contrast one either labels the U.S. practice as elitist or, using the Deafhood concept, posits that U.S. Deafhood gives a lower priority to these kinds of collectivist beliefs.

The observations above represent just the beginnings of what might be learned about Deafhood through cross-cultural research, and we can anticipate that these tentative conclusions will be greatly refined in the years to come.

Deafhood and the Future of Deaf Studies

The opportunity in this volume to reevaluate Deaf Studies, to assess its development since its inception twenty-odd years ago, and to suggest future directions for its development is not only timely, but indeed somewhat overdue. I will apply the principles utilized above to such an initial analysis.

One can begin by observing the contrast between "Deaf Studies," that is, the domains of Deaf communities, culture, arts, and history, and the other discourse domains around the Deaf experience, namely sign linguistics, education, mental health, and social welfare.[31] Each of the latter (which traditionally are constructed as existing "for" rather than "of" "the Deaf") are characterized by international journals, formal bodies, national and international conferences, and semiformal Internet groupings.

By contrast, with the exception of Deaf history, Deaf Studies itself exhibits almost none of these characteristics. There are no journals, formal bodies, or international conferences. (There has never been a conference on "Deaf Cultures," for example.) Moreover, the only regular national conference, organized from 1991 to 2001 by Gallaudet University, produced a wealth of thought and data in its postconference publications, yet remained virtually unknown throughout much of the United States and abroad.

Such an apparently low status is reflected in the proceedings themselves being published, not by the main arm of the Gallaudet University Press, but by the now defunct College of Continuing Education. Moreover it appears that this consequent lack of recognition and respect has actually led not only to the cessation of publication from 1997, but the demise of the conferences themselves.[32] By contrast, the other domains above go from strength to strength.

The significance of this contrast is that Deaf Studies represents the only site where the collective experience of Deaf persons and Deaf nations can gather together to form a systematic reflexive praxis, *without which decolonialism cannot take place*. The striking differences between the two sets of domains thus reflect the extent to which colonialism still holds sway above and within Deaf Studies.

Yet, as with other minority studies, it is the task of Deaf Studies to formally establish Deaf and Deafhood epistemologies and ontologies, based on traditionally understood "Deaf Ways," yet sensitive to the degree to which these themselves have been diminished by colonialism. Such work cannot be achieved by our present levels of self-understanding as expressed within the extant literature—considerable research into Deaf communities is required to identify those epistemologies and ontologies. Thus it is at precisely this point that we can come to realize and belatedly appreciate the significance of the sheer paucity of research into Deaf communities themselves.

It is perhaps no coincidence that numerous participants in Deaf Studies discourses have in the last few years been decrying the lack of epistemological progress within the discipline, for that lack of progress precisely correlates with that absence of research. To some extent this is because we Deaf scholars, few in number because we are the first generation to emerge from what I have termed the oralist holocaust,[33] have had to deal with numerous other struggles toward decolonization in other domains, not least in resisting the considerable neocolonialist backlash of the past decade (as manifested in the spread of oralist mainstreaming and cochlear implant experimentation). It is also exacerbated by the colonial relationship as manifested in the institutionalized discrimination of academia—the immense barriers imposed with respect to obtaining research funding, and the lack of career paths within Deaf Studies. And it has been prolonged also because the other domains named earlier, such as education, mental health, and sign linguistics, have formed a significant proportion of what we understand by "Deaf Studies."

We need to understand that the vast majority of the work produced in those domains still casts Deaf communities as the *object* of the gaze. This is itself a pattern inherited from colonialism and raises the question as to whether large areas of Deaf Studies itself are in fact sites of neocolonialism. Work on Deaf Culture, arts, community, and history generally posits Deaf peoples as *subject*. And decolonization cannot be achieved until the subject replaces the object.

During my decade-long examination of Deaf Culture and Deafhood, it has become clear to me that it is culture and language that are the epistemological "core" of the collective Deaf subject. It has often been said that sign languages alone form that core, but in fact recognition of the languages without the culture can actually lead to a subversion of Deaf community beliefs.

To give one example. When sign languages were linguistically recognized and the

basis for bilingual education established, many Deaf people thought that radical change, as opposed to piecemeal liberal reform, would inevitably follow. What has happened instead is that sign languages have been relegated to the status of "educational tools," in order that (consciously or unconsciously) non-Deaf teachers and administrators could justify their continued control of the deaf education system.

The threat to colonialism that lies within Deaf cultural recognition is that along with the language comes *collective* cultural ways of seeing, being, thinking, and strategizing. These form a profound basis upon which, for example, a deaf child–centered education system can be constructed, one that explictly rears the children to take their place primarily within their own language community, while equipping and encouraging the children to operate from this center to achieve in majority society also. And although all cultures, like all languages, are objectively equal in value, minority cultures often have an iron-clad case in asserting the primacy of their own cultural values in rearing their own children.

To formally recognize Deaf Culture therefore immediately calls time on non-Deaf colonial administrations, not just in education, but in Deaf welfare services, in medical and political domains, in Deaf television, in Deaf organizations, and in the academy. Such change can be delayed if research into Deaf communities is left unfunded, because it is precisely this next phase of research that will inform the paradigm shift needed to attain decolonization.

To continue the previous example, until Deaf educational personnel are formally observed in daily practice, interviewed to enable them to express their understanding of the rationales by which they operate and the problems they observe with non-Deaf educational strategies, and the consequent results published and disseminated widely, we are not yet properly engaged with decolonizing praxis. More than that, it must be firmly understood that such research must move beyond individualism to seek the collective cultural commonality that lies within this praxis. In the absence of such research we find the discourse still limited to theoretical cliches such as "Deaf role models" and a concept of "bilingual education" where the bicultural dimension is almost completely ignored and where each Deaf staff member must struggle on alone, operating chiefly from their own intuition, often on a lower or a nonteaching grade, and frequently without professional respect.[34]

Similar patterns can be found right across the colonized professions. This brings us back to Deaf Studies once more and the apparent paradox that the very area of research that is most needed, research into Deaf community and culture, is the very area that has the least formal academic discourse, as we have described earlier.

Deaf Studies and Minority Studies

These patterns can be more easily understood by a comparison with other minority studies. Most of these were founded and administered by minorities themselves. Moreover each discipline was consciously conceived as a central plank of the liberation strategy for their "community."[35] By contrast, Deaf Studies was and is run primarily by non-Deaf academics.

Even where Deaf academics are in pole position, there has been very little thought

given to the question of decolonization per se. The rationale, priority, or financial imperative they have inherited in most institutions is one of training non-Deaf people to become professionals in the Deaf domain, and there is little time or space to reflect upon how this situation might be changed.

A similar pattern could be observed in Gallaudet University's own resistance to establishing a Deaf Studies department; there was for years a very tangible fear that this would somehow bring together the most "radical" of Deaf faculty and by implication threaten the colonial control over the rest of the university.

Anti-intellectualism, Colonialism, and Deaf Studies

Classic radical decolonization strategies conceive of the newly emerging nation as a holistic entity, holding the entire society within their gaze, and from that position conceive of policies that will remove the negative effects of colonialism and replace them with cultural values and beliefs that they consider central to their precolonized societies.[36] In so doing, a reflexive praxis that identifies the place of the intellectual classes in relation to other classes is established. This may manifest conservatively in that it seeks to maintain class divisions in its ruling policies, or radically as in the field of Subaltern Studies. But for both, social analysis and historical awareness are central motivating forces that impel their policies and actions. The danger that exists for Deaf Studies entering decolonization is that, without such reflexivity, it may continue to replicate inherited oppressive patterns from colonialism.

The simplest example that can be offered from Deaf cultural study is that of individualism and collectivism. Deaf Cultures are increasingly being recognized as among the world's 70 percent collectivist cultures.[37] However, most Western Deaf Cultures operate within individualist cultures. The temptation for the Deaf academic is therefore to pledge intellectual allegiance to the latter rather than the former. This combined with the ahistoric stance of individualism can result in a disregard for a Deaf community concept that recognizes traditional social classes. In the present time this stance is most often manifested as a belief that, since the traditional Deaf club-and-school cultural basis is rapidly declining, examination of the tradition in a postmodern era is of little value.

This form of postmodern individualism with its reduced valuation of collectivism as a daily praxis thus enshrines an academic elitism in which the everyday lives of groups of subaltern Deaf people are seen as deserving of little attention. However, a Deaf Studies that cuts itself off from its roots, that is content to teach and market a simple model of historicity, is a culture in danger of continuing to reify only the external struggles with the non-Deaf world, unable to describe what Raymond Williams calls the "smell and taste" of a culture—the internal cultural life full of grit and grime, the blood, sweat, and tears of the daily struggle, as well as its triumphs.

It is precisely the blandness of this "whitebread" diet that lies unrecognized at the root of the dissatisfactions felt by some Deaf Studies practitioners. A simple comparison with Black Studies may be useful here. By valuing black history and the everyday details of survival, suffering, and joy, by embracing rather than hiding from the several controversial historical dimensions of black life, whether these be the liberal/conservative

discourses of black churches, the contrasting traditions of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Dubois, the "house nigger-field nigger" discourses, or the range of competing modernist discourses from black conservatism to black Muslims to the radical/Panther wings, and by tracing the historical traditions of black arts, African American communities have emphasized the concept of *soul,* so that participation in a Black Studies course brings just such a grittiness of smell and taste, blood, sweat, and tears of joy into epistemological awareness.

The oralist colonization of Deaf communities has been focused on a sustained attempt to sever the intergenerational lineage. However this is not unique to them; the same patterns were enacted not just on African Americans but on First Nation tribes. What has been noticeable in the case of the latter is that when the process of decolonization has begun, their first concern is to locate their historical traditions and cultures. They have not given priority to theories about their contemporary postmodern existence; rather they sense a deeper need for their peoples' psychic health that can only be met by regenerating as much of their precolonized belief systems as is possible.[38]

Deaf Studies, Deaf Ontologies, and Deafhood

Perceptions of the psychic health of a colonized people as a crucial element in true decolonization have led to in-depth investigations of their philosophies, spiritualities, and religions originating from their own cultures. It is noticeable within Deaf Studies that such ontological dimensions have been more or less ignored.[39] Indeed it would be true to say that, unlike other minority studies, Deaf Studies remains largely unaware of these dimensions, whether stemming from the present day or the preoralist past, as in the Deafhood principles of the Paris Banquets. This too can be attributed to the colonial process that has turned the Deaf gaze outward. If Deaf Studies is to make a meaningful contribution to decolonization, it must extend its gaze to these ontological dimensions both past and present.

Ironically the emergence of the genetic engineering movement suggests that in the near future both Deaf communities and Deaf Studies will be placed in a position where the value of the continued existence of Deaf peoples will come under question, and justification for that existence will be demanded. Deaf Studies may well be compelled to embrace the ontological dimensions of Deaf existence in order to locate a basis for that justification. In so doing, we may well find that locating precolonialist ontologies, such as the Deafhood principles of the Paris Banquets, and exploring their present-day manifestations are necessary for the survival of Deaf communities and thus Deaf Studies itself.

Notes

1. Harlan Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community* (New York: Random House, 1993). Owen Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness* (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1996).
2. Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2003).

3. Economic: Lane, *Mask of Benevolence.* Welfare: Quentin Beresford and Paul Omaji, *Our State of Mind: Racial Planning and the Stolen Generations* (South Fremantle, Wash.: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1998). Linguistic: Lane, *Mask of Benevolence.* Cultural: Susan Merry, "Law and Colonialism," *Law and Society Review* 25 (1991): 889–922.
4. Ibid., 894. Italics mine.
5. Reuben Conrad, *The Deaf School Child, Language and Cognitive Function* (London: Harper and Row, 1979).
6. Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf* (New York: Random House, 1984).
7. Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture.*
8. Ibid.
9. Pierre Desloges, "A Deaf Person's Observations about an *Elementary Course of Education for the Deaf,*" (1779) in *The Deaf Experience: Classics in Language and Education,* ed. Harlan Lane, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 28–48. Laffon De Ladebat, *A Collection of the Most Remarkable Definitions of Massieu and Clerc* (London: Cox and Baylis, 1815). Bernard Mottez, "The Deaf Mute Banquets and the Birth of the Deaf Movement," in *Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and Their Sign Languages,* ed. Renate Fischer and Harlan Lane (Hamburg: Signum Verlag, 1993), 143–56.
10. In actuality, such accessibility has for the most part been hypothetical. The library of St. Jacques's Deaf School in Paris contains many volumes of these speeches beautifully bound, with collections of these volumes also being republished (evidence itself of their perceived importance at the time). However, as of 2003, there is no sign that anyone apart from Lane, Mottez, and Bernard have examined them. Given that the school is the oldest and most impressive of all the Deaf schools left in the world, such neglect tells its own tale of colonization.
11. Mottez, "Deaf Mute Banquets," 151.
12. Ferdinand Berthier, "The Deaf Before and Since the Abbe de L'Epee," in Lane, *The Deaf Experience,* trans. Philip, 112.
13. De Ladebat, *A Collection,* 11.
14. This frankness is one Deaf cultural feature that survives to the present day, although it is impossible to conceive of it now being stated from such an enlarged philosophical perspective. It is worth noting also that in contrast to his teacher Massieu, Clerc generally adopted a much more diplomatic tone in public, which makes this assertion the more remarkable.
15. Mottez, "Deaf Mute Banquets," 149.
16. Ibid., 147.
17. The last twenty-five years have witnessed an ever-widening "Green movement"—back toward the "natural," toward appreciation of the richness and diversity of Earth's manifestations, and concerned about the paths that the trope of "Science" has taken in negatively affecting those manifestations. It is not a coincidence that Deaf communities have been able to reemerge and become more positively regarded during this same time period. Indeed, extricating the philosophical, cultural, and political connections between the two is one of the more urgent tasks before us, given the advent of the Cochlear Implant and Green Movement industries.
18. Joseph Garcia, *Sign with Your Baby: How to Communicate with Infants before They Can Speak* (Seattle: Northlight Communications, 1999).
19. Robert Buchanan, "The *Silent Worker* Newspaper and the Building of a Deaf Community, 1890–1929," in *Deaf History Unveiled,* ed. John Van Cleve (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 172–97.
20. Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 33–55.
21. Marie Philip, *Cross-Cultural Comparisons: American Deaf Culture and American Majority Culture,* Workbook (Westminster, Colo.: Front Range Community College, 1993).
22. We should note that some would question the extent that this can be applied to the NAD, inasmuch as the organization's emergence and development is closely tied to Gallaudet College (as it

was known for almost a century), and thus further removed from Deaf subaltern than most other national Deaf organizations. Nevertheless this does not detract significantly from the argument advanced here.

23. See Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana, and Lindy Wilson, eds., *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991).
24. Another simple example from the United States: the refusal (until the 1960s) to allow black Deaf persons to become members of the NAD. This is clearly an example of Deaf Cultures absorbing majority-cultural values. Deafhood values, by contrast, would welcome all Deaf persons, irrespective of racial/gender/etc. differences.
25. Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, Engendering Power* (New York: Pantheon, 1993).
26. Bernard Bragg and Eugene Bergmann, *Tales from a Clubroom* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1981).
27. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
28. Hakim Bey, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone: Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991).
29. It is interesting to note the extent to which Deaf President Now has been consistently promoted since that time, in what appears to be self-celebratory rhetoric, yet the U.S. Deaf nation appears not to notice its own inability or unwillingness to apply these apparently highly successful tactics to the many other political challenges that have faced it since.
30. Marie Philip, *Deaf Culture and Interpreter Training Curriculae: New Dimensions in Interpreter Education* (Silver Spring, Md.: RID Publications, 1987).
31. Space limitations prevent me from exploring an issue that urgently demands our attention, namely how one conceives of and defines the discipline of "Deaf Studies" itself, and why that might be important. Sign linguistics and Deaf education are at the core of some domains and situations, as the title of the journal *Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* attests. Given that these two disciplines already have their own existence and traditional discourse, their approach to Deaf Studies is essentially "studying Deaf people from the outside," that Deaf people are the *objects* of their gaze. Thus it follows that Deaf Studies departments built around these (or some of the other "external" disciplines) will conceive of Deaf Studies itself as necessarily meaning "Deaf communities as objects." They will find it difficult to conceive of another way of constructing Deaf Studies—from the "inside." In other situations, such as at Gallaudet, these two departments and even Deaf History are actually separate departments from Deaf Studies. It is possible to argue that a genuinely decolonizing approach would be to reconstitute the discipline from the "inside" outward, and that either Deaf Cultural Studies or Deafhood Studies might more accurately reflect the basis on which it would be rebuilt. Explorations of these two opposing positions have much to teach us.
32. The impulse to continue such work exists (cf. the Deaf Studies Think Tank of 2002, or the Deaf Studies Today conferences in Utah in 2004 and 2006), but it appears that Gallaudet itself lacks the will to lead the conference-organizing process and the publication of the creditable research that is still emerging.
33. Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*.
34. In parts of Latin America, where decolonization is an issue for all peoples, Deaf or hearing, an equivalent critique is emerging but is confined at present to writings in Spanish and Portuguese. See Carlos Skliar, *La Educacion de los Sordos* (Mendoza: EDIUNC, 1997).
35. Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1993).
36. That they do not always succeed in this has much to do with the strength of the forces of neocolonization that continue to operate on them.
37. Anna Mindess, *Reading Between the Signs: Intercultural Communication for Sign Language Interpreters* (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 2000).
38. See Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
39. Though note Padden and Humphries, *Deaf in America*.