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**On the possibilities and limits of "DEAF DEAF SAME":
Tourism and empowerment camps in Adamorobe (Ghana),
Bangalore and Mumbai (India)**

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Abstract

This article qualitatively analyzes the ways that the discourse of "deaf universalism" circulates within two common deaf practices: tourism and engaging in interventions. Arguing that the largely Northern-situated discipline of Deaf Studies does not adequately examine how deaf bodies and discourses travel, ethnographic data compiled in India and Ghana during transnational encounters is employed to examine how claims of "sameness" and "difference" are enacted and negotiated. Similarly, this article examines how deaf individuals and groups deploy the concepts of deaf "heavens" and "hells" to analyze their travel experiences and justify interventions. We argue that deaf travelers and those engaging in interventions, mostly from Northern countries, employ teleological concepts that they attempt to impose on deaf "others." Adopting a critical approach, this article argues for the importance of carving out a space within Deaf Studies for allowing non-Northern concepts to come to the fore.

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

This article analyzes the ways that the discourse of "deaf universalism" circulates within two common deaf practices: tourism and engaging in empowerment programs. Northern deaf people, and those from the global South to a lesser degree, appear to be more mobile than ever, travelling to conferences or events such as the Deaflympics and World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) congresses, and also on their own. ¹ Although this is not at all a new phenomenon (as documented by Murray 2007), individual travel as well as group and programmatic travel have intensified as a result of practices and processes of globalization; deaf travel is increasingly talked about within deaf public spheres and is encouraged by projects such as "Discovering Deaf Worlds," a multimedia project in which deaf American travelers seek out and interview deaf people in other countries and provide deaf people "at home" with a sense of what it is like to be a deaf person in another country. (<http://www.discoveringdeafworlds.org/>).

In addition to tourism and travel, there has recently been an increase in deaf focused, run, and organized aid organizations, international leadership courses, academic programs, and NGOs seeking to work with and improve the lives of deaf people living elsewhere, often in "developing" countries. Examples of these include the Denmark-based Frontrunners Program, the United States-based Global Reach Out (GRO) program, and the United States-based Gallaudet University Masters program in International Development and its Deaf Studies Masters level track in Language and Human Rights.

This interest in "other deaf lives" seems to be based on a feeling of deaf similitude, which is often uttered in one of the most powerful phrases used in deaf worlds: "DEAF SAME" or "I am deaf, you are deaf, and so we are the same." ² This phrase, although not extensively researched, is a deaf "social fact" (Durkheim 1966); utilized without question or critique by deaf people around the world. "DEAF SAME" seemingly has the power to transcend geography, culture, space, and time and creates a sense of a universal deaf community. It can create claims of likeness and affiliation between people with very different cultural, racial, class, religious, economic, and geographic backgrounds. "DEAF SAME" can also be used strategically to either foreground or obscure power differentials.

In this sense, we view "DEAF SAME" as a discourse that produces certain affects and effects. That is, it produces both feelings and relationships; and it produces an imagined universal deaf moral sphere in which differences between deaf people are put aside. This sphere in turn produces and engenders the discourse of deaf universalism, or the idea that deaf people everywhere share the same experiences, ideals, and aspirations (Berlant 1992). This is not dissimilar to what Dennis Altman (2002) calls "global sex" or Chandra Mohanty (2003) calls "global feminism." In fact, our work on the discourse of "DEAF SAME" closely mirrors work on queer and feminist sameness and difference. While "DEAF SAME" is grounded in empirical and experiential ways of being in the world as deaf people with shared sensorial, social, and moral experiences, this article is concerned with how it functions as a

discourse and creates conditions of possibility for certain kinds of practices and processes to happen, specifically tourism and empowerment camps. Our research questions are therefore: What kinds of practices and processes are engendered by the discourse of "DEAF SAME" and what kinds of negotiations over sameness and difference subsequently result? We explore these questions through an ethnographic study of transnational interactions during practices of tourism and interventions (aimed at empowerment and development) that is informed by theory from Anthropology, Development Studies, Deaf Studies, and Critical Disability Studies.

In our analysis of the discourse of "DEAF SAME", we examine the production of deaf heavens and hells, or utopias and dystopias, by diverse deaf people as they interact in practices of "deaf tourism" and "empowerment programs" in Ghana and India. ³ Our conception of deaf heavens and hells borrows from Eunjung Kim's (2011) theorization around disability heavens and hells in which other countries' disability policies are imagined as hell-like, while one's own country's policies are imagined to be vastly superior. According to Kim, disability activists and organizations (often strategically) deploy transnational comparison based on ideas of heavens and hells in order to create conditions of possibility for intervention. In utilizing Kim's framework, we also argue that heavens and hells are often intermingled concepts that are impossible to disentangle in that they are produced in relation to each other. Organisations like the earlier mentioned Discovering Deaf Worlds traffic in narratives of sameness and difference and deaf heavens and hells—and also create conditions of possibility for intervention. We see deaf heavens and hells as being connected to discourses of deaf universalism: deaf travelers and those who intervene through camps and other projects, make judgments about what they see in other places based upon the idea that they are "DEAF SAME." This perception of a shared experience creates conditions for making claims about what these "other" places are like and what they *should* become.

Here we are reminded of the anthropologist James Ferguson's (2006) comment regarding African children who, through writing tragic letters, make demands upon the west. As Ferguson writes:

Claims of likeness, in this context, constitute not a copying, but a shadowing, even a haunting—a declaration of comparability, an aspiration to membership and inclusion in the world, and sometimes also an assertion of responsibility. (Ferguson 2006: 17).

This quote powerfully points to the role that sentiments of sameness play in creating connections and senses of responsibility. It is extremely important to examine what claims of sameness produce for diverse deaf people around the world. We argue that the presence of globalization creates new understandings of deafness as well as new ideas and imaginaries of similtude and difference—although these understandings and ideas vary depending where they are found. Indeed, Inda and Rosaldo (2008:4) define globalization as "the intensification of global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchanges." Within our

globalized context, links, interactions, and encounters are intensified and regularized and this brings up important questions about how deaf people negotiate sameness and difference.

Tom Boellstorff (2005), writing about homosexuality in Indonesia, states: "Similitude is the ultimately challenge both homosexuality and globalization pose to social theory; in both cases we appear to be confronted with "a desire for the same." (Boellstorff 2005:26). Boellstorff pushes anthropologists to examine how the categories of sameness and difference might no longer be appropriate ones for understanding experiences that are increasingly global. We agree with Boellstorff and we see our analysis of the workings of deaf similitude as a step towards understanding how the categories of sameness and difference are deployed in deaf worlds. Indeed, we argue that our research with diverse deaf people offers an important intervention into understanding how sameness and difference are fraught and contested categories.

Going forward, we first provide an overview of the current status of research on deaf international experiences in Deaf Studies. We argue that the Northern-based discipline of Deaf Studies, while being attentive to international encounters, has not devoted attention to way that key concepts and theories are marked as universal and unsituated. We then provide background on ourselves as researchers and discuss the methodologies employed in our research, to be followed by a detailed analysis of two cases: deaf tourists in Adamorobe and empowerment programs in India.

Deaf Studies and the Global

Within the largely Northern-situated academic discipline of Deaf Studies, scholars have tended to explore the existence of unmarked, unemplaced, dehierarchized, and ungendered deaf people (e.g., Lane et al 1996; Padden and Humphries 1988). More recently, some Deaf Studies scholars have analyzed transnational deaf experiences, most notably those found at international deaf conferences and sports events (Breivik, Hualand and Solvang 2002; Murray 2007; Hualand and Solvang 2012). In a similar vein, Deaf Studies scholars have turned their attention to analyzing deaf peoples' experiences in terms of "routes and not roots" and in doing so, they explore the ways that deaf people often see themselves as part of a transnational deaf community before they identify with their national or familial communities (Breivik 2005).

However, while Deaf Studies scholars have devoted attention to theorizing around the creation of international deaf spaces (Breivik, Hualand and Solvang 2002; De Clerck 2007, 2010; Hualand and Solvang 2012; Murray 2007), we argue that the discipline has largely not examined what happens when discourses around deafness travel nor has it probed or problematized the limits of deaf universalism and the stakes of transnational experiences. Northern- situated concepts and discourses embraced by the discipline of Deaf Studies such as "oppression," "human rights," "Deafhood," and "Deaf culture," for example, engender ideas of

deaf universalism and are often uncritically adopted both as universal analytic concepts and as universal discourses. Indeed, Goedele De Clerck (2010:441, emphasis in text) expresses concern about "whether unitary concepts such as *deaf culture* and *deaf identity* can be used to gain accurate insight into culturally constructed deaf identities." ⁴ Along the same lines, Friedner (2010) criticizes Northern-situated international rehabilitation institutions, activists, and organizations which disseminate discourses of a universal Deaf culture and community. These discourses become hegemonic and usurp the specific realities of everyday deaf lives. We therefore believe that this is an especially important time to be asking questions about what happens when such concepts, discourses, and deaf bodies travel.

Recently there has been a surge of interest in the concept of "deaf epistemologies" and Deaf Studies scholars are increasingly concerned with how deaf people have distinct deaf knowledges or epistemologies that differ from those of hearing people (e.g, Kusters and De Meulder 2013; Paul and Moores 2012). In addition, scholars have been increasingly attentive to the existence of (subjugated) deaf epistemologies that exist elsewhere in the world (e.g., De Clerck 2011; Kusters 2011; Monaghan et al., 2003). De Clerck (2011) writing about research with members of the Cameroonian deaf community, states: "there is a need for reflections on an integrative epistemological framework and on how African (deaf) indigenous knowledge, local spoken and signed languages, and local cultural practices can be incorporated." Our work builds upon this important but nascent body of literature although it also departs from it in that we argue that analysts must be attentive to power differentials and the ways that discourses (or epistemologies) are power-laden (and we want to flag and foreground the fact that Western knowledges are local and indigenous too). To be sure, there are certainly encounters and exchanges that may produce positive results (as those that De Clerck 2007, 2011 discusses in her work on emancipation and empowerment processes that happen through transnational encounters). However, this article is an attempt to carve out a space for analyzing the less than positive effects and affects that our interlocutors experienced. In addition, this article is an attempt to engage with a key untheorized discourse in deaf epistemologies: the discourse of "DEAF SAME."

Researchers and Research Methods

We draw on experience and knowledge gained as deaf anthropologists who have conducted ethnographic research among and with deaf people in urban locations in India (Bangalore and Mumbai) and in a rural location in Ghana (Adamorobe). ⁵ Our research is ethnographic in nature in that we utilize participant observation and semi-structured interviews as our main methodology (Robben and Sluka 2007). Data was compiled through conversations with deaf individuals and groups; participating in and observing workshops, seminars, and meetings in India, Ghana, and also elsewhere in the world, and an analysis of media (organizations' and academic programs' websites) germane to the focus of the article. We mainly utilize qualitative data collected in Adamorobe for our section on tourism and

subsequently we utilize qualitative data and media sources from Bangalore and Mumbai to discuss interventions in the form of "empowerment camps" (although we should note that very often deaf tourism and engaging in interventions accompany each other).

In our research, we initially did not set out to focus in particular on transnational deaf interactions and the discourse of "DEAF DEAF SAME" in tourism and interventions. Rather, the data included in this article was compiled within the frame of larger research projects. Friedner has been conducting ethnographic fieldwork in urban areas of India since 2006 and Kusters has conducted research in Mumbai, India since 2007 and in Adamorobe, Ghana since 2008. We both focus on deaf peoples' orientations and what factors such as education, work, family, and deaf sociality mean for deaf people in urban India and rural Ghana. In keeping with the "reflexive turn" in the discipline of anthropology since the 1980s, in which anthropologists are exhorted to be mindful of their own subject positions and how these shape their interactions with their fieldsites and interlocutors (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986), we should also note that we both benefited from the discourse of "DEAF SAME" when conducting research. On multiple occasions, we were warmly welcomed into homes, schools, and social gatherings, and told that it was because we were "DEAF SAME." This sentiment was further reinforced by learning the sign languages utilized by the people we were working with. Friedner, a non-native American Sign Language user from the United States learned Indian Sign Language (moderate proficiency) while Kusters, a non-native signer from Belgium, learned Adamorobe Sign Language and Indian Sign Language and became fluent in them.

It is through participating intensively in deaf networks in everyday life during our fieldwork periods, that we encountered the practices and discourses discussed in this article. Our attention was caught by tourism and interventions by Northern deaf people which provoked reflections from both the Ghanaian/Indian and the Northern deaf people involved. We shared relevant fieldnotes and developed our analysis together, which resulted in the present article.

Deaf Travellers to Adamorobe

In this section, we examine how individual Northern deaf travelers to Adamorobe, Ghana engage in what we might call "deaf tourism," strategically seeking to make connections with local deaf people to create meaningful travel experiences based on "DEAF SAME." We will show how tensions between "DEAF SAME" and *difference* infuse travelers' experiences in Adamorobe.

Initially sporadically mentioned in Deaf Studies literature, Adamorobe has become more well-known in the international Deaf community after Nyst's (2007) research on Adamorobe Sign Language and the increasingly popular allure of the concept of "a deaf village" similar to Martha's Vineyard in the United States. In Martha's Vineyard, due to the presence of many deaf residents (because of the spread of a 'deaf gene'), sign language was a language shared by both deaf and hearing

people (Groce 1985). Adamorobe is an agricultural village located in a valley eastward of the Akwapim Ridge where a 'deaf gene' was spread as well, probably through marriages between the founding clans since the late eighteenth century and subsequently, Adamorobe Sign Language has evolved. Because no sociolinguistic research has been conducted in Adamorobe yet, the number of AdaSL (Adamorobe Sign Language) signers and their proficiency is unknown. Kusters observed that both deaf and hearing people use sign language and hearing people who are typically able to sign well are close relatives and friends of deaf people and people who grew up with or work in proximity to deaf people.

While in everyday life, deaf people interact naturally and frequently with hearing people through Adamorobe Sign Language, the majority of deaf people also frequently engage in deaf-only conversations in smaller or bigger groups, at different times of the day, and typically at particular locations in the village. Degrees of hearing loss were irrelevant in Adamorobe: all deaf people were fluent signers, none wore hearing aids and none spoke (nor were they able to). These deaf Adamorobeans express the discourse of "DEAF SAME": because deaf people share their first language and deaf ways of knowing and being in the world, they feel connected and united. In the words of Ama Korkor, one of Kusters' interlocutors:

All deaf people everywhere are connected. All deaf are connected and the same. Do not fight with each other but be happy. Do not gossip, that is bad. We are all the same. When you go to Aburi or Accra for example: we are all the same: all the deaf everywhere are connected, the same. You shouldn't discard or ignore each other: deaf are all connected, the same. (Interview Ama Korkor, 21/11/2008)

In Adamorobe, concepts such as "Deaf culture" or "Deafhood" are not used to make sense of the connection felt between deaf people: deaf people in Adamorobe employ the concepts of "DEAF SAME" and "DEAF ALL CONNECTED" to explain why they should greet each other, maintain good relationships with each other, and support each other in both daily life and times of hardship. The discourse of "DEAF SAME" thus emphasizes social harmony and the existence of social relationships between deaf people, although it does not lead these deaf people to organize themselves as a group or network with their own events, structures, organizations or leaders. While they see themselves as deaf individuals who are "the same" and therefore "connected," collective structuring happens in the context of families rather than based on shared deafness. (Kusters forthcoming 2014a). Deaf people also talked about certain deaf-specific psychological characteristics, such as being hard workers and fierce fighters, a discourse propagated by themselves and by hearing people which marked deaf people as being "the same." In addition, deaf people have also married each other since time immemorial (that is, until 1975 when a village law prohibited deaf-deaf marriages) and this further served to congeal deaf people as "the same." While this article explores how "DEAF SAME" is utilized as an unspecified and unmarked discourse, there is thus a specific understanding of this discourse in Adamorobe.

Kusters encountered five deaf Northern tourists who were travelling in Ghana

between 2005 and 2009, and visited Adamorobe as a short excursion; she met some of them during her field work and others before her field work. The visitors were Europeans in their twenties and thirties, four of them were members of signing deaf families and all of them were active in deaf organizations or associations. The deaf visitors in Adamorobe did not wear hearing aids during their visits and they were fluent in one or more European national sign languages and in International Sign: four of them had sign language as their first language and the fifth person had grown up bilingual in sign and a spoken/written language.

The visitors were interested in Adamorobe because of its "otherness" (its being African), at the same time expecting "sameness" (based on the discourse of deaf universalism). Some of them were brought there by (former) board members from the Ghanaian Association of the Deaf (GNAD) who were aware of the attractiveness of this location to foreigners. Because of Adamorobe's location in relation to the capital (it is easily accessible on a main road to and from Accra), it is convenient to visit the village as a day trip from there. [6](#)

These visitors expected that the typical enthusiasm in deaf international encounters based on "DEAF DEAF SAME" would be clearly present in Adamorobe. This, however, was not the case. One of them, who visited in 2009 during Kusters's stay in Adamorobe, told her afterwards:

I was a little bit surprised that some deaf villagers did not care about our presence. It should be fun to receive deaf foreigners in their village but some villagers — especially men - showed little or no interest. Just saying hi and a short introduction was enough for them. They did not ask about Europe, Accra, and so on. There is not much interest for visitors.

Another European deaf man who visited Adamorobe a few years earlier told Kusters: "The deaf were uninterested and passive, in contrast to the hearing." It appeared that although the deaf visitors and the deaf people from Adamorobe all considered each other to be "DEAF SAME," this did not automatically entail an easy connection, and differences between them came to the fore. Kusters encountered several examples of this disconnect which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, while deaf Europeans and Adamorobe deaf both used sign languages and it was expected that communication would occur easily, communication was often quite difficult. Adamorobe Sign Language is very different from the sign languages the foreigners used, including International Sign. Contrary to Ghanaian Sign Language (which is based on American Sign Language), Adamorobe Sign Language is entirely grounded in Akan culture (Akan is the ethnic group to which the founders of Adamorobe belong). Its core consists not only of a large number of local gestures, but also of mimes of Akan customs, local foods and their preparation, farming terms, and festivals. In addition, the structure of AdaSL is thoroughly influenced by spoken Akan in several ways: mouth shapes, and parallel semantic and syntactic structures (Nyst 2007).

The second problem was the very different backgrounds of the deaf foreigners and Adamorobe deaf people. Conversation themes in the daily life of deaf people in Adamorobe include relationships with family, witchcraft accusations, the marriage prohibition against deaf people marrying each other, dwarf spirits at the river, and the sale of lands surrounding the village. These topics were not immediately legible to foreign visitors. Kusters observed how a few of her deaf interlocutors tried to talk about such topics with deaf foreign visitors, who had difficulty in understanding the signs and making sense of the stories. Similarly, the visitors asked Kusters "Why do they [Adamorobe deaf] introduce their families so elaborately?" The visitors did not have the context to grasp what was important to those whom they were talking to.

A further disconnect was caused by expectations of deaf people in Adamorobe: they expected and requested gifts or donations from these deaf visitors just as they do from any (deaf or hearing) foreign visitor to the village. A deaf visitor who visited Adamorobe in 2005 stated:

At the end when we should leave, they asked if I had brought some gifts for them. I was so unprepared - but had a bit money which I gave them. They wanted me to promise to send them clothes and so on.

This is a standard social practice which must be understood in a context of donations for deaf people in Adamorobe started in the early 1960s, by various NGOs, churches and wealthy benefactors, motivated perhaps by a perspective of deaf people as needy (Kusters 2014b forthcoming). However, it was perceived as jarring and confusing by tourists who were unfamiliar with this practice. People from Adamorobe also expected reciprocity or compensation for taking photos or recording movies in Adamorobe because there is the (often silent) expectation of receiving something in return (ie. money or prints of the pictures), otherwise there is a sense that the images are being "stolen:" "the deaf are hungry and don't get money and all the white people do is take pictures of us and film us, the thieves!" In addition, there was the lingering sense of failed promises that Kusters' interlocutors in Adamorobe felt. Those interlocutors reported that Northern visitors in the past made unfulfilled promises to return and do something for them, such as sending them to school, making them hearing, coming with a big coach to take them for a trip, or taking them to a "white country." It is not clear if visitors have explicitly made these promises, or if this is the Adamorobe deaf people's understanding, but the result in any case is that they feel betrayed. Deaf people in Adamorobe were also disappointed that many visitors came only once. When talking about foreigners who visited Adamorobe, they typically added: "Never came back since then" and "Will come soon, you will see," even if the visit happened decades ago. It is therefore understandable why Adamorobe deaf people were not as enthusiastic as the foreign tourists expected. Since visitors were not aware of these practices there was often a disconnect in expectations on both ends.

In addition, the European visitors were distressed by the living conditions and economic and social structures in the village, describing them as "primitive," "isolated," and "backwards." Surprised by the lack of "modern" infrastructure and

facilities, they asked questions such as, "How can you [Kusters] live here?" Because the deaf people in Adamorobe are uneducated in the Western sense, Kusters was asked: "What is these deaf people's level of thinking?" and one visitor referred to them as "immature" because they had not been formally schooled. For these visitors, Adamorobe became — in certain aspects - a "deaf hell" and they were not fully able to see beyond what they thought was deprivation or poverty. While the foreign visitors' perspectives on their interactions might seem like merely an example of Western ethnocentrism or privilege, the fact that the discourse of "DEAF SAME" created conditions of possibility for the encounters to take place reveals interesting ways that sameness and difference were intermingled in an increasingly globalized world in which such travels are becoming more commonplace.

These disconnects do not mean that deaf people from Adamorobe make no distinction between deaf and hearing visitors whatsoever. Most foreign visitors who come to Adamorobe for its deaf population are hearing: representatives of NGOs, churches and charities, for example; but deaf people living in Adamorobe told Kusters that they preferred deaf visitors, arguing "DEAF SAME," which was thus understood as transcending Adamorobe. A recurring theme then, was that deaf people in Adamorobe felt ambivalent as to how much weight to give to the "DEAF SAME" argument in contexts outside of Adamorobe, and this ambivalence was related to the racial difference. Maybe for the white visitors, "DEAF SAME" trumps racial differences (or they expected it to do so), but for the black Adamorobeans this is a much more complex issue. In Adamorobe there is a powerful image of "the white peoples country" which is an imaginary that plays a role in everyday life — "white" is a synonym for colonialism, power, money, and (the lack of) donations.

Amidst this background, deaf Adamorobeans said that deaf Northern visitors are more welcome than hearing people because they are "the same" and because communication — although not fluent - is better with deaf than with hearing visitors, but even so, they often said that both deaf and hearing visitors should stay away, or they fluctuated between saying that deaf people are welcome and then rescinding the invitation. Deaf people from Adamorobe seemed to expect more generosity from deaf visitors although at the same time they expressed that the "price" for a deaf person to be accepted would be lower. Deaf people from Adamorobe thus deploy the discourse of "DEAF SAME" to explain why they do or do not have expectations from deaf foreigners. They do not use this discourse when there are feelings of disappointment and exploitation and when there are difficulties in communication. Similarly, Kusters found it was impossible to disentangle the influences of her deafness from those of her white skin and outsider-status in the relationship she had with her interlocutors in Adamorobe; her being deaf and her being white were factors that were strategically and ambiguously utilised in discourses. (see Kusters 2012).

Deaf foreigners also vacillate between feelings of sameness and difference as they encounter deaf people living in material, social, and moral conditions vastly different from their own: they attempt to have encounters and create relationships

based upon the idea of "DEAF SAME" only to be disappointed by feelings of disconnection and lack of familiarity. It became clear to these deaf foreigners that there were limits to deaf universalism and this was something that they struggled with and which resulted in a certain degree of melancholy. As such, we see that feelings of sameness and difference are often in flux and that discourses of sameness and difference are often deployed in ambiguous ways.

Deaf Empowerment Programs in India

At this point, we move from recreational travel or tourism to interventions, specifically those focused on "development." There has recently been an increase in deaf focused, run, and organized aid organizations, academic programs, and NGOs seeking to work with and improve the lives of deaf people living elsewhere, often in "developing" countries. Such programs are inspired both by ideas of "DEAF SAME" and by a picture of deaf people as deprived or needy, living in "deaf hells." Indeed, "DEAF SAME" seems to translate into an imperative to promote living conditions, values, and social and cultural norms that are similar to those in the global North in other places (through either academic study or development interventions). The language of the recent United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) also helps fuel this imperative in that deaf people are represented as an unmarked "linguistic minority" and as a category of people universally possessing the same needs (also see Meekosha and Soldatic 2011 on the UNCRPD and what it bodes for North-South relations and power differentials).

This imperative can be witnessed at international activist and academic conferences, such as WFD congresses, international deaf leadership programs, and international deaf education seminars and workshops, in which a specific template is often followed when discussing the experiences of deaf people living in "developing" countries. As we have observed in such settings (most recently at the 2013 WFD International Conference in Sydney, Australia), this template consists of the following: the geography and political structure of the country is briefly discussed. A brief overview of deaf organizations is provided, usually consisting of talking about organizations that are national in scope and affiliated with the WFD. Subsequently, there is a discussion of all the ways that the country is lacking in its approach to deaf people (e.g., the absence of sign language interpreters, education, anti-discrimination laws, and employment opportunities for deaf people). Thus the country is depicted as a space of lack, of un(der)development, and desperately in need of improvement.

In all of these presentations, the specificities of each country are glossed over and a nuanced discussion of what is unique about each country's history, political economic structure, and deaf experiences are missing. Uganda is rendered identical to Turkey and India is made commensurable to Ghana, for example. And in this way, deaf experiences in the "developing" world are rendered identical and universal; deaf people living in these countries are seen as in need of intervention and help. These presentations — just like the WFD - follow a traditional

development framework in that nations are defined as "developing nations" by entities such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the World Bank, based on their political economic capacity.

Even when using deaf-specific development parameters for deaf people such as the existence of bilingual deaf schools, deaf associations, interpreters, and sign language dictionaries, these are Northern-centered. Programs aimed at deaf people in non-Northern countries aim to set up and support "national deaf associations," record "national sign languages" (assuming that these exist) and create dictionaries for use in education and by interpreter programs. While such practices can and often do catalyze deaf associations, social movements, and language development, they can also ignore the linguistic diversity of deaf communities and indigenous deaf minorities within national boundaries (Branson and Miller 2002); they also ignore the complicated politics associated with regional, ethnic, and cultural differences within a country. As such, these directives are often out of touch with what happens on the ground in these countries. Branson and Miller (2002: 247) call this "symbolic violence" that ignores and even denies the cultural diversity of deaf communities.

Friedner conducted ethnographic research at an "deaf youth empowerment camp" organized by the United States-based Global Reach Out (GRO) program in Bangalore, India in the summer of 2007. Since 2007, GRO has hosted "peer to peer" programs in countries such as Kenya, Philippines, Guatemala, and India and according to its website, over 150 deaf delegates from the United States have participated. In the camp which Friedner observed, a delegation of eight deaf young adults traveled to Bangalore, one of India's largest cities, to work with deaf Indians and, in their words, to "empower", "encourage", and "support" them in their struggle for deaf human rights. Simultaneously, Kusters observed parts of GRO's program held in Mumbai, another of India's largest cities, at the same time. The deaf Americans in the Bangalore and Mumbai programs were all either students or recent graduates of Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, the United States' premier (and only) deaf institutions of higher education. The eight Indian delegates who were chosen to participate in the Bangalore program were either students or recent graduates of vocational training programs. They were largely between the age of 18 and 35 and ranged from lower class to upper middle class backgrounds. There was one young man who worked as a web designer and there was also a community based rehabilitation (CBR) worker hailing from a lower class and rural background. Participants were diverse in their use of hearing aids and cochlear implants: some had them while others did not. Communication largely took place in American Sign Language and Bangalore variety Indian Sign Language (which features lexicon from American Sign Language) and there was often significant negotiation around communication. ⁷ A deaf Indian man with experience interacting with deaf foreigners was hired to facilitate the program and he often helped interpret for the American and Indian delegates.

During the eight day camp in Bangalore, held largely on the grounds of a large

disability-focused NGO with vocational training programs for deaf young adults, the group held a day-long workshop and brainstorming session on problems facing deaf individuals in India. According to the organizers, the workshop's goal was to brainstorm, problem-solve, and collectively create solutions. The mood was set with a discussion of "deaf rights," which one of the American participants defined as "You can do it, you must do it, you have the right to do it." During this workshop the American delegates were the ones mostly contributing the problems - lack of sign language interpreters, lack of closed captioning, and teachers who do not know sign language - and the Indian delegates were mostly silent during this process. They occasionally nodded their heads and offered affirmation but they did not suggest any "problems" themselves. There was one particularly engaged discussion that took place around an American delegate's suggestion that there be one national Indian Sign Language "just like there is in America so that all deaf Indians can understand each other." A few of the Indian delegates disagreed with this assessment and said that it was important for each state to have its own variety of Indian Sign Language. However, the absence of a standardized national sign language was listed as a "problem."

The culmination of these problem solving sessions was the performance of skits in which problems were miraculously and effortlessly solved through individual advocacy, perseverance, and hard work. For example, in one skit a deaf college student asks his college for a sign language interpreter and the college principal refuses, saying it is too expensive. The student persists, arguing that it is "his right" to have an interpreter. The principal then acquiesces and hires an interpreter for the student. The principal also hires an interpreter coordinator (something that the Indian delegates had never heard of) so that the student does not have to do the work of finding an interpreter himself. Despite the rosy outcome of this skit, it is difficult to imagine this happening in real life as India has few certified or qualified interpreters and schools are not legally mandated to provide communication access.

The camp, which included visits to deaf schools and a deaf college in Bangalore and a nearby city as well as numerous workshops (one featuring Indian deaf "professionals" working mostly in multinational corporations where they did back office data entry work, software programming, and graphic design was very well received by everyone although the Indian delegates could not really relate to these individuals), was only one week long in length yet the Americans participating within it desired to see impact and change right away. In the organization's newsletter there is a quote from a delegate from a later delegation to India and she writes: "When I first met Parvati [an Indian delegate], eight days ago, she did not know what "empowerment" meant. Today she stands as a lady that knows now." Similarly, an animated video on GRO's website shows a mass of people effortlessly knocking down a wall which has graffiti written on it that says: "No access;" "No education;" "No Support;" "No empowerment;" and "No role models?" After the wall is broken down, a leafy green tree labeled "empowerment" grows and the figures knocking down the wall become illuminated. Next to each figure a bubble appears with words such as "Empowerment!;" "Role models!;" and "Self esteem!" A globe

comes onto the screen and various regions of the world light up as the deaf communities living in these regions have ostensibly become transformed through their encounters with this program. And so the temporality of development as espoused by this program is fast, effortless, and automatically transformative (<http://www.globalreachout.org/>).

In other "report backs" on this organization's website, American delegates reported feeling transformed, energized, and grateful for the opportunity to learn more about another culture. One American delegate says: "[GRO] is a person's mindblowing journey towards advocacy, empowerment, and exchange of language, culture, and tradition to help break the barrier to the high road in international deaf education. If you think America is not good enough, then come and join [GRO] and see how fortunate you are..." The last sentence uttered by this delegate positions India as a deaf hell and America, while perhaps not necessarily a deaf heaven, is perceived to be better.

This program and others like it are promoting a specific idea of "Deaf culture" or "Deaf pride" that is presumed to be universal. For example, one of the leaders of the American delegation with which Friedner interacted said that he felt that "the Indian girls are so sheltered. They can talk about their families, their schools, and their mosques but they can not talk about Deaf culture. They don't know about Deaf culture." A universal (and seemingly unmarked) sense of Deaf culture and Deaf pride permeate this organization's efforts and its work is teleological: the stated aim is to instill specific understandings of what it means to be Deaf, to be empowered, and to be a role model. This is not dissimilar to what happens in other kinds of empowerment programs. See Aradhana Sharma (2008) for critiques of womens' empowerment programs, and David Mosse (2005) for a critique of the discourse of empowerment as used in general development programs in India, for example. These works situate the discourse of empowerment within a neo-liberal political economic framework.

The imposition of language and action on those living in a particular country becomes glaringly obvious when juxtaposed against the local concept of "DEAF DEVELOPMENT." The concept of "DEAF DEVELOPMENT" was used by many of Friedner's Indian interlocutors and she subsequently adopted the concept to be used as a key analytic in her work (e.g., Friedner 2011, 2014). Once "DEAF DEVELOPMENT" occurs, sign language will be recognized, many more deaf and non-deaf people will sign, schools will offer good quality education in sign language, and there will be a variety of vocational opportunities available to deaf people. There will also be sign language interpreters and deaf people will have communication access in different settings. There is also a moral component to "DEAF DEVELOPMENT": deaf people will become more confident and strong in their interactions with others and developed deaf people will be morally responsible for helping less developed deaf people. "DEAF DEVELOPMENT" is therefore a shared moral project. "DEAF DEVELOPMENT," for some of Friedner's interlocutors, also meant having consumption power and being able to participate in global consumer culture.

In this focus on "DEAF DEVELOPMENT," Friedner's interlocutors did not talk about "rights," "empowerment," or "Deaf culture." Rather, they spoke about the importance of "sharing," and of learning from and with other deaf people. While "DEAF DEVELOPMENT" may not seem dissimilar to the (Northern) concept of "deaf rights," the focus on both concrete and explicitly collective ways of being in the world marks it as being different. In addition, as an often-used local concept, it has resonance within everyday deaf life and it is used by deaf people to imagine and create new ways of being in the world. Indeed, it is a teleological concept albeit a local one. This discovery reinforces the ineffectual and futile efforts of the visitors imposing "empowerment" and "Deaf culture" on the local delegates. Indeed, utilizing abstract and individualist concepts like "deaf rights" in an Indian context could potentially be harmful and not productive for improving material conditions for deaf people (in contrast to the skit that the GRO American delegates suggested in which the deaf college student insisted on sign language interpreters because it was "his right" as a deaf person). Unfortunately, there was little time and space allocated to reflecting upon sameness and difference between the delegates' different understandings of the world. Had there been such time and space, it is possible that the Indian delegates could have shared the concept of "DEAF DEVELOPMENT" with their American counterparts. It also did not seem that deaf Indians recognised "DEAF DEVELOPMENT" as a "concept" that needed to be imparted or shared. The idea of having a teleological concept to share is perhaps a very Northern idea of language and politics.

So what *did* the Indian delegates take away from this? Throughout and after the Bangalore program finished, Friedner interviewed the Indian delegates and learned that the web designer was hoping to wrangle an American visa out of this program, and that the others very much enjoyed interacting with the American delegates although they did not understand what the words "empowerment," "rights," or "support" meant. They knew how to create the signs with their hands and bodies but they did not know the concepts behind them; it was mimicry. This was made clear when a teacher at the vocational training program that a few of the delegates who attended were asked what these concepts meant and the students could not answer. Friedner did not observe much transformation in the Indian delegates' perspective after the program finished although it appeared that some of the Indians benefited from improved social status from interacting with Americans and hoped that their new connections would result in greater mobility, or more specifically, the opportunity to visit the US. The web designer, who came from an upper middle class family, continued to keep in touch with American delegates via Facebook and Oovoo and in a subsequent year, he flew to another GRO program held in another Indian state. Indeed, at the closure of the GRO camp in Mumbai, a deaf young woman told Kusters that she did not feel "empowered:" "the Americans had fun, are on holiday and went out in evenings but we did not really gain anything so it was a waste of time and money for us."

What the Indian delegates did gain, however, was a sense of India being "behind" or inferior to the United States. The American delegates were seen as possessing financial capital and were able to travel. They were all in college or recent college

graduates and they regaled the Indians with stories about the access features available at home: interpreters, video relay, deaf professors, employment in all sectors, and so on. These categories— interpreters, access, education, technology — were also treated as universals, unmarked by place and presumably the same everywhere. So, once India catches up, interpreters, access, education, and technology in India will ideally be the same as they are in the United States or the West more generally. In this sense, India, and deaf Indians in particular, were being produced as un(der)developed subjects lagging behind those in the West (Escobar 1995). Indeed, subsequent to the GRO program, many of the Indian delegates compared and contrasted India and the US, citing examples that American GRO participants had shared with them.

These 'empowerment' camps should be contrasted with the vibrant organizations and mentorship structures which already exist in many Indian cities. For example, in Mumbai there is a robust deaf youth association called the Yuva Deaf Association (YAD) which was started in 2006 and works with a structure that is reflexive of local practices and norms. Weekly, up to 100 participants aged between 18 and 35 attend its meetings. During these meetings, people reflect on being *deaf*, but also on being a deaf *Indian*. For example, participants discuss deaf peoples' positioning in regards to Indian societal and political systems, the rights of *dalits*, the lowest caste in the Indian caste system, their relationship with people with (other) disabilities, and their relationships with their mostly hearing families (which is very important to them as most Indians live with relatives and family plays a large role in everyday life). Participants also discuss the emergence of new employment opportunities, the use of gesture and sign language in everyday life, and tensions between learning English literacy and literacy in local Indian languages. It is clear that participants in this association feel very much connected by being deaf, but that this connectedness articulates with social, familial, and national customs and practices (Hall 1985).

In conclusion, we argue that engaging in intervention is often motivated by an urgent sense that deaf people living in other countries are behind and that they do not have access to the opportunities, resources, structures, and ideologies that they *should* have access to. This urgency derives from a sense of "DEAF SAME" as well as a sense of responsibility towards deaf people living elsewhere. This sense of responsibility manifests itself through engaging in "empowerment" activities, which, as many scholars have pointed out, is very much a product of our current neo-liberal political economic system in which individuals and communities are responsible for taking care of themselves (Rose 1999). In line with current discourses in development programs which focus on the importance of individual and community "empowerment," deaf delegates from "developed" countries attempt to "empower" deaf people living in "developing" countries by focusing on universalist concepts and discourses such as "Deaf rights," "Deaf culture," and "Deafhood."

Conclusion: Globalization, Sameness, and Difference

In an article reflecting upon the role of his own activism in conducting anthropological research with gay and lesbian Indonesians, Boellstorff (2012:34) writes: "I cannot overemphasize the importance of developing a theory of similitude, which does not assume that apparent sameness is a symptom of homogenization or a betrayal of the authentic and indigenous." Recognizing that "[t]he reality of global inequality means that when it comes to outsider activism, Westerners engaging with non-Western contexts are far more common than the other way around," Boellstorff attempts to carve out a space for considering both sameness and difference when conducting both activism and research in other places (ibid:23). We attempt to do this as well and like Boellstorff, we want to hold onto the possibility of the existence of both. That is, we have analyzed how feelings of both sameness and difference exist in diverse deaf encounters; although we argue that there is often a lack of awareness of how these samenesses and differences are often ambiguously and ambivalently felt and in need of negotiation.

Our research in Adamorobe, Bangalore, and Mumbai has shown that the discourse of deaf universalism, when utilized as starting point for tourist encounters and interventions through empowerment programs, often obscures important differences. We would therefore like to carve out space for analyzing how deaf people might be different and for respecting this difference. Deaf universalism, despite appearing to be expansive, indeed universal, has its limits. To be sure, there are certainly encounters and exchanges that may produce positive results such as those that De Clerck (2007, 2011) discusses in her work on emancipation and empowerment processes that happen through transnational encounters between Deaf Cameroonians and Deaf Westerners. At the same time, this work raises concerns for us because the author does not seem to recognize that "empowerment" and "emancipation" are often (problematic) power-laden discourses and practices. This article is an attempt to analyze the less than positive effects and affects that our interlocutors experienced when introduced to such concepts while also attending to the power of deaf universalism as both a feeling and a motivator for action.

Of equal importance, in creating deaf heavens and hells based on deaf universalism, local knowledges and ways of being in the world are ignored. Our concern is to allow such local discourses to come to the fore and not be obscured by sweeping ideas of "DEAF SAME." We argue that with the emergence of globalization and a focus on "development" in both deaf and hearing worlds, it is important for deaf travelers and those engaging in interventions to be mindful of the existence of local deaf concepts (such as DEAF DEVELOPMENT) and everyday experiences which exist outside of Western teleological notions such as "human rights," "Deaf culture," "Deaf pride," "Deaf rights," and "Deafhood," for example. Globalization creates opportunities not only for access, but also for misunderstanding and misrecognition.

Similarly, our research has shown that, in addition to the existence of local deaf concepts (which may or may not have similarities to concepts utilized in the global North), there are also different local understandings of "DEAF SAME." This has

become clear in the strong ambiguity with which the concept was used with regard to deaf foreigners in Adamorobe. This teaches us that "DEAF SAME" is a concept with specific (and often complex) meanings and registers that has to be analyzed and understood as such. The discourse of "DEAF DEAF SAME," while powerful, is often (strategically) negotiated and met with feelings of both ambivalence and disappointment by those invoking it.

It is extremely important to examine what claims of sameness are produced by and for diverse deaf people around the world. We argue that the presence of globalization creates new understandings of deafness as well as new ideas and imaginaries of similitude and difference; although these understandings and ideas vary depending where they are found. How do we let diverse experiences speak for themselves and how can Northern- based deaf academics, activists, and travellers avoid both overprivileging sameness and producing deaf heavens and hells? In light of the intensification of tourism and intervention practices and the emergence of new academic programs and NGOs, this is an important time to focus on these issues. Attention must also be paid to the role of power differentials and differences in mobility in these encounters. Indeed, it seems to us that an awareness of the complicated relationship between sameness and difference is a tool needed to negotiate new globalized deaf spaces.

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Endnotes

1. While deaf people from the global South do receive funding and sponsorship from deaf organizations and programs in the global North to attend conferences and workshops, it is often the "deaf elite" from the global South who engage in recreational travel.

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2. This could also be glossed as "deaf deaf same." We use glosses in "small caps" here and in other instances in order to note that this is a direct phrase from sign language. "deaf deaf same" and "deaf same" can be translated to "I am deaf, you are deaf, we are the same." Friedner worked with deaf people using American Sign Language and (various varieties of) Indian Sign Language. Kusters worked with deaf people utilizing Adamorobe Sign Language, Indian Sign Language, Ghanaian Sign Language, and International Sign.

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3. We place "developed" and "un/derdeveloped" in quotes to highlight that we view these as discursive frameworks that exist in relation to each other. These discursive frameworks in turn create subject positions as people begin to identify as being un/derdeveloped. (Escobar 1995).

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4. However, as we discuss in our conclusion De Clerck (2007, 2011) does not problematize concepts such as "empowerment" and "emancipation" in her analysis of how Deaf Cameroonians benefit from encounters with Deaf Westerners.

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5. We both personally benefited from (and were inspired by) discourses about Deaf culture, Deaf rights, Deaf identity and Deafhood. As such, we are experientially aware of how these are powerful concepts.

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6. "White," "Northern," and "foreign" are used interchangeably. All of the foreign visitors that Kusters encountered were white and Adomarobe deaf people referred to them as "whites." See Kusters (2011) for more on these particular dynamics.

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7. Unfortunately, there has been little linguistic research on this variety of Indian Sign Language (or Indian Sign Language in general). Bangalore variety Indian Sign Language is considered to be quite unique though because it features ASL lexicon and the one handed sign language alphabet as a result of the influence of a Canadian priest who came to Bangalore in the 1960s-70s to work on deaf education.

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