It’s a Small World: International Deaf Spaces and Encounters

Michele Friedner
Annelies Kusters
First wave of research into international deaf spaces

• 2000 – 2007:
  • Murray: historical perspective on gatherings (from late 19th to early 20th century, mainly USA and Europe)
  • Mottez, Gulliver: Parisian Banquets
  • Breivik, Haueland, Solvang: WFD conferences, Deaflympics, other large gatherings
  • De Clerck: Gallaudet University as “deaf dream world”

✓ Created the groundwork for study of international deaf spaces
✓ Focus on Global North, on elite/connected/mobile deaf people
✓ Focus on how deaf people have similarities, “the right way to be deaf.”
Second wave of research into international deaf spaces

- Example of second wave: this book
- Global focus: relationships between Global South and Global North
- Attention to power, privilege, (im)mobilities, inequalities
- Focus on local discourses and a realization that all discourses are indigenous (even those from the West)
- Focus on non-institutional encounters (ie, not just conferences, banquets and Gallaudet university)
The book…..

• **23 chapters** from anthropologists, historians, theologians, development researchers, cultural studies scholars, activists, etc.

• **Themes such as:** conferences, camps, development work, research, leadership programmes, arts festivals, tourism, missions, NGOs, language use and language ideologies, social media, ...

• **Countries such as** Cambodia, Vietnam, Nigeria, Eritrea, Chile, Uruguay, France, Denmark, Turkey, ...

• Most of them use **ethnographic methods**
Sameness and difference

• The authors all look at **sameness and difference** in diverse international encounters

• **Deaf similitude**: **DEAF-SAME**: a sentiment and a discourse
  – shared experience of being deaf (sensorial, social, history, communication)
  – Is said to transcend geography, culture, religion, ...: **deaf universalism**

• Differences
  – **Background**: Nationality, education, language, values, epistemologies, ...
  – **Expectations/purposes**: networking, learning, tourism, exchange, business, research, volunteering, development, ...
Deaf transnational gatherings at the turn of the 21st century and some afterthoughts

Hilde Hauaaland (with Per Solvang and Jan-Kare Breivik)
Transnational gatherings at the turn of the 21st century

• Transnational events analysed as ritual manifestations of an imagined global Deaf community at the turn of the 21st century

• the events were tangible manifestations of a deaf community that transcended national borders.

• Tensions and differences were underplayed and/or overlooked

(Haualand, Solvang and Breivik)
Orals don't belong here! ASL does!

(World Garr of the Deaf Sundsvall, Sweden 20C)
Transnational gatherings at the turn of the 21st century

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  – Diverse educational and language backgrounds
  – North; many interpreters, IS 😊. South; few interpreters, IS 😞

  – Effects of digital communication and social media
  – From shared identity communities to interests and networks?

(Haueland, Solvang and Breivik)
Deaf Jewish Space and "Deaf-same":
The International Conferences of Deaf Jews in the 20th century

Mark Zaurov
• Deaf Jews — a double cultural minority
• Deaf Jews had their own clubs, schools, national and sport associations
• Pillars to maintain Deaf community (Lane; Eickmann)
• National and International Conferences (1931 Prague)
• One of several Reasons: Exclusion by anti-Semitism

• Deaf-SAME requires a so-called space based on „white Christian western European monoculture“
• Conflict with other groups like Deaf Jews (anti-Semitism)
• Historical exclusions of Deaf Jews from Deaf World (Poland 1927-1929; Germany 1933)
Conclusion

• „Deaf-Same“ as a universal experience is a myth because the Deaf community has diversity (e.g. Deaf Black etc.)

• Struggle till today for Deaf Jews as with WFD (no SIG)

• One part of problem: Jews are seen as religion instead as ethnic group

• Deaf Jews are transnational, „hybrid imagined Community“
Sign language recognition: Tensions between specificity and universalism in international deaf discourses

Maartje De Meulder
Tension between specificity and universalism?

Internationally-oriented aspirations for sign language recognition as used in deaf discourses

Sign language recognition has to be achieved, implemented and understood through national legislation
Risks?

• “Sign language recognition” as used in international deaf discourses seems to refer first of all to the collective aspirations and not to national recognition

• Risk for confusion and miscommunication (also because of different national languages and systems)

• Less attention for effective meaning and status of recognition
Opportunities

• “Sign language recognition” illustrates, inspires and strengthens Deaf communities’ collective ethos as a “people”

• Transborder activism: countries support each other to achieve successful legislation (but in the end every country is different)
What would an International Convention on Sign Language Peoples’ Rights look like?
Challenging Sign Language Lineages and Geographies: The case of Eritrean, Finnish and Swedish Sign Languages

Rezenet Moges
• This chapter presents a multiplicity of ideologies that are in contestation as the result of the incorporation of Finnish signs in Eritrean Sign Language.

• Language planners felt that there was an excessive sameness through a shared language between two very different countries, ethnicities, and customs. Demissionization (process of language purification) is one of the enforcements that protects cultural difference and linguistic independence.

• I argue that the ideology of "DEAF-SAME" can go amiss from using the examples from language planners in Deaf Eritrean community.
• Conclusion: the romanticized notion of “DEAF-SAME” needs to be restricted, especially in terms of language, or else, indigenous/native sign languages will perish.

• Demissionization can remove the endangering and overpowering monolithic DEAF-SAME effect to promote indigenous languages, and, in turn, the intersectionality of multiple ethnic identities will emerge and be protected. As long as Deaf Eritreans experience DEAF-SAME with Deaf foreigners, demissionized EriSL embraces the indigenous culture of Eritreans.
A Deaf Leadership Program in Nigeria: Notes on a complicated endeavor

Khadijat Rashid
Nigeria – DEAF-SAME?

• Leadership training run in Nigeria by deaf expatriate Nigerians for primarily Nigerians
• Despite background and knowledge of culture; conflicts among participants in
  – Ethnicity
  – Religion
  – Gender
  – Attitudes
Conclusion

• Shared experience of being deaf WITHIN a country could not trump

• Differences of
  – Power
  – Privilege
  – Values
  – Education...
Changing the World (or not): Reflecting on interactions with the Global South during the Frontrunners program

Outi Toura-Jensen (with Annelies Kusters, Filip Bergmann Verhelst, Ole Vestergaard)
It’s not all DEAF-SAME...

(...) When we teach, there are some things that are DEAF-SAME, but once they're out in the field, it's surprising to see that it's not all DEAF-SAME...
Turning point in interactions with Global South

(...) After learning these strongly Western theories, that person went over there and started to teach and things were jarring...

...The Frontrunners got satisfaction and experience but the local people didn't get much. Just another white group that came and went. I found that interesting. The idea of an exchange wasn't 100% fulfilled...
Conclusion

Equal crossover?
Deaf International Development Practitioners and Researchers Working Effectively in Deaf Communities

Arlinda Boland (with Amy T. Wilson And Rowena E. Winiarczyk)
“Deaf Deaf Same”

• Our Approach to the fieldwork and research process
  – Human Rights Framework
  – Inclusion of ALL stakeholders (deaf and hearing)

• Challenges of Deaf Deaf Same
  – Quality of Data Collection
  – Social Events: Observations during these events

• Expectations and Assumptions by Research Participants
  – Information Sharing (Global North possess more knowledge)
  – Access to material resources (Privileged background)
  – Role shifting other than being a researcher (health worker, social worker, and doctor)
Is it Really All about Deaf Deaf Same?

- “Language-Same” shows to be more important than Deaf Deaf Same
  * Gender: Amy was asked to swap the position of interviewer over a local Deaf man during the interview process by a deaf female participant

  * Interpreting: Amy was asked to interpret even though she has no interpreter training, deaf finds her signing skills satisfactory

- Deaf participants ask for information about Deaf people in the States including legal and health information as well as ask for gifts just like us (Rowena and Arlinda as deaf researchers)
Global Deafhood: Exploring Myths and Realities

Paddy Ladd
Global Deafhood?

• <DEAF-ALL-SAME> ?? Yes and no 😊

• Yes - Deaf educators’ work suggests powerful ‘Deaf ways’ across different countries.

• No – Because we are cultural minorities.

• This means we must learn 2/3 cultures. Hearing (‘majority cultures’) mostly learn 1.

• Other cultural minorities (African-American, Indigenous Peoples) also must learn 2.
Double-Binds

• But these cultures not equally respected.

• Polarises minorities and Deaf – accept vs rebel.

• And so – ‘double-binds’ (‘lose/lose).

• Eg:
Some Simple Examples

• Place your Deaf child in hearing / Deaf school?

• ‘You First Which?’

• ‘You “Think-Hearing”.

• Deaf Inuit – join Deaf, lose own culture, or join own culture, lose Deaf?
Deafhood and Unity

• **Yes** - have many examples of Deaf trying to find unity. Our Deaf associations / WFD / IS

• But still have weaknesses because not understand the minority culture concept. So...

• **Deafhood study > Global Deafhood =**
  • 1. Understanding both/all cultures.
  • 2. Respect and enjoy diversity.
  • 3. Search for common ‘Deaf Ways’.
Book conclusion
• Many authors are affirmative of the power of DEAF-SAME and at the same time highlight differences and/or inequalities

• The nation-state is of much importance in deaf experiences! Hence the book’s title: It’s a Small World: International Deaf Spaces and Encounters (rather than transnational in which nation is not so important)
Frameworks/Foci

- **Deaf spaces and networks**: look at how these spaces and networks are actually produced/used, process-oriented

- **(Local) epistemologies and ontologies**: How do deaf people in diverse contexts think of themselves and their encounters?

- **Attending to language**: not taking understanding between diverse deaf people for granted; analyzing language use, language politics, language ideologies
• The book will appear end of 2015 or early 2016 (Gallaudet University Press)
• If you want to read the book’s introduction, send us an email: michele.friedner@stonybrook.edu or annelieskusters@gmail.com