

“I don’t worry because I have my education”

Translated deaf people moving toward emancipation

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In ethnographic interviews, ‘international deaf people’ who study at Gallaudet University, the world’s only university for deaf people, view their past, present, and future experiences through the lens of the ‘figured world’ of Gallaudet. In comparison with negative or limiting cultural constructions of deaf identity in their country of origin, cultural resources available at Gallaudet, such as deaf cultural rhetoric, sign language and deaf space, enable them to form positive (transnational) identities of ‘strong deaf people.’ Deaf peers create a ‘zone of proximal development’ that contributes to the personal development of international deaf people. This identity formation is marked by tension; as ‘translated [deaf] people,’ international deaf people constantly move between different cultural constructs of deaf identity and develop multiple identities. ‘Self-authoring’ may lead to the development of an ‘authorial stance’, which enables them to provide an adequate answer to new and changing situations. When returning home, this empowered deaf identity construction inspires and guides translocal agency. Acting as a ‘strong deaf person’ includes advocating for an equal position in society, both for oneself and for deaf peers. In this process of intercultural conflict and negotiation, deaf cultural identities may be transformed again.

[deaf identity, empowerment, agency, transnational contact, personal development]

Gallaudet University (US) impacted me in a huge way. Before I came here, in Nigeria, I felt that I was a second-class citizen. Hearing people were above us. I did not know how deaf people lived in other countries, so when I came here and saw that deaf people were empowered and have rights, that women have rights, then I felt really... .. When I flew home, my behavior was very different. My family noticed that I was a different person since my life changed a lot. I learned so many things, like how to be a leader, about your rights, what you can do. ... Deaf people have abilities, so we can’t let hearing people tell us that we can’t do what we are able to do. I want to share that kind of experience. ... We are human too. The only problem is that we can’t hear.

This quote describes the awakening of KK (deaf, female, Nigeria)¹ when she arrived at Gallaudet University, the world’s only university for deaf² people in Washington,

D.C. At Gallaudet and in the United States, deaf people are educated by deaf and hearing professors using American Sign Language, can be social actors and can manage their own lives (e.g. marry, graduate, set up a business, communicate with hearing people through interpreters and video-relay systems). This unique sociality stands in sharp contrast with the barriers deaf people experience in other parts of the world. This paper explores empowerment, identity, and agency through the life stories of 'international deaf people' at Gallaudet, i.e. non-American deaf people who came to study and live in the US and currently identify as international.³ What is their experience of arriving at Gallaudet? What does it mean to be deaf in their home countries and how does this identity construction differ from or conflict with the identity construction and agency developed at Gallaudet? What kind of identity construction is experienced as empowering and why? What happens when these deaf students return to their home country?

Human development, the empowering transformation of deaf identities, transnationalism, social change, space/place, and cross-cultural comparison of different meanings of deafness in different contexts are themes that come to the fore in the quote and in the other narratives. This brings up the question: what theoretical frameworks and tools of analysis are adequate for this case study? Identity has been studied in different disciplines, such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, deaf studies, and geography, each with its own strengths and limits. In an attempt to provide an adequate frame of reference, this paper has been developed from an interdisciplinary stance.

Varied and culturally situated deaf identities

Since their foundation in Europe and in the United States in the 19th century, deaf schools have been places where deaf children can grow up and acquire sign language in interaction with deaf peers. Deaf school graduates continued their socialization in deaf clubs close to the schools. Initially, there was room for manual instruction. However, towards the end of the 19th century and influenced by industrialization, deviance from the norm was less tolerated. After the Milan conference in 1880, sign language was considered a threat for deaf children's acquisition of spoken language and was prohibited in deaf education in most countries (Fisher & Lane 2003; Widell 2000; Burch 2002).

Oralism resulted in serious linguistic and cultural oppression of deaf people. Liberation movements in the 1960s provided new room. Influenced by sign language research, Total Communication philosophies⁴ were developed and adopted worldwide. In the 1970s manual instruction returned to the classroom, although sign systems⁵ were used rather than sign languages. In the 1980s and 1990s, sign language was recognized in some countries and bilingual programs began springing up. After the 1970s, mainstreaming policies also influenced deaf education, which led to the decline of deaf schools. After the Second World War, hearing aids – and, more recently, cochlear implants (bionic ears) – became widely used (Monaghan et al. 2003; Widell 2000). Also a new interest in the genetics of deafness has emerged (Lane 2005).

These trends are indicative of Western countries. Unfortunately, developments in non-Western countries are less well-documented. European and American missionaries under colonial influences and development programs established deaf schools, which have often adopted the philosophy and sign language of its founding and/or supporting country. Technological innovations are scarce due to a lack of economic resources (Monaghan et al. 2003; Barcham, 1998; Erting et al. 1994; Goodstein 2006).

In the last forty years, Deaf Studies scholarship, the global distribution of emancipatory discourses through increased transnational contact, and changes in local educational, political, social, and cultural contexts have contributed to the recognition of sign languages and the empowerment of deaf communities around the world (Erting et al. 1994; Goodstein 2006; Monaghan et al. 2003). However, human rights of deaf people are still violated in many countries, and sign languages have only been acknowledged in 44 countries (of which, 18 are European countries) (Andersson & Robinson 2007). The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) estimates that there are 70 million deaf people in the world, 80% of whom are living in 'developing countries' (World Federation of the Deaf n.d.). A recent WFD survey revealed that only 23 out of 93 countries provide a form of bilingual education in some schools (Haualand & Allen 2009). The lack of educational opportunities and the lack of sign language used in the educational programs cause high levels of illiteracy, and consequently unemployment or low wages and menial positions. Violations of human rights such as the right to vote, and examples of exclusion such as not being able to marry another deaf person are reported (Allen 2007; Joutsalainen 1991; Haualand & Allen 2009).

Against the background of these changing contexts, anthropological and sociological studies have documented culturally situated constructions of deaf identities. In the US, the UK and the Nordic countries, research finds a politicization of deaf identities (De Clerck, in press-a). After the 1970s, deaf people liberated themselves from medical discourses that branded them as individuals who needed to be cured, and instead identified as members of a minority group with an own culture (deaf culture) and language (sign language) (e.g., Jankowski 1997; Harris 1995; Fredang 2003). Recent studies in the Nordic countries find individualization and boundary weakening in young deaf people's identity. Political lobbying has been successful, and young deaf people have grown up with the use of sign language in different realms of life (family, education, larger society) and are able to take a more equal and inclusive position in society. Although a political basis is maintained, being deaf is viewed as an aspect of diversity in a pluralist society. This development can be illustrated by the re-labeling of deaf people as 'sign language users' (e.g., Haualand, Gronningsaeter & Hansen 2003; Fredang 2003).

Simultaneously, an evolution towards transnational deaf identities is found in young deaf people. Deaf people from different communities easily communicate, adapting their sign language, using international sign and/or picking up the local sign language. The development of transnational deaf identities is facilitated by a shared life experience of being deaf. Fostered by globalization, technological inventions and economical resources, many young deaf people travel extensively and develop trans-local identities (e.g., Breivik 2005; Haualand, Gronningsaeter & Hansen 2003).

Anthropological and social studies in non-Western countries have brought shifts in and conflicts between culturally situated identities to the fore and have called for a critical perspective on monolithic and one-dimensional conceptualizations of deaf identity, deaf culture and deaf community (De Clerck, in press-b). In Japan, Nakamura's (2005) anthropological study indicates a generational conflict as a result of transnational contact. Inspired by American deaf activists, young deaf people have developed political deaf identities, advocating for a 'pure' sign language. Growing up mainstreamed, they experienced linguistic and social exclusion. In their identification, they differ from a senior generation of deaf people who attended deaf schools and later deaf clubs. Voicing while signing, older deaf people view sign language as a mode of communication that does not fundamentally differ from Japanese. Nakamura raises the question of whether ethno-linguistic discourses will be able to find recognition in a homogeneous Japan that lacks the ethnic minority frame American cultural constructions of deaf identity have drawn upon; in Japan, deaf people have achieved recognition from the government as a disability group.

Woodward (2003) sketches a complex picture of deaf identities in Thailand and Vietnam. At the time of his study, he found (at least) seven separate sign languages. As in villages in other parts of the world where an increased proportion of the population is deaf, hearing and deaf people in Ban Khor have developed an indigenous sign language that is used in the local context. The majority of hearing people know sign language. Consequently, deaf people are included in all parts of life; there are no social institutions for deaf people. They don't develop separate linguistic or cultural deaf identities and do not identify with culturally deaf people in other parts of Thailand. Users of original sign languages, developed through contact with other South East Asian sign languages, have not had the opportunity to attend deaf schools, and have not established deaf organizations; they develop a separate linguistic identity but not a separate cultural deaf identity. Link sign languages and modern sign languages were introduced through deaf schools. Whereas the former developed out of contact with both modern sign languages and original sign languages; the latter are more influenced by Western sign languages than by South East Asian sign languages. Modern sign languages are promoted through deaf schools and through the establishment of deaf clubs and regional associations, which is a first step to a national association and identity. The establishment of the National Association of the Deaf in Thailand was a result of international contacts with other national and international organizations and was conditional to the development of a national linguistic (Modern Thai Sign Language) and cultural deaf identity in Thailand and the start of this process in Vietnam. Woodward notices that national identification has contributed to the empowerment of deaf people in Thailand. However, it has also threatened original sign languages: after the foundation of deaf schools and/or organizations, its users tend to identify with the modern or link sign languages implemented and give up their original languages and identification.

Branson and Miller (2002: 234) argue that western deaf communities have been unconsciously guilty of cultural and linguistic imperialism: "They assert with confidence that a Deaf identity is primary for all deaf people throughout the world, and

that all deaf people are members of an international Deaf community.” Conceptualizing deaf communities as national deaf communities and promoting national sign languages is problematic and oppressive for indigenous sign languages and deaf people. An emerging assertiveness on the part of indigenous deaf people has been noticed (also see Miles 2001).

This overview indicates varied and culturally situated deaf identities and deaf community emergence and development. De Clerck's (2007) ethnographic research with Flemish deaf role models indicates that transnational contact contributes to the transfer of deaf cultural rhetoric and the politicization of deaf identities. In comparison with less fortunate life conditions, visits to places such as Gallaudet, where deaf people can occupy more equal positions in life, are empowering. Haualand (2007) finds that deaf people celebrate the global deaf community in transnational events. For a community that is spread among the world and whose members predominantly live in a hearing world, these temporary deaf spaces fuel identity formation. This raises the question of processes and dynamics of empowerment, identity and agency in international deaf people who study at Gallaudet, which is viewed by the global deaf community as a deaf utopia.

Research method and analysis

The choice for an exploratory qualitative case study (Stebbins 2001) is motivated by the lack of systematic empirical scrutiny on this issue. To date, I haven't found any previous research with international deaf people at Gallaudet University on this topic. The research participants were recruited through a flyer that was posted at Gallaudet University. The Office of International Programs and Services (OIPS) also disseminated the flyer through email to all international students at Gallaudet University. To ensure diversity in the participant groups, additional participants were recruited through purposive sampling (Stebbins 2001), making up a group of 25 international deaf people from 18 different countries in Europe,⁶ Canada, Asia, Africa, South and Central America. The recruitment was open to all international deaf people at Gallaudet University who had experienced a turning point in their lives when coming into contact with deaf cultural rhetoric; all research participants identified themselves as leaders or role models in some circumstances and some ways. The group was diverse in gender, age, race, class, linguistic, and educational backgrounds and included people with and without deaf parents and/or siblings. As a deaf international scholar at Gallaudet, I knew and had shared experiences with international deaf people. I have found Ladd's (2003) concept of 'subaltern elite researcher' useful to reflect upon my position in the field and my academic background.

The research data were generated between August 2005 and May 2007. In ethnographic interviews, the research participants reflected on key moments in their empowerment, identity and agency. The interviews were conducted in American Sign Language (ASL), were videotaped and followed by a list of questions. This project has received approval by the Gallaudet Institutional Review Board.

Grounded analysis led to tentative generalizations and theory development (Stebbins 2001; Goodley et al. 2004). Preliminary research findings were summarized in a paper and discussed with the research participants in individual meetings to check whether the findings were acceptable from their perspective. I translated part of the interviews from American Sign Language into English; another part was translated by an interpreter and later checked by myself. The translations presented in this paper were read, approved and sometimes edited by research participants, who also decided upon their identification or anonymity.

Since the cultural turn in Deaf Studies, anthropological and sociological frames of reference, methods and analytical tools have been used to study the lives of deaf people (see De Clerck, in press-b); this study has benefited from theoretical frameworks.

Beck (2002) argues that an epistemological shift is needed in the social sciences for adequate knowledge construction of a transnational world. A 'methodological cosmopolitanism' (Beck & Sznaider 2006) is "a frame of reference for empirical exploration for globalization *from within*, globalization *internalized*" (Beck 2002: 25-26). As human beings our interaction is no longer tied to geographical proximity: "the sphere of experience, in which we inhabit globally networked life-worlds, is *glocal*, has become a synthesis of home and non-place, a nowhere place" (Beck 2002: 31).

The framework developed by (Pinxten, Verstraete & Longman 2004) is developed from a post-colonial perspective and through cross-cultural comparison. The framework responds to the debate on multiculturalism and interculturality and the danger of essentialized concepts of culture and identity that are increasingly developed and employed. The authors argue that the category of 'culture' is not able to take into account other factors that are in play in intercultural conflicts. The open-ended comparative model has been used successfully to describe different cases around the world and includes the contextualization and situation of identity dynamics.

The framework conceptualizes identity dynamics as a complex of processes of three material units interacting on the same level: the individual, group (individuals in face-to-face contact) and community (virtual interpersonal contact). Identity is constructed through dynamic interaction between these units, which are on a par with each other. For example, individuals are constitutive to the identity construction of groups and communities; belonging to different groups and communities is part of the identity construction of an individual. Consequently identity is dynamic and multi-layered.

Each material unit is constituted by and organized into dimensions of personality, sociality and culturality; the values on these dimensions are constantly changing (see Appendix). Personality refers to the characteristics described in personality studies in psychology: individuals, groups, and communities can be assertive, strong, et cetera. The difference between sociality and culturality is conceptualized as analogous to the syntax-semantics difference in linguistics. Whereas people are mostly not aware of sociality characteristics, and experience those characteristics as 'common sense' and deeply rooted, people consciously choose culturality characteristics as part of meaning-making processes. The notion of culturality has a more restricted meaning than the term 'culture' as used in anthropology:

What was and is studied under the name of 'culture' is seen as part of the complex of processes of individuals, groups and communities, a process we call identity dynamics. Only those features and phenomena which somehow or another involve the production and transfer of meaning are dealt with in the category of dimension of 'culturality' (p. 12).

Persons, groups and communities are agents and differ in their emphasis on dimensions of personality, sociality and culturality. These complex and multi-layered identities are only a specific and particular construction of identity, in a context of multiple and diverse identity constructions by others. Consequently, essentialism is also a particular construction of cultural identity and it should be viewed as such.

At each level, identity is constructed and marked by narratives and labels. People use narratives and labels to provide continuity in change and to assess their position in society. In turn, they are positioned in society by others who are using their own sets of narratives and labels.

The model is particularly useful to gain insight into differences in culturally situated deaf identities, and into the conscious mobilization and politicization of deaf identities, which is fostered by transnational contact. For example, a deaf person from the Democratic Republic of Congo narrates about the process of empowering identity transformation: "Because I grew up orally, I used to think that we, deaf people, used sign language for communication only. We had to speak because we were thought that speaking was a proper language". In these utterances, he refers to the use of sign language that was regular among deaf people (i.e. sociality) and not reflected upon. However, this sociality is limited to a few contexts, such as the playground in the deaf school (the children were punished for using sign language in the classroom) and the deaf center. When he learns from a signing American missionary that "sign language is a bona fide language", the use of sign language gains a symbolic meaning and becomes a community marker (i.e. culturality). This discourse and transnational identity formation enable him to advocate for the use of Congolese Sign Language as a language of instruction in educational programs and for a broader dimension of a sign language sociality in society (beyond 'deaf places').

Research findings

Holland et al. (1998: 52) employ the concepts of 'figured worlds' and 'cultural worlds' to refer to "a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others." For international deaf people, stories of how Gallaudet changed their lives are a genre in the cultural world of Gallaudet, and past and future events are viewed through the lens of the Gallaudet world. After discussing the stage before their arrival at Gallaudet, which is marked by negative or limiting ('local') constructions of deaf identity, I will highlight the cultural resources that enable international deaf people to construct positive and empowered or 'strong' (transnational) deaf identities. I will argue that Gallaudet can be conceptualized as a

'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978); international deaf people's participation in activities on campus and peer support contributes to their personal development and to becoming 'a strong deaf person'. However, this identity formation is not without conflict; as 'translated [deaf] people' (Rushdie 1991 in Hall 1995: 206) with personal histories and 'local' constructions of deaf identity, they develop multiple deaf identities. The empowered deaf identities developed at Gallaudet guide international deaf people's translocal agency when returning to their geographical home. Acting as a strong deaf person includes advocating for an equal position in society for oneself and for deaf peers and focusing on the capabilities of deaf people. The concept of 'self authoring' (Holland et al. 1998) illuminates the negotiation and transformation of strong deaf identities in 'local' practice and the production of new cultural resources that may lead to social change.

"I saw all these deaf people so strong"

Exploring the relation between deaf place/space and deaf identity, Matthews (2006) argues that diverse experiences of growing up in a hearing or deaf family, attending a regular and/or deaf school, experiences of functioning in deaf space, which is organized through sign language and visual orientation, and/or functioning in hearing space, which is based on speech and auditory orientation, may lead to multiple deaf identities. The narratives of international deaf students in the study represent diverse routes/roots (see Clifford 1997), however, they converge in the perspective that Gallaudet has changed their lives. This turning point needs to be understood from their experiences of growing up, studying, working in hearing space and encountering social barriers in their personal development. This is illustrated by the school story of JA, a deaf woman from South Korea:

I went to school for the first time when I was six years old – five years in American age. That school was a signing school, there was no speech. My parents didn't know (about differences in the language of instruction). There were two deaf schools and the signing school was cheapest. Most kids were profoundly deaf and signed. ... One time, my mom had seen that the children were all quiet on the track; there was no speech, noise. She didn't want that: "My daughter becoming the same as them and quiet, no..." So my parents struggled to pay the high costs and brought me to the oral school. The strong oral school was founded by nuns from Germany. I went there for two years. ... So first there was the deaf school with signing I entered when I was five. Ah! I absorbed it all with my eyes. That was a warm environment. But then (after one year) my parents took me abruptly to the oral school. I was puzzled again. Fine, learning to speak. The teacher applauded: "Good!" Maybe because I had some speech left from the time that I was hearing. Then after two years, the teacher said that I was fine and could go to a mainstream school. ...

Initially, my parents spent a lot of money to pay a tutor for me. I didn't understand the teachers, which means that all day, like seven-eight hours, I was lost and then at home I had to do it all over with the tutor. But then in the last high school years, I revolted. ... I argued with my parents and could study on my own. ... My personality developed and I

thought: why should I pay attention all the time if I have to do it over at home? I slept on the table in class. At first, the teacher tapped me on the shoulder: "Come on!" "I am deaf. I can't hear. I don't understand what you say." And then she couldn't respond anymore. OK, fine. So I took advantage of that. When the school finished, I was out with friends, socializing. ...

At my graduation day, all good students were applauded. During the last three years, I had copied notes from a friend. My teacher said: "Now we have to applaud for someone who did a good job and had a big heart." And she awarded my friend. That messed with my mind. Does that mean that they pitied me? You know, she was my friend, so it was normal that she would help me! But their perspective was different. What did it mean that they awarded her? Was I just a disabled person who needed help? I didn't feel good about that. ...

Of course, I was not motivated to continue advanced education. I wouldn't understand the teachers. Doing that again? No. I was tired. So I went to work for about seven years. I did several jobs in the hearing world. Then a friend asked me whether I wanted to become a teacher at the deaf school. ... Do you remember the second deaf school I went to? Yeah, the oral school. Things had changed and now they used both signs and speech. I worked as a teaching assistant and I really liked that. I felt: deaf children and me, we are the same! ... That time, a teacher from university came to the school for her internship and she trained the children on how to use the bathroom proper and knock on the door before entering. You know, knock! I was puzzled, I felt that she was stupid. I didn't mean to be rude, but I had to be straightforward. They are deaf, they can't hear! But she didn't want to accept that because all the children were watching and I was just a teaching assistant and she was the teacher. ... I thought it had improved a little but hearing people still forced them to act hearing! That was disgusting. Also the three other deaf teachers were really negative about being deaf. They weren't deaf inside. So, that means: what is the future for deaf children in Korea? ... I thought a lot about deaf education. I can teach deaf children but how? What methods work? I thought about that, I was confused.

JA experiences social barriers in education and employment. She is frustrated that she is viewed as a disabled person who needs help, rather than as someone capable who can study and be successful. Socializing with deaf peers, she knows that deaf space is organized differently and that deaf children should have room to develop deaf cultural identities.

Vygotsky viewed human development as the result of social learning through the internalization of cultural and social relationships. Handling a social perspective on 'defects', he focused on the social factors of disability:

Any physical handicap – be it blindness or deafness – not only alters the child's relationship with the world, but above all affects his interaction with people. Any organic defect is revealed as a social abnormality in behavior. It goes without question that blindness and deafness per se are biological factors. However, the teacher must deal not so much with these biological factors by themselves as with their social consequences (Vygotsky, in Kozulin & Gindis 2007: 335).

Providing persons with disabilities with alternative tools (e.g. means of communication) and ways for development and an adequate learning environment that focuses on their strengths would 'compensate' for the biological defect (Kozulin & Gindis 2007).

JA's daily confrontation with an educational setting that doesn't meet the needs of deaf children raises questions for alternative educational methods and alternative deaf life trajectories. However, she doesn't find answers in South Korea. Although her deaf knowledge inspires her to provide a deaf learning environment, the cultural resources available don't enable her to legitimize and negotiate her deaf knowledge and create room for a deaf way of learning.

In the narratives, the stage before entering Gallaudet in international deaf people's lives is marked by a negative construction of deaf identity: deaf people are viewed as people who have a physical problem that needs to be cured or as deviates from the hearing norm. As illustrated by the quote in the beginning of this paper, these views are often internalized. The social and cultural positions of 'disabled persons' and 'second-class citizens' and their lack of cultural resources to create or expand a sociality of sign language and visual orientation, set limits on their personal development. This quest for solutions to concrete problems, educational opportunities, employment, inspires international deaf people to embark for Gallaudet.

Socializing with deaf adults in the deaf club, DT (male, Colombia) realized that deaf people's limited access to education and the cultural position of deafness in Colombia channeled deaf people into blue-collar jobs. When he learned about the life of deaf people in the US and saw Gallaudet on television, he realized that there was an alternative:

My dad was a doctor and very successful, while these people weren't. That was strange, and it bothered me. Would that be my future? Because I am deaf? I didn't want that, working in a factory. Some people have got education, while other people haven't. What happened to them? They couldn't read and write. I visualized how that would impact me. I started planning, talked with friends some more and learned that the US was good because there were interpreters, job opportunities, comfortable living, and deaf people and so on. I had a friend who came back from the US and he said that he had finished college. I asked how he did that, and he said that he had interpreters. He also told me about how they used TTYs to communicate on the phone, and showed me a TTY. I thought, wow, I can do that and be successful. ... So that's how the US has always been in my mind. My goal was set. ... I knew about Gallaudet because of the protest in 1988. Four months later, I flew here to the US. I remembered the televised protest in Colombia. Deaf friends had told me about it. I saw all these deaf people being so strong and I was elated. That influenced me.

Gallaudet is related to imagining an alternative way of life and searching for a sense of belonging and an identity as a 'strong deaf person'. Imagination "allows people to consider migration, resist state violence, seek social redress, and design new forms of civic association and collaboration, often across national boundaries" (Appadurai 2000: 6). International deaf people share deaf life experiences in a hearing-oriented world (see also Murray, in press). Gallaudet is appealing as it provides "a focal point

and a cultural center for a widely dispersed deaf people, whose orientation (visual) and mode of communication (sign language) differ from those of mainstream society” (Peters 2000: 34).

Deaf people have traditionally viewed deaf schools and deaf clubs as “places of their own” (Van Cleve & Crouch 1989). Even when these organizations were controlled by hearing people, deaf people found (some) room to create deaf space. The deaf world has also had a long historical tradition of celebrating the global deaf community and a united deaf identity in temporary and transnational events such as congresses of the World Federation of the Deaf and the Deaflympics (Haualand 2007). As the world’s only university for deaf people and localized deaf space, Gallaudet combines the stability of traditional deaf places such as deaf schools with the transnational character of temporary events. Consequently, it has a symbolic meaning for the global deaf community: “... it has long been called the Mecca of the DEAF-WORLD. Indeed, Deaf people from around the world make ‘pilgrimages’ to this place, now Gallaudet University, toward which they feel some sense of ownership” (Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan 1996: 128).

These claims of ownership by deaf people are illustrated in the Deaf President Now (DPN) protest in 1988, when students closed the campus for one week to demand the first deaf president and a majority of deaf board members. The protest symbolized deaf people’s advocacy for sign language in the long struggle against oralism, which had begun because deaf people were not involved in decision-making (Jankowski 1997). Gallaudet has also hosted international academic and artistic conferences on deaf culture. At the Deaf Way I and II conferences in 1988 and 2002, more than 6,000 and 10,000 deaf and hearing people from all over the world celebrated deaf ways of life and were inspired to bring this unique sociality of sign language and visual orientation home, improving the lives of deaf people around the globe (Erting et al 1994; Tossman 2002).

JA learned about Gallaudet from a deaf friend who informed her about the Deaf Way II conference; it took her two years to convince her parents to support her stay in the US. DT arrived at Gallaudet to find out that he couldn’t afford the tuition fee. He would only achieve his goal many years later. For many international students, studying at Gallaudet is a dream come true, a miracle, something they had not thought possible or attainable. The journey of arriving at Gallaudet consists of visa procedures, searching for financial resources and negotiating with one’s family: “There are many things in life, but getting to this university is really hard” (TP, Sri Lanka).

Waking up in deaf space

When international deaf people are asked to look back on their arrival at Gallaudet, they recall feelings of shock and surprise. FA (Chile, male) describes what went through his mind:

My jaws dropped because I never thought I would ever set foot on the Gallaudet campus. It was big, and had professionals, everyone signing! I felt as if we all had the same feel-

ings, all part of the DEAF-WORLD – this was my true culture! I felt ... It was just like a movie, I couldn't believe it, as if I was still in a dream. It was impossible. Never in my life had I seen that. I had seen small campuses with hearing teachers, which wasn't enough. At Gallaudet, everyone was deaf and signing: people wore professional attire and had offices, and all that. It was so amazing. Very shocking.

The narrative of FA illustrates the concept of Gallaudet as a continuous transnational deaf festival. As a place where deaf people have found room to create deaf space, Gallaudet provides a “‘home’ – where one finds oneself and others like oneself; where one's identity is found or is reinforced and strengthened; where one is comfortable with people who communicate in the same way” (Peters 2000: 36).

De Clerck (2007) employed the concept of ‘deaf ways of education’ (Reilly 1995; also see Erting et al. 1996), to refer to the transfer of ‘deaf cultural rhetoric’ (see below for the emancipatory discourses referred to) and deaf ways of life through informal and transnational contact with empowered deaf peers. Coming into contact with these forms of deaf knowledge and a barrier-free environment for deaf people (Jankowski 1997) raises consciousness and is experienced as empowering. Some research participants use the metaphor ‘wake up’ to refer to this turning point in their lives, which stands in contrast with the period of time when they were ‘asleep’ (also see De Clerck 2007). It should be noted that international deaf people also mention moments of awakening in their life stories before their arrival at Gallaudet (or at deaf programs in the US). Transnational contacts transform deaf identities into glocal or cosmopolitan/transnational deaf identities:

Before I came to Gallaudet, one person from Costa Rica came to Chile and explained at a meeting about deaf identity and its importance. He made several good points. I was struck by the information and felt good because I finally had found my true identity. What he was saying was exactly what I was! Before, I didn't know. I often wondered why I did things, why I didn't understand things, but now I had found why – that means that I had these things, and had a strong identity. As he explained each point, it worked out. When I came here, I developed a stronger identity. ... It's like I am able to define in a good way who I am.

Jankowski (1997) identifies discourses and labels that have shaped the deaf empowerment movement in the United States and that also emerge as themes in the interviews. The rhetoric of *sign language* as a bona fide language is based on linguistic research on American Sign Language. The rhetoric of *deaf culture* enables deaf people to reject the disability label and perceive mainstreaming as cultural genocide. This establishment of a bilingual and bicultural identity legitimizes a positive perception of *deaf identity*. The emphasis is no longer on the individual person, but on the interaction of deaf people with society and the barriers they may experience when society is not adapted to their language and culture. These ethno-linguistic minority discourses enhanced deaf people's sense of pride and paved the way for a third rhetoric. The *can do* rhetoric is a discourse of equality: it counters paternalist discourses

and (internalized) oppression and enables deaf people to determine the course of their own lives. This rhetoric can be illustrated by the famous statement of I. King Jordan, the first deaf president of Gallaudet University in 1988: “Deaf people can do anything that hearing people can except hear” (Christiansen & Barnartt 1995: 54). King Jordan became president after the Deaf President Now (DPN) protest, which gained worldwide support and presented deaf cultural rhetoric to the world. DPN contributed significantly to the Americans with Disabilities Act, which granted US deaf people more access to society. These civil and also human rights discourses are also central in the narratives, often referred to by the concept *deaf rights* (Kaupinnen 2006; Rosen 1994).

Cole’s (1996) conception of cultural artifacts, based on cross-cultural psychology and anthropology and inspired by Vygotsky and others, can be applied when light is shed on identity formation as sketched in the life stories of international deaf people. People actively interact with the world through cultural artifacts. Cultural artifacts combine a material and a conceptual part and “ ‘open up’ figured worlds. They are means by which figured worlds are evoked, collectively developed, individually learned, and made socially and personally powerful” (Holland et al. 1998: 61). I argue that deaf cultural rhetoric and American Sign Language can be viewed as cultural artifacts that evoke the conceptual world of Gallaudet.

From a Vygotskian perspective and in the theory of Holland et al. (1998) ‘semiotic mediation’ enables individuals to liberate themselves from being determined by the environment and control one’s reaction and behavior:

I felt like in South Africa, I was in a small box. I needed space to liberate myself. Yeah, I couldn’t breathe, express myself. In South Africa, my name is D-E-A-F. In America, my name is [spells name] and that is a big difference (DS, South Africa).

The new cultural artifacts are viewed by international deaf people as preferred tools that provide them with an identity construction of a *strong* or *empowered deaf person* that (as a ‘higher mental function’ (Vygotsky 1978)) guides their interaction with other people and with the world: “The ability to organize oneself in the name of an identity ...develops as one transacts cultural artifacts with others and then, at some point, applies the cultural resources to oneself” (Holland et al 1998: 113).

Through ‘being involved’, participating in social activities at Gallaudet, empowered deaf identities are developed and the figured world of Gallaudet continues to be figured. TS (female, Barbados) shares her experiences:

It’s been four years now. I feel that Gallaudet has influenced me to change, yes. My English has improved, and I’ve learned that diverse people have different behaviors, attitudes. International people, and Americans, too. That exposure was a shock for me. When I was home, I moved back and forth between work and home. I didn’t socialize much, and I didn’t know what people’s behaviors or attitudes were like. I really didn’t know. My parents were quite strict and overprotective. But now that I’m at Gallaudet, I’m more independent....

I also learned a lot about myself through being involved in the International Student Club. It's a good challenge to try and encourage other people. The organization helps me to know how to work in a business-like environment, and learn the concept of teamwork, how to interact and see different people and that it is important to develop relationships and interact with other people rather than just doing nothing. I learned how to work with finances, how to work in different positions, how to sell things, how to have a successful organization and how to draw people to events. I have also learned during meetings how to disagree or agree with people, how conflicts arise and how to solve problems.

Before her arrival at Gallaudet, TS had limited access to both the hearing and the deaf world. From the perspectives of the interviewees, Gallaudet enables international deaf people to take up new social roles and discover new aspects of their personality, which leads to a different understanding of the person one is, the things one likes or doesn't like, etc: "Culture is integral to self-formation: in the absence of cultural resources and cultural worlds, such identities are impossible" (Holland et al. 1998: 115). Acting as a strong deaf person means being independent, going out in the world and knowing how to socialize, being assertive and confident, thinking positively ('nothing is impossible'), using sign language and/or writing. This stands in contrast with former lives of being dependent, staying home and not knowing how to deal with the world and other people, being shy and afraid, thinking negatively ('I can't'), using speech and/or hiding sign language.

The research participants emphasize that social interaction with deaf peers and role models from different backgrounds, who support them in their learning to participate in new activities and take up new social roles, enable them to live up to their potential. If they experience a problem, then the advice of (older) deaf people and/or teachers is sought. This can be illuminated by Vygotsky's concept of 'zone of proximal development', which refers to "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978: 86). Collectivism is a core construct in a deaf cultural identity (see Mindess 1999 on American deaf cultural identity; also see Ladd 2003) and individual success is seen as an achievement for the community. This reciprocal relationship stimulates the creation of a zone of proximal development, encouraging deaf people to support each other (culturality) and to 'develop themselves and contribute to the community'.

Translated [deaf] people

Teaching American Sign Language (ASL) and Deaf Culture to international deaf people who have just arrived at Gallaudet, TP (Sri Lanka, male) explains that it is important to make cultural artifacts available and support the development of empowered identities. To be successful, zones of proximal development need to involve shared knowledge construction in reciprocal social relations. This pleads for supportive learning environments and interpersonal joint activity settings in educational contexts (Hausfather 2001).

When I teach in ELI, many of the students come with a background that emphasizes no signing or are hard of hearing. I respect that, but I empower them with an open mind, by explaining and showing them videotapes of Deaf President Now. I also take them to the visitor's center and show them around, so that they can feel empowered through socialization, not by force. I simply give them the tools. Some of the students change, and that's empowerment succeeding. Their identities are important, to keep their hearing and speaking skills. It's their identities, but time will change their identities. ...

For example, I had one Arabian student who really impacted and inspired me, a very smart eager boy who loved discussion. I told him that he needs to be a role model in his country. He should graduate, go back home and lead and fight for deaf people's rights such as the accessibility of the educational system. His father has political connections; he should go back to his country and show the government how deaf people can change for the better. I look up to him. He's hard of hearing, can sign well, and is very smart. I keep telling him: study hard, keep it up, think positive. I want to give my students all the power, inform them and have them run with the information I share.

Analyzing the narratives of international deaf people, some ambivalence is found. Viewing oneself through the figured world of Gallaudet, they subscribe to the "myth of a singular Deaf identity" (Matthews 2006: 206) emphasizing that 'having a deaf identity' is crucial to their identity formation and brings clarity in contrast with 'feeling half' or 'feeling confused'. However, in the interviews, the research participants also challenge the controlling aspects of this construct. Their experiences and lives before arriving at Gallaudet enable them to position the dominant identity construction at Gallaudet in relation to different culturally constructed deaf identities and to create space for varied deaf roots/routes, situating this particular identity construction in comparison with ('local') deaf cultural identity constructions, e.g. the use of speech that is necessary for the survival for deaf people in different parts of the world, the absence of the deaf pride and the d/D distinction, the absence of cultural meaning assigned to having deaf parents, and required assertiveness and active discussion and participation in US classrooms. AZ (Greece) mentions that it is hard to negotiate the concept of deaf identity in the absence of the multicultural framework on which the US society is based:

Often I use 'identity', but that's an American thing. In Greece, they say, "Identity? What does that mean?" They don't know. ... Here in America, it's easier because of so many cultures, and people understand. In Greece, there's one culture and one identity, and that's being Greek.

International deaf people continuously move between culturally constructed identity dynamics. The 'here' always implies a 'there': "'here' is an intertwining of histories in which the spatiality of those histories (there then as well as there here) is inescapably entangled. The interconnections themselves are part of the construction of identity" (p. 139). In a state of *constant comparison*,⁷ the trajectories of people, experiences, and lives in their home countries are connected with those at Gallaudet and in the US

in “a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local” (Massey 1994: 154). Salman Rushdie (1991, in Hall 1995: 206) used the concept of *translated people* to refer to people who

... speak from the ‘in between’ of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another, and thus finding ways of being both *the same as* and at the same time *different from* the others amongst whom they live (Bhabha 1994). Of course, such people bear the marks of the particular cultures, languages, histories and traditions which ‘formed’ them; but they do not occupy these as if they were pure, untouched by other influences, or provide a source of fixed identities to which they could ever fully ‘return’.

The people I interviewed for my research are multilingual, moving back and forth between the spoken and written language(s) and sign(ed) language(s) used in their geographical homes, and English and ASL, the languages used at Gallaudet. Matthews (2006) finds that ASL competence organizes social life at Gallaudet University, placing American deaf students of deaf parents with an ASL background at the deaf center. This is a governmentality and territoriality that excludes particular groups of students who haven’t mastered ASL (yet) and for whom educational and social access at Gallaudet University may be problematic: “Thus while Gallaudet University is arguably Deaf space, a particular form of deafness dominates a particular set of power-geometries (Massey 1998) that locates students differentially as in or out of place” (Matthews 2006: 206). Although Gallaudet provides room for difference through student clubs such as the Black Deaf Student Union, the International Student Club, and the Asian Pacific Association and through awareness raising via lectures and workshops on diversity, experiences of linguistic, ethnic and racial discrimination were shared in the life stories (see also Stuart & Gilchrist 1991).⁸ An increased awareness of those axes of difference and a call for a Gallaudet united in diversity were central in the recent protest in 2006.

Feelings of difference and exclusion and identification as ‘international’ as opposed to ‘American’ are also related to structures that apply to deaf international students only such as double tuition fees, which create pressure to compensate for limited financial resources by work and scholarships. Some research participants mention frequent socializing with international students, while other people have been at Gallaudet longer and have become comfortable socializing with the entire Gallaudet population and are even employed in ASL fields. All research participants emphasize the positive aspects of Gallaudet, recognizing that “there is a definite need for Deaf spaces like Gallaudet where ASL is dominant to provide a platform from which to resist the hegemonic nature of hearing space” (Matthews 2006: 206).

The quote of TP on his support to international deaf people illustrates that, in the world of Gallaudet, leadership is viewed as a significant outcome of being a *strong deaf person* (culturality). This includes standing up for your rights, ‘showing’ strong deaf and ‘exposing’ the world to sign language and deaf culture, ‘rolling up your sleeves’,

'waking up' deaf peers and creating a 'ripple effect of empowerment'. Reaching out to deaf people in different parts of the world has been one of the strategic goals of the university, and as a deaf Mecca, Gallaudet has assumed a leadership role in global deaf empowerment (e.g. Prickett 2002; Walter 1989).

Searching for negotiation space and tools

Returning home, international deaf people also return to the 'local' constructions of deafness from which they have distanced themselves by forming an empowered transnational and translated deaf identity. In the interviews, international deaf people emphasize that they carry over the self-esteem and focus on the capabilities of themselves and deaf peers they acquired at Gallaudet to 'local' contexts. A 'capability approach' (Nussbaum 2006) is cross-cultural and leaves room for contextualization. While this is a crucial factor to international deaf people's emancipation process, the interviews reveal intercultural conflicts and negotiation processes. On his arrival at Gallaudet, JM (Botswana, male) was very surprised to see deaf people drive, something which he had never seen in Botswana. He learned to drive and even managed to have his own car. When he visited Botswana after a couple of years during summer break, he wanted to drive in his country too. However, he was confronted with a sociality of spoken language and exclusion of deaf people:

In America, people from outside [hearing people] can sign. I go to an office and people sign. When I go to my country, then I have to write, slow communication. Sometimes hearing people in my country will not help deaf people. ... That happened for the first time when I wanted to drive in my country. I went to the office and told that person: "I am deaf. I came here to see you because I want to drive." And the woman said: "Oh." She laughed: "You are deaf?" "Yes." "Oh." And she gave me a form: "You go and fill out the form and when you are done, you come back." So I filled out the form and when that was done, I came back. There was a line of people waiting, all hearing people, and I joined the line. I got to the desk and I gave her the paper. The person looked at me and talked to me. I told her: "Here you are. I am deaf." "Wait here please." And she put me on the side: "Wait, wait." The hearing people moved on in the line, moved on, and moved on. What is that? I became upset. I left, I gave up. Then I stayed at home and I wondered: Why are hearing people there in the line, whereas deaf can't be? Why are they different?

Back in the US, he reflected upon sociality conflicts (spoken language versus sign language and deaf people as people who are not treated equally and not supposed to drive versus deaf people as drivers and participants in society) and realized that he would have to advocate for the things that are common sense at Gallaudet and in the DC area. While distancing himself from his old identity construction, he also realized that the new identity construction he developed at Gallaudet, which empowered him and inspired him to his agency, needed transformation before it would be useful in Botswana. He is in need of common ground (writing) for intercultural communica-

tion and negotiation (Pinxten 1999). He realizes that he needs to produce new cultural resources to create an equal position as a deaf person. Exploring different strategies, he shifts to the culturality level and the discourses available at Gallaudet:

What I see here in America now, is that deaf people have their own rights, the same rights as hearing people. I was thinking and I remembered that before I arrived in America, in my country, I didn't know about deaf rights. All people have, must have rights and can do the same things as hearing people do. ...

After his graduation, JM returned to Botswana where he successfully employed this strategy and drives comfortably now. He feels "well equipped," explaining to officers "that deaf people are human beings and deserve equal rights and treatment as normal people" (JM, personal communication, February 6, 2008). The only barrier left is the lack of interpreters at the motor vehicle department. His education (both formal and informal) and the authority status and cultural position gained by his degree enable him to successfully negotiate his newly acquired identity as an equal citizen in a different environment. Right before returning to Botswana, he concluded the interview with the statement: "I don't worry because I have my education." He wishes for all deaf people in Botswana to get education and learn to read and write, which is needed to communicate with the outside world.

Holland et al. (1998) draw upon Bakhtin's theorizing on power, status, conflicts and struggles and situations of heteroglossia to complement Vygotsky's sociogenetic concept of the self. This is found in the label of 'self-authoring':

A Bakhtinian 'space of authoring' is then very much a particular 'zone of proximal development,' and one that is extremely important in an explication of the development of identities as aspects of history-in-person. Bakhtin does not take development as the center of his concerns, as does Vygotsky. Yet he does write about differences between the neophyte, given over to a voice of authority, and the person of greater experience, who begins to rearrange, reword, rephrase, reorchestrate different voices and, by this process, develops her own 'authorial stance' (Holland et al. 1998: 183).

As the example of JM illustrates, it may take a while before an 'authorial stance' is developed that can provide an adequate and new 'answer' to a particular situation involving social relations with other persons who also occupy cultural positions. This new form of practice has become a cultural artifact that is significant to the mediation of behavior in future activities and as such is a heuristic product: "a Vygotskian approach [that] values the cultural production of new cultural resources can be seen as means, albeit a contingent one, of bringing about social and cultural change" (Holland & Lachicotte 2007: 116).

In the interviews, emancipation can be defined as deaf people's efforts of advocacy towards a broader use of sign language in different realms of life (i.e. a broader dimension of the sociality dimension) and the creation of an equal status as citizens and human beings.

While applying the concept of 'self authoring', I need to add a deaf critique on the primacy of voice in concepts developed by Vygotsky and Bakhtin – which need to be situated in their period of time.⁹ 'Phonocentrism' is viewed as the ontological orientation on which institutionalized audism (control over deaf people) is based and which leads to oppressive practices, for example in science (Bauman 2008).

After having learned about empowerment at Gallaudet University, LA (female, Mexico) was very motivated to empower deaf people in Mexico, her home country. Although she grew up in a deaf family and using sign language was an evident sociality for her, she had internalized standard views and thought that speech was a bona fide language, whereas sign language wasn't. At Gallaudet, she learned that ASL was a natural language equal to spoken English (culturality). That boosted her self-esteem. Consequently, this inspired her to share her knowledge with deaf peers. She still identified as Mexican, so her stay in the US led to a translated identity construction. When she returned to Mexico after many years, she became aware of this identity construction when she encountered resistance to her attempts to empower the deaf community there:

I excitedly explained what I knew and they were immediately resistant. I was stunned. Mexican deaf people were very resistant, and I found it impossible because I myself was a native of Mexico just like them, and I could still sign with them. But that wall was up and I was shocked. I decided to say nothing, and stayed in Mexico City DF for two months. And I realized that it would be better for me to stay quiet rather than explaining that ASL or LSM [Língua de Sinais Mexicana, Mexican Sign Language] is a language. It was better for me to just visit, chat with people, and say nothing. Interestingly enough, I met a few deaf people – and they all identified themselves as hard of hearing instead of deaf. I sat there puzzled. After chatting a while, I asked him, "Are you really hard of hearing?" He said, "No, I'm deaf, but I prefer to be called hard of hearing." I nodded as if I understood, even if I didn't. Inside me I was really enthusiastic about providing them with empowerment.

In the Mexican deaf community, it was common sense for deaf people to use sign language in the deaf club (sociality). Deaf people had internalized the labels of mainstream society that refer to a spoken language sociality. This hearing orientation places hearing people in the center and deaf people in the margins; consequently the label 'hard of hearing' increases their chances of social acceptance and success (see Padden & Humphries 1988). In the US, ethnic minority frameworks have enabled deaf people to identify as culturally deaf (i.e. Deaf), referring to a deaf world sociality that places deaf people in the center. When LA emphasized the culturality level, employing the rhetoric that has been useful for deaf people's emancipation in the US, a conflict emerged. She realized that this discourse and her construction of deaf identity as it came to the fore in her behavior in concrete situations were viewed by Mexican deaf people as non-Mexican, i.e. American/transnational. Looking for a solution, she strengthened Mexican deaf people in their collectivist constructs and placed herself at a more egalitarian (and Mexican) position for the rest of her stay.

Her narrative illustrates the role of common participation, doing things together and sharing in intercultural negotiation (also see Pinxten 2003). In her self-authoring, LA shifts between different cultural constructions of deafness:

I had to do a self-assessment because I had never envisioned myself as having American attitudes. ... I had learned about empowerment from American deaf communities and from Gallaudet University. Perhaps I was using approaches to encourage empowerment that might have felt oppressive to deaf Mexicans since deaf consciousness hadn't been developed yet and the community hasn't been exposed yet to empowered deaf people. ... On the very last evening I was there, a friend came up to me and said, "I want to know more about LSM." I thought to myself, why wasn't this two months ago? Why wait until the very last night?! I left for home and didn't feel good about what happened.

Although both discourse and discourse on practice suggest a pragmatic and contextualized stance on deaf identity, in their conscious rhetoric international deaf people employ the perspective of a singular deaf identity. Evaluating oneself and others through the Gallaudet lens, deaf people who haven't come into contact with deaf cultural rhetoric yet are viewed as people who 'don't know' yet or who are 'asleep'. Deaf communities that are not (yet) organized to advocate for deaf rights are viewed as communities that need leadership training. Comparison of the life trajectories of deaf people in different parts of the world is part of the daily discussion among deaf international students, and a post-colonial awareness (e.g. of the use of indigenous sign languages) is emerging. However, post-colonial critiques of the use of monolithic and one-dimensional concepts of deaf identity and imperialist notions of empowerment were not available in informal context at Gallaudet during the time of the study and don't appear in the narratives. When LA found the confidence to work successfully on a project for community development with an NGO that supported deaf people in Kenya, the authorial stance she developed from her experiences in Mexico inspired her translocal agency, starting from the capabilities of deaf agents in (g)local contexts:

I flew to Kenya and the first thing I told myself: 'Do not try to empower these people. Show Kenyans that you respect their language and culture.' I didn't want to make the same mistake I had made before. I socialized and listened to Deaf Kenyans' experiences and needs. I used KSL [Kenyan Sign Language] and respected their cultures. I built a relationship with the students there and that wall of resistance slowly crumbled. With that, they started asking me what to do. I learned from my mistake.

Conclusion

Through the life stories of 'international deaf people', i.e. non-American deaf people who came to study and live at Gallaudet University and identify as international, I explored key moments in deaf identity, agency and empowerment. Grounded analysis is combined with analysis through a multi-dimensional and multi-layered framework

of identity dynamics (Pinxten, Verstraete & Longman 2004). Additionally, I employed analytical concepts from the theory of Holland et al. (1998), which is inspired by the sociohistorical school. Tentative generalizations and hypotheses were developed (Stebbins 2001).

International deaf people identify with the 'figured world' (Holland et al. 1998: 52) of Gallaudet. Coming into contact with deaf cultural rhetoric and a barrier-free environment at Gallaudet (deaf space), in comparison with negative constructs of deaf identity and social barriers experienced in their geographical homes (hearing space), is experienced by international deaf people as a turning point or *awakening* (also see De Clerck 2005). The 'cultural artifacts' (Cole 1996) available at Gallaudet enable international deaf people to develop positive and *strong deaf* identities. Peer and/or teacher support also create a 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978), which contributes to international deaf people's personal development.

Although, rhetorically, a singular deaf identity is claimed, the term 'translated (deaf) people' (Rushdie 1991 in Hall 1995: 206) is more adequate to refer to the multiple identities that come to the fore in the interviews. International deaf people situate the deaf identity construct dominant at Gallaudet in relation to constructs of deaf identity available in their geographical homes. Returning to their countries of origin, their newly acquired identities as strong deaf people are a platform for emancipatory and translocal agency. The cultural artifacts acquired at Gallaudet are experienced as useful in this process of learning intercultural negotiation and communication (Pinxten 1999; Pinxten 2003); a focus on the capabilities of deaf people can be employed cross-culturally and leaves room for contextualization (see Nussbaum, 2006). The label 'the authoring self', inspired by Bakhtin (Holland et al. 1998: 32), illuminates how international deaf people move between and rearrange different culturally situated constructions of deafness, and how they learn to develop an 'authorial stance' that can provide an adequate response to a new situation. This new cultural form then becomes a cultural artifact that mediates future behavior and may contribute to cultural change.

In Deaf Studies, in agreement with the views of the research participants in the study, the development of political and essential deaf identities is often seen as an end point (e.g. 'having a deaf identity' or 'becoming a full deaf person'). This study suggests that deaf identities are learned through practice in social contexts, depending on the cultural resources available; deaf identities continue to develop and transform. From this perspective, the awakening and politicization of deaf identities is a particular stage in contextualized emancipation dynamics.

A comparative and intercultural perspective and insight into culturally constructed identity dynamics and meanings of emancipation and empowerment can contribute significantly to successful self-authoring and negotiation that can enable deaf people to live up to their potential. Gallaudet students may benefit from these frameworks. A partial, situated deaf experience can stimulate deaf people to reflect on their own perspectives, learn different views and support each other in a contextualized and self-reflexive 'politics of empowerment' (Collins 1990).

This paper suggests that a sociocultural approach can contribute significantly to Deaf Studies; the concepts applied in this paper need further exploration. Simultane-

ously, Deaf Studies and concepts of audism and phonocentrism provide criticism to the sociohistorical school. Since this is a first and exploratory study, this topic should be examined further in future research that involves the study of practice; a specific focus on the intertwining of axes of difference is called for.

Notes

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- 1 In the quote, consciousness-raising of gender also comes to the fore. The quote indicates an intertwining of different axes of difference. However this discussion falls beyond the scope of this paper.
- 2 In Deaf Studies, the distinction between 'deaf' and 'Deaf' is often used to refer, respectively, to audiological and cultural perspectives on deafness. Within the context of Gallaudet the research participants also employ this distinction, identifying as Deaf. Since deaf identity dynamics are "in a constant state of flux within the deaf community" (Fjord 1996: 66 in Breivik et al. 2002: v), which is illustrated by this study, I do not use the d/D distinction in the present paper.
- 3 It is important to notice that not all non-American deaf people who came to study and live at Gallaudet and in the US (continue to) identify as 'deaf international'. A research participant who has lived in the US for many years mentions that he is proud to emphasize that he's from South Africa and to call himself 'South African' or 'African American', whereas his deaf brother identifies as 'American'. These differences in identification would be an interesting topic for further research. My recruitment poster advertised for international deaf people to participate in a study on deaf empowerment and as such attracted research participants who identified as international and had an interest in the topic of deaf empowerment and leadership.
- 4 Total communication starts from the point of view that deaf people should be able to use all kinds of forms of communication in interaction with hearing people – oral, written, as well as manual forms (Schermer et al. 1991).
- 5 In sign systems the grammar of spoken language is used in combination with signs of the local sign language.
- 6 The length of this paper is limited and I predominantly focus upon experiences of people from non-Western countries. Although European and Canadian research participants have more services at their disposal, their experiences are similar. Those who attended bilingual deaf schools were familiar with deaf cultural rhetoric before arriving at Gallaudet; they ex-

perienced the large number and diversity of deaf people and opportunities for participation and leadership as empowering. People from the Nordic countries are not represented in the sample.

- 7 The contribution of these student clubs to creating room for difference is illustrated by Yerker Andersson's personal view on changes at Gallaudet since his arrival at Gallaudet in 1955 as an international deaf student from Sweden: "During my first years, we knew that we would not survive if we could not get adjusted. Besides, we could not discuss foreign issues because many US students tended to believe that the US was superior to all foreign countries in all the ways. We simply were willing to get adjusted to the US. When foreign clubs came up on campus, I got a feeling either that new foreign students were more resisting a quick acceptance of the US or that US people were more tolerant or aware of changes in other countries" (personal communication, 25 February 2008).
- 8 Thanks to Yerker Andersson for paying attention to this perspective.
- 9 Zaitseva, Pursglove and Gregory (1999: 9) reflect on Vygotsky's impact on deaf education in Russia and his views: "While Vygotsky perceived sign language as limited in some aspects, nevertheless, he always considered that it had a role in the education of deaf pupils."

Appendix: A schematic overview of the analytic framework as developed in Pinxten and Verstraete (2004: 8-9)

- 1 *Individual identity dynamics* are constituted and reorganized constantly by changing values on three parameters or dimensions:
 - personality: the physical and psychological make-up of each individual: strong, shy, emotional, beautiful, intelligent, masculine/feminine, young/old, etc;
 - sociality: the forms and means to fit into transpersonal settings: sociable versus individualistic, integrated versus displaced, etc;
 - culturality: the meaningful aspects in individual identity: a conscientious individual in the Christian religio-political tradition, a responsible capitalist in the present-day West versus a redistributive leader in Tuareg civilization before the emergence of the new states, etc.
- 2 *Group identity dynamics*: group identities are constituted and continuously rearranged along the following three dimensions:
 - personality: certain professional groups may require a particular personality type (e.g. salesmen should not be shy, cheerleaders should be young, etc.), while others will induce a particular mixture of personality types (e.g., the staff of a university department). Other groups may be indifferent to personality characteristics (e.g., age classes for puberty rites);
 - sociality: the 'grammar' of a group can be very specific (e.g., initiated males only, that is, only those males who know how to behave in the select group of village elders). The rules and habits of interaction in a hierarchical family are quite different (implying heritage agreements, respect, etc.) from those of a leisure group of cyclists;
 - culturality: e.g. the historical references of a family (with a genealogical tree, a religious belonging and an economic tradition) bestow different meanings on the group's identity than the revolutionary vocation of a group of partisans who fought for the freedom of their city in Ghent, Flanders during the Second World War.

3 *Community identity dynamics*: again the three dimensions are constitutive:

- personality: communities can select for, educate towards and allow special room for particular personality types. For example, Rambo and Marilyn Monroe are considered to be role models for the Westerner at the end of the second millennium, whereas they are seen as handicapped ‘half-persons’ (lacking feminine and masculine aspects, respectively) by Navajo Indians. The research into so-called national characters illustrates how personality types can be constitutive for the identity of communities: e.g. the male, dominant, conformist and collectivist Saudi as opposed to the feminine, creative and individualistic Swede (e.g., Hofstede 1993);
- sociality: different communities socialize their members in a different way, rearing them in a different set of structures and mechanisms. Thus, the social contract model prevails in the West, whereas kinship-based power for the elderly is the role in traditional rural communities;
- culturality: particular meaning-producing processes can operate on the level of communities. The processes will vary vastly at this level: e.g. the Christian tradition gives meaning to life and death and pervades the moral and political sphere profoundly in Western societies; the community bestows meaning through textual historical references, through interiorization in terms of good and bad by means of generalized education, and by organizing life in terms of punishment and reward at every level (including jurisdiction). The Navajo community, on the other hand, attaches meaning through contextualized oral referencing (in myths and ceremonials through rearing its members in a guilt-free control system, and through procedures to seek compensation and balance in conflicts rather than deciding who is ‘right’ and who is ‘wrong’ according to some pre-established written rule. The difference in meaning giving can be vast: an almost encompassing meaning system prevails in the religious communities around the Mediterranean, whereas ‘local’ meanings seem to leave room for realms devoid of meaning in other communities.

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