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Negotiating Deaf Identity in an Audist Educational Environment:

An Arts-Based Inquiry

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Abstract

An arts based enquiry provides an account of how a Deaf teacher negotiated her identity within an audist educational environment. This enquiry is supported by autoethnographic data gleaned from personal journals, artwork, and a brief discussion of language policy recommendations revealing institutional audism. The account reveals the encounters between the Deaf teacher and her interpreting staff who attempted to undermine her as a supervisor and a teacher. This narrative was initially interpreted as a conflict between strong personalities. In this study, however, the narrative is told against the backdrop of colonialism, and specifically, audism. With insights provided through the use of Edgar's (1999; 2004) research on imagework and with reference to Mignolo's (2000) border epistemology, this study makes use of the interplay between image and text and makes for a richer and multilayered story by revealing injustices and creating a much more compassionate view of all the players who were struggling with the pain of being subjected to audism.

Keywords: Arts-based inquiry, autoethnography, Deaf studies, Deaf education, audism, American Sign Language, educational interpreting

Negotiating Deaf Identity in an Audist Educational Environment:

An Arts-based Inquiry

This study aims to explore how I, as an elite Deaf subaltern (Ladd, 2003) and as a Deaf teacher in an inclusive education setting shaped by neo-colonial policies, negotiated my professional and personal identity in the early years of teaching in a resource room setting. In this study, I present myself as a colonized subject (Ladd, 2003) and as a target of audism, which evaluates Deaf people's intelligence and behaviour according to how well they can approximate the speech and behaviours of hearing people (Humphries, 1977, cited in Eckert and Rowley, 2013).

Statement of Reflexivity

I present myself as the only culturally Deaf teacher within the K-12 system within this Canadian province. Profoundly deaf, I had been educated with no support services in the K-12 education system. Upon leaving high school, I earned university degrees again without support services before earning the requisite graduate courses from Gallaudet University toward professional certification, allowing me to be a teacher of the deaf. At Gallaudet, I learned ASL, became exposed to Deaf culture and participated in the Deaf President Now movement in 1988, a successful bid to supplant a hearing president with a Deaf president of Gallaudet University. Later that fall, I joined the teaching faculty of a residential school for the deaf. After the exodus of Deaf teachers upon the closure of this school two years later, I remained for personal and family reasons. Moreover, I also stayed (perhaps from a misguided messianism) out of the conviction that the upcoming d/Deaf[1] children through the education system needed to have all

[1] d/Deaf refers to two definitions of deafness; "d" refers to the audiological diagnosis of hearing loss while "D" refers to membership in Deaf culture and the use of American Sign Language (Padden & Humphries, 2005).

language and communication options (including oral English, Signed English, and American Sign Language) concerning their communication and access to the curriculum. In doing so, I subscribed myself to a very dark and long period of negotiating my identity as a culturally Deaf professional at a large city board in the province mostly dedicated to the use of oral English and Signed English as the language of instruction. As a culturally Deaf teacher, I believe I was a target of audism.

Deaf People as Colonized

Batterbury, Ladd, and Gulliver (2007) argue that culturally Deaf people, otherwise known as Sign Language People (SLP), are more accurately defined as indigenous peoples rather than being described solely according to disability frameworks, a model that only partially describes the ontology, epistemology, linguistic, and cultural realities of SLPs. Therefore, SLP have more in common with the oppression and colonization experienced by First Nations peoples in that they are in need of protection concerning educational, linguistic, and cultural rights (Batterbury, Ladd, & Gulliver, 2007). While First Nations people refer to land as the arbiter of linguistic, cultural and spiritual realities, Deaf or SLP refer to their bodies in a similar way (Batterbury et al., 2007). While First Nations lost their lands to colonial enterprises, Deaf or SLP were barred from the use of their hands to communicate in their language to educators who, at the Milan Conference of 1885, voted overwhelmingly that all deaf people were to be discouraged from using sign language and were to be taught oral languages only (Lane, 1989). Therefore, the tight parallels between First Nations people and SLP suggest that Deaf people are colonized peoples (Batterbury et al., 2007). Colonial practices, which define SLP as feeble minded, incompetent, primitive, savage, and unable to think in abstract terms, include the removal of d/Deaf children and youth from the use of sign language, Deaf-authored knowledges,

Deaf-created spaces such as schools for the deaf, and from other Deaf people (Batterbury et al., 2007). Ladd (2003) has likened the neurological damage ensuing from the deprivation of language as a continuing holocaust of the mind. Furthermore, he suggests that when a d/Deaf child is damaged due to incomplete language acquisition or deprivation of language, the Deaf community is damaged as well (Ladd, 2003).

Language Planning Policy Concerning Deaf Education

A number of researchers have suggested that deaf education remains a site of colonizing practices despite the advance of neo-liberalism and acceptance of multiculturalism in educational practice (Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Ladd, 2003; Lane, 1989). Colonial practices concerning the education of the deaf stem from the viewing of the deaf child through a deficit lens and therefore in need of rehabilitation (Lane, 1989). The language of the majority and the powerful is English, and minority languages are considered to be of lesser value (Pennycook, 1998); in a similar way, sign language, known in North America as American Sign Language (ASL), is considered to be inferior and generally not useful for educational purposes by many educators (Ladd, 2003). The movement from the provision of educational services within institutionalized settings such as residential schools for the deaf toward the installation of d/Deaf students in inclusive learning environments has resulted in an entrenchment of the language planning policies favouring oral and signed English over ASL in Canada (Snoddon, 2009). The support of oral and signed English as the language of instruction is supported by the auditory industrial complex (Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Eberwein, 2007), which is an intricate web of hearing aid manufacturers, cochlear implant companies, surgeons, speech and language pathologists, audiologists, and teachers of the deaf who all work together to rehabilitate the d/Deaf child within a deficit framework. The auditory industrial complex thrives on a most attractive premise: the hope of converting a child

with a hearing loss into a hearing person and therefore into a full participant in the hearing world (Ladd, 2003). A monolingual approach in the form of oral English or Signed English would be introduced only upon the failure of the d/Deaf children to acquire spoken language is favored by the auditory industrial complex (Ladd, 2003).

The critical distinction between Signed English and ASL is that Signed English is a manual code that provides a sign for every word that is spoken (Wilbur & Spencer, 2003). Signed English, however, is most often not signed consistently and many of its morphological features become dropped, thereby presenting an incomplete and often nonsensical version of spoken English (Wilbur & Spencer, 2003). ASL, on the other hand, is a visual-spatial language indigenous to the Deaf community and cannot be divorced from the Deaf community and Deaf culture (Ladd, 2003).

Audism

The auditory industrial complex, with its emphasis on oralism and the case of increased need for accessibility to English, that is, Signed English, does not always deliver on its promises. Despite advances in technology and the use of Signed English, the median reading level of d/Deaf high school leavers is at grade 4 (Qi & Mitchell, 2012). The discourses associated with the colonization of the d/Deaf stem from the exercise of audiocentric privilege, which views Deaf people as having yet to approximate the speech, norms, and behaviours of hearing people (Eckert and Rowley, 2013). Eckert and Rowley (2013) further define audism as "a schema of audiocentric assumptions and attitudes that are used to rationalize differential stratification, supremacy, and hegemonic privilege" (p. 105). Institutional audism is defined as "a structural system of exploitative advantage that focuses on and perpetuates the subordination of Deaf Communities of origin, language, and culture" (p. 106).

Language Policy

In 1989, a Canadian provincial Ministry of Education Task Force reviewed the status of a residential school for the deaf (Houghton, 1989). The most contentious issue raised during the Task Force proceeding was that of language usage with d/Deaf students. The Task Force recommended that Signed English be used with students who required sign language to access the school curriculum in all inclusive education settings (Houghton, 1989). Furthermore, the Task Force cautiously recommended the use of ASL in a pilot project context and in limited situations (Houghton, 1989). One year later, however, the school for the deaf was closed, resulting in the exodus of several Deaf teachers to other provincials, thereby draining ASL and Deaf cultural resources in this province (Saskatchewan Minister's Advisory Committee on Deaf Education, 1990). Despite a court case concerning the deprivation of language to a young boy in a small city, which resulted in a court order to provide American Sign Language so that he could access a provincial curriculum, the province remains entrenched in a monolingual language policy favoring spoken and signed English to DHH children (Snoddon, 2009).

Border Epistemology

Within postcolonial theory, border epistemology (Mignolo, 2000) enables me to fully comprehend the subtler and more complex forms of audism informed by policy regarding language usage (spoken English, Signed English, and American Sign Language) in the classroom. Border epistemology (Mignolo, 2000), however, provided me with a much more sophisticated and nuanced interpretation. Within this border epistemology, I found that the tensions between the two epistemologies (standard and Deaf epistemologies) became heightened due to the lack of support toward the full utilization of a Deaf epistemology in educational settings and the lack of evidence supporting the claims of standard Western hegemonic

epistemology for oral English or Signed English as the only option for d/Deaf children and youth.

Methodology

The study will provide a visual narrative and autoethnographic inquiry into the impact of the language policy as articulated by a Canadian provincial Ministry of Education concerning language of instruction and how it influenced the interactions between myself and two mother interpreters.

Against the backdrop of postcolonial theory and border epistemology proposed by Mignolo (2000), the visual narrative inquiry incorporates the use of imagework (Edgar, 2004) supported by an autoethnographic analysis of my journals, which were written during the early years of teaching. I chose to provide a visual narrative inquiry rather than solely an autoethnographic account based on textual resources. I had written this story in a published creative nonfiction work, using my journals as the sole source of memory, fact, and emotional content. I did not refer to images, which I also created at that time. I did not consider the images as valid sources of data and they remained tucked away in a closet until I retrieved them for the purpose of this study. Since the use of imagework has the potential to bypass the usual verbocentric (or phonocentric) and logical categories imposed by western hegemonic epistemologies (Edgar, 2004), I wanted to see if I had left out vital information or had unconsciously ignored important realities in my written work that would resurface in my artwork. I also wanted to ascertain whether retelling this story against the backdrop of postcolonial theory would reveal further knowledges as defined by Mignolo (2000).

Since the images arose easily and spontaneously during these early years of teaching, I applied imagework as proposed by Edgar (1999; 2004) retrospectively for this study. Edgar

defines the imagework method as an active process in which the person "actively imagining lets go of the mind's normal train of thoughts and images and goes with a sequence of imagery that arises spontaneously from the unconscious" (Edgar, 1999, p. 199). Edgar (1999) outlines five levels of imagework; levels one to four involve the support of groups and therapists and the use of techniques in accessing the unconsciousness. In this study, the fifth level, passive imagework is used. Passive imagework refers to dream imagery arising spontaneously from the unconsciousness without mediation from a facilitator (Edgar, 1999). I found much of my work to be generated at this level.

Over a ten-year period, all imagework was done during times of intense negotiations concerning my professional and personal identity and concerned a critical series of incidents. I selected this methodology because I am a highly verbal, cerebral, published author of two books and several reports. Therefore, the attention to my artistic attempts is a means to honour other forms of knowledge within me, as opposed to relying upon my highly honed craft with words to tell a story. Furthermore, imagework mediates between conscious and unconscious realms within a person and can often reveal social and political realities (Edgar, 2004). A retrospective application of imagework enabled me, however, to link the art pieces with the political and social realities incurred by audism.

Furthermore, imagework is part of my practice as an educator; on a weekly basis, I continue to experiment with this methodology and regularly post my work on my Facebook page. I consistently find that this practice reveals thoughts, insights, fissures, and openings concerning my practice as a culturally Deaf educator working within a predominantly audiocentric environment. Cavallaro Johnson (2004) proposes that visual-verbal narrative inquiry enables teachers to retell their stories in a more powerful and meaningful way, moving

the storyteller from mere confessionalism toward critiques of social, cultural, and institutional realities. Finally, the retelling or exploration of one's personal experiences as a subaltern is also seen as a way for the subaltern to disrupt the colonial discourse and to provide counternarratives (Tsalach, 2013).

Narrative Inquiry

Introduction. The school division I worked for was not unusually audist. In terms of support for ASL, Deaf culture, and, by extension, the Deaf community, the school board was exemplary as it supported my decision to use ASL at the high school level and to use culturally appropriate materials in the curriculum, even though their language policy dictated the use of Signed English in the elementary schools. Many parents allowed me to introduce their children to Deaf adults and to facilitate their participation in Deaf community events. Yet my employer practiced laissez-faire audism in that it recognized me as a culturally Deaf professional and then continued to assume that I thought, taught, and behaved like a hearing person within my classroom.

Laissez-faire audism is defined by Eckert and Rowley (2013) "as a postmodern perspective where the human identity of the Deaf is acknowledged, but autonomy is denied or denigrated" (p. 329). For instance, I was instructed by a principal to write my own evaluations of my teaching abilities, as he didn't have time to come in and observe how I taught differently than a hearing teacher would. In this version of laissez-faire audism, despite my repeated entreaties to have someone come in and evaluate my performance and through administrative indifference, I was rendered even more invisible as a Deaf teacher. Another example of laissez-faire audism concerned my requests for interpreters at meetings and for professional development, only to be told to use the school interpreters (who were not trained and severely lacking in interpreting

skills) because the community interpreters (who were trained and qualified) were too expensive. Furthermore, despite my numerous emails and personal entreaties to provide training for the assigned sign language interpreters and to raise their salaries, I received offers of computers and reading programs instead. I saw these actions as an attempt to ameliorate guilt (Eckert & Rowley, 2013) rather than truly address the challenge of providing complete language models to d/Deaf students who needed a bilingual approach (that is, ASL and spoken English) to access the curriculum. In sum, laissez-faire audism at the institutional level ultimately stemmed from the privileging of Signed English over ASL and ultimately created a setting for individual incidents of audism on several levels within my place of employment.

Mother Interpreters. Upon my first day of work in my new position as a resource room teacher of d/Deaf and hard of hearing adolescents in a large high school in a Canadian prairie city, I was introduced to two educational interpreters who would be working with me. Lena and Mary were two mothers of deaf children who had interpreted for their children in the very same program in which I had been hired to teach and with which they had been working as educational interpreters for over fifteen years. Their children had long left the school and were pursuing their own well-paid careers. Within weeks, the two mother interpreters made several references to their "glory" days during which they had interpreted for their children in the very same program in which I had been hired to work.

I could see that the two mother interpreters struggled to sign well in Signed English. Mary demonstrated the most fluency in Signed English. She signed primarily in a pidgin signed English (PSE) and dropped many of the morphological markers associated with English in her signing. Although her face was somewhat animated, the pidginized form of English did not allow her to provide the eye and mouth movements associated with the grammar associated with ASL,

nor did she use classifiers, which are essential to providing rich linguistic meanings. In short, she did not possess facility in ASL, a visual spatial language, or Signed English. Lena had more difficulty than Mary with Signed English and was visibly less skilled as an interpreter.

Lena confided to me that she and Mary initially had not allowed their children to use Signed English until after seven fruitless years of oral rehabilitation. Mary's reluctant use of Signed English with her child had one caveat, however: that her child was to never participate in the life of the Deaf community and that they always were to use Signed English. She was adamant that her child was to participate only in the hearing world, and she arranged for her daughter to attend a small college in the United States, as opposed to sending her to Gallaudet University, the only university for Deaf people in the world. Furthermore, she encouraged her adult deaf daughter to interact exclusively with hearing peers and actively discouraged her from participating in the events and activities of the local Deaf community. Lena and Mary had formed close bonds as they advocated for their children, became educational interpreters and worked together for many years in various deaf and hard of hearing elementary programs and the high school program where we were currently situated.

The vital difference between Lena and Mary, however, lay in their supports and choices for their adult children. Lena sent her son to Gallaudet University for one year "to help him understand who he was" before supporting his decision to study toward a position within the medical profession at a Canadian University. Lena openly supported and appreciated the value of Deaf culture and ASL and positively indicated that the experience had raised her son's self-esteem. Perhaps out of recognition of me as a Deaf community member, Lena supplied all this information about Mary to me. Mary, on occasion, provided small tidbits that corroborated this narrative.

My entrance into the program was clearly unsettling for Mary and Lena, and they did their best initially to be part of a team. My persistence, however, in using ASL rather than Signed English, teaching English directly using a bilingual, bicultural approach to d/Deaf students who were six or seven years behind their peers in reading and writing, and my attentiveness to the emotional and social needs of the d/Deaf youth greatly upset Mary and Lena. They always had sent emotionally distraught d/Deaf students with an interpreter upstairs to guidance counsellors. Clearly, I had disrupted the practices, procedures, and the language policy adhered to by the two mother interpreters. To add insult to injury, I was more fluent in sign language, especially in ASL. I already held an English honours degree, and was accredited to teach senior English classes.

Despite my many qualifications, I was, however, an unknown quantity, being the only culturally Deaf teacher in the education system in the entire province and being situated in a Deaf community that was severely incapacitated due to the closure of the school for the deaf, the primary site of acculturation and transmission of ASL. Ontologically, I was a displaced person, supposedly "hearing" according to my colleagues and administrative personnel but really "Deaf" according to my own experience. The assumption that I subscribed to a western hegemonic epistemology and my own private convictions that I had a different epistemological basis for my teaching created an epistemological "crack" in my teaching and relations with students, teachers, parents, and administrators. This "crack" is defined as border thinking by Mignolo (2000), an epistemology that arises from a double critique of the Western hegemonic epistemology (which is largely positivist in nature) and the Deaf epistemology that I had embraced. This border thinking, which was imposed upon me by my circumstances, and my education rendered me as an elite Deaf subaltern (Ladd, 2003, McDermid, 2009). Unlike Spivak's (1988) subaltern,

however, I could certainly speak, sign, and write, all with considerable fluency. But as an elite Deaf subaltern, I was juxtapositioned between the expectations and perceptions by administrators and teaching colleagues and the Deaf epistemologically fuelled environment of my resource room, where I daily managed my students' fears, anxieties, anger, resentment, hopes, and dreams regarding their own negotiations with hearing people in their families and at school. Furthermore, I had to address the gaps in concepts, knowledge, and skills created by the long-term use of Signed English and introduce concepts in ASL, which was a language they could readily grasp after becoming familiarized with its grammar and structure. I was caught, however, between two linguistic and cultural communities, which had little to do with each other.

Soon, the relationship between the three of us, especially between Mary and me, became fraught with tension. A series of covert actions on their part ensued, including the correcting of signs I had taught to students and changing my approaches to English language instruction when I was absent or out of the room. Furthermore, they interrupted my classes and reminded me to include certain aspects of the English curriculum when I taught the students. In order to address the mounting tension, I asked them to read some articles explaining the philosophy behind using ASL within a bilingual bicultural context in the hope they could come to understand and therefore appreciate the changes I had made. Mary referred to a workshop that was provided for all educational assistants in the system, and said, "When you do the things that this workshop recommended, then I will read the articles." As I had not attended the workshop and was given no directive from the board office to use the materials from the workshop, we quickly reached an impasse. Clearly, Mary and Lena saw themselves as authoritative figures within the school due to their being mothers of successful deaf children. Ironically, my life experience as a profoundly

deaf oral person, my training as a teacher of the deaf, my acculturation into the Deaf community, and subsequent fluency in ASL carried little weight with them.

Victims of Audist Practices: Mother Interpreters

Lena described at length the quality and effectiveness of the support that she and Mary had received in their children's early years from individuals associated with auditory industrial complex in the province. Upon their children reaching the age of six, with very little language despite their concerted efforts, Lena and Mary decided to adopt Signed English and found that adopting a language policy recommended by the Ministry even brought about negative repercussions. "We were treated as if we were irresponsible parents, that we gave up too easily, that we were very wrong in our decision, and that we would destroy the future of our children by adopting Signed English," Lena told me. I could see, upon seeing the anguish in Lena's face, that this development was pivotal in their experience as mothers of deaf children, and that the pain of being shunned by those from whom they had sought support had scarred them immensely. Yet Lena's sharing this pain with me did not ease any tensions in the room; rather, the hostilities perpetuated by the two mother interpreters increased.

Individual Audism

I could not make sense of the contradictions in this room dominated by two mothers who had raised successful adult deaf children. Moreover, I could not comprehend their resistance to my use of ASL (especially from Lena who had sent her son to Gallaudet to learn ASL) and my visual teaching style. I couldn't figure out a way to appeal to the mother interpreters on common ground: that, in our experience of deafness, which was intensely personal for each of us, we had all been abandoned and vilified by the auditory industrial complex. Like the mother interpreters, my decision to embrace ASL and the Deaf community and to become acculturated at the age of

25 had been greeted with scorn and distrust from the professionals who were audiologists, speech and language pathologists, and teachers of the deaf in this Canadian province.

After days of thinking about this issue, exhausted by words, and dominated by fear and anxiety generated by Mary and Lena's hostilities toward me, I began to develop the practice of creating artwork to access my feelings about my work life. I would gather my paints and craft supplies and take a deep breath before the empty canvases before me in the hope that something from within would guide me. I allowed images to emerge through my artwork in response to the personal and political quagmire I had found myself in. I did not allow myself to think during this process and I completed the pieces usually within twenty minutes. I created this piece:

Figure 1. *Opera glasses*. All artwork by Joanne Catherine Weber.

This image of "opera glasses" in Figure 1 arose spontaneously and upon completion, I could see that I possessed two ways of seeing: one that was dominant and the other restricted or "barred." The unfocused eyes, the small unrestricted eye and the larger but penned or bracketed

eye, suggested that I was seeing the same thing in two entirely different ways, hence my feelings of confusion and disorientation. Furthermore, a mouth-like shape below accompanies the restricted eye, suggesting the association of speech with the narrowing of vision. The primary colors in this image (red, blue, and yellow) are often found in the work of Deaf artists who are working within the De'VIA tradition (Durr, 1999). The use of intense colors and/or contrasting textures and the emphasis on facial features all contribute to the depiction of Deaf people as people of the eye. In this image, my vision seemed out of proportion because of the undue emphasis upon hearing and speech within my own life.

Years later, when I embarked upon my doctoral studies, I revisited this piece and realized that my understanding of an alternative epistemology, that is, border thinking (Mignolo, 2000), gave me the language to interpret this piece beyond my initial interpretation that Mary and Lena were bullying me and I was being torn into two because of their actions. Border epistemology and the imagework helped me to understand that I had become marooned in a no man's land of sorts. In this "crack" between two distinct groups or cultures, stuck between these two established ways of thinking and learning (Mignolo, 2000), I found myself possessing a different knowledge better understood against the backdrop of colonialism (Mignolo, 2000).

Mignolo (2000) speaks of the disjunct experienced by the subaltern in terms of space and time. There is always the feeling of having to be somewhere else and in a time that is not defined by the present. In my case, that meant that I would, someday, somehow, become hearing and reach that blessed place. In the meantime, I had to live in this inferior and dreary existence (according to perceptions of hearing people) until I could marshal up the resources to become fully "hearing." This dislocation is an effect of colonization, the idea that one must refer to Western hegemonic thought, that one's thought processes are literally hijacked by colonial

constructs concerning how and where one is to be (Mignolo, 2000). At the age of 25, I began to correct this sense of dislocation by claiming my Deaf body and to honour it by using sign language. In doing so, I disrupted the discourse that I ought to be a hearing person and therefore speak in order to fully participate in the hearing world (Ladd, 2003). I had realized that I was always going to be equal but inferior no matter how many accolades I had earned (Andreotti, 2011). I had earlier abandoned this quest for recognition and I was prepared to pay the price of remaining in the province. Hence, I was shunned, scorned, and dismissed just as Mary and Lena were in their decision to use Signed English with their children.

I thought I had resolved this dislocation prior to my position in the resource room. But the opera glass piece suggested that the sense of dislocation was still in effect, that I was still being affected by colonial discourses concerning deaf education. All I understood at the time was that the two mother interpreters were inflicting audism upon me, but I was afraid to claim it or to play the "audism" card. I knew that they didn't see me as their equal. In short, I felt that they extended their beliefs about their own deaf children to me; I was a child in need of guidance, not a professional who could guide them. Yet somehow, I knew we were all on the same side.

Moreover, I wondered whether Mary and Lena, in their decision to use Signed English with their children, were determined to maintain hearing attitudes about deafness and therefore a deficit approach to deaf people. Their commitment to the use of Signed English suggested that Deaf people were incapable of learning through their own language. For Mary especially, it appeared that Signed English was a means to the participation of her children in the hearing world and that the Deaf community was not worthy of entrance. Lena's position was slightly more flexible, but her migration back and forth between Mary and me hinted at a deep sense of ambivalence about the use of sign language with her son.

Institutional Audism

We struggled on in this fashion for two more years. I was reluctant to bring this problem to the administrators, although I wanted very much to tell them that these mother interpreters were prejudiced against me because I identified myself as culturally Deaf and used ASL during daily instruction. I knew I would not receive much understanding due to the newness of the term "audism" which can't be found in a standard dictionary. The use of the term "audism" remains primarily within academic circles. In this early stage of establishing my professional credibility, I knew that this was not the time to explain audism to my supervisors. As Schick and St. Denis (2005) explain, our Canadian culture prides itself on being a multicultural society and yet attempts to charge other people as guilty of racism (or in my case, audism) is frowned upon.

Descent into Mimicry

At the same time, I did mention to my department head at the school that I was having difficulty with the two women. Her response was that I needed to figure out how to build a team with the staff I had been given. There was not much further discussion beyond that directive. Soon, another image came to me, that of swans in flames in Figure 2. This image was created with view to contrasting textures (another feature of De'VIA art according to Durr, 1999); the swans are depicted as smooth, shiny, and undifferentiated, while the flames are presented as stick like against a roiling orange, silver, and yellow background.

Again, through a retrospective application of border epistemology and imagework, I realized that the presence of dual swans engulfed in flames suggested that I was acting from a divided self; the self that was culturally Deaf and the self that engaged in mimicry (Bhabha, 1984), as a means to survival, economically, socially, and professionally. I knew very well at the time who I was mimicking - for instance, the audist establishment in the personage of the

Figure 2. *Swan in flames*.

Department Head who wanted me to think like a hearing person and engage in "team building," while failing to uncover the complex realities linking the pain in the two mother interpreters and my own pain as a culturally Deaf person. As an elite Deaf subaltern, I knew I had to be silent. Team building was not possible at the time.

Tsalach (2013) writes of silence as being a mode of subaltern resistance, which is a pregnant sort of silence, rather than a means of avoidance: "The dominant social rules in multicultural societies perceive it as inappropriate or tactless to engage with differences in public spaces. Those who point to these moments are accused of exaggerating, being too sensitive, making a fuss about nothing, or simply misunderstanding the situation" (Tsalach, 2013, p.78). In order to escape the mirrored selves, which are the two swans, one as the Deaf self and the other as the "hearing" self, I submerged myself in long hours of hard work. I ripped apart curricula and

reconstructed them in order to provide a more Deaf friendly discourse that supported visual learning, incorporated Deaf literature and history into curricular content, reviewed objectives and goals to ensure that I was indeed following the requirements, and integrated subjects such as English, Psychology, and Social Studies in order to provide schemas for the d/Deaf students.

Conceptualizing Resistance

As the disjoint between the Deaf self and hearing educator self- grew, I began to submerge my Deaf self in order to survive. I had adopted this form of mimicry with my peers (including the two mother interpreters) and my administrative supervisors. As with swans engulfed in flames, I dove underwater, looking for safety, looking for a place to be, far away from the scrutiny of the mother interpreters. Diving underwater and emerging yielded another image: The "black" garden in Figure 3, as I called it, was bordered by a pond comprising an oil slick, garbage, refuse, teeming with fronds of discarded plastic. The setting is twilight. The mirrors or shining objects placed among the fruit trees suggested a quicksilver sort of existence, a tantalizing flickering of lights that suggested a d/Deaf person's auditory experience: broken words, phrases, or snatches of vowels and consonants. Again, the colors are presented in strong contrast to each other, the black pond, bushes, and trees are textured with black gesso. I visualized myself as having emerged from the black pond, pushing away the slimy plastic, to gaze at the broken lights.

Years later, with the help of border epistemology, I perceived that the image suggested the colonial backdrop to my experience with the mother interpreters. The darkness, the twilight, the refuse, and the flickering nonsensical lights were the world I lived in, which suggested a surreal world. The image amplified the feeling of dislocation: my hearing self was in the dusty resource room marshalling the "hearing" educator image to those outside my classroom,

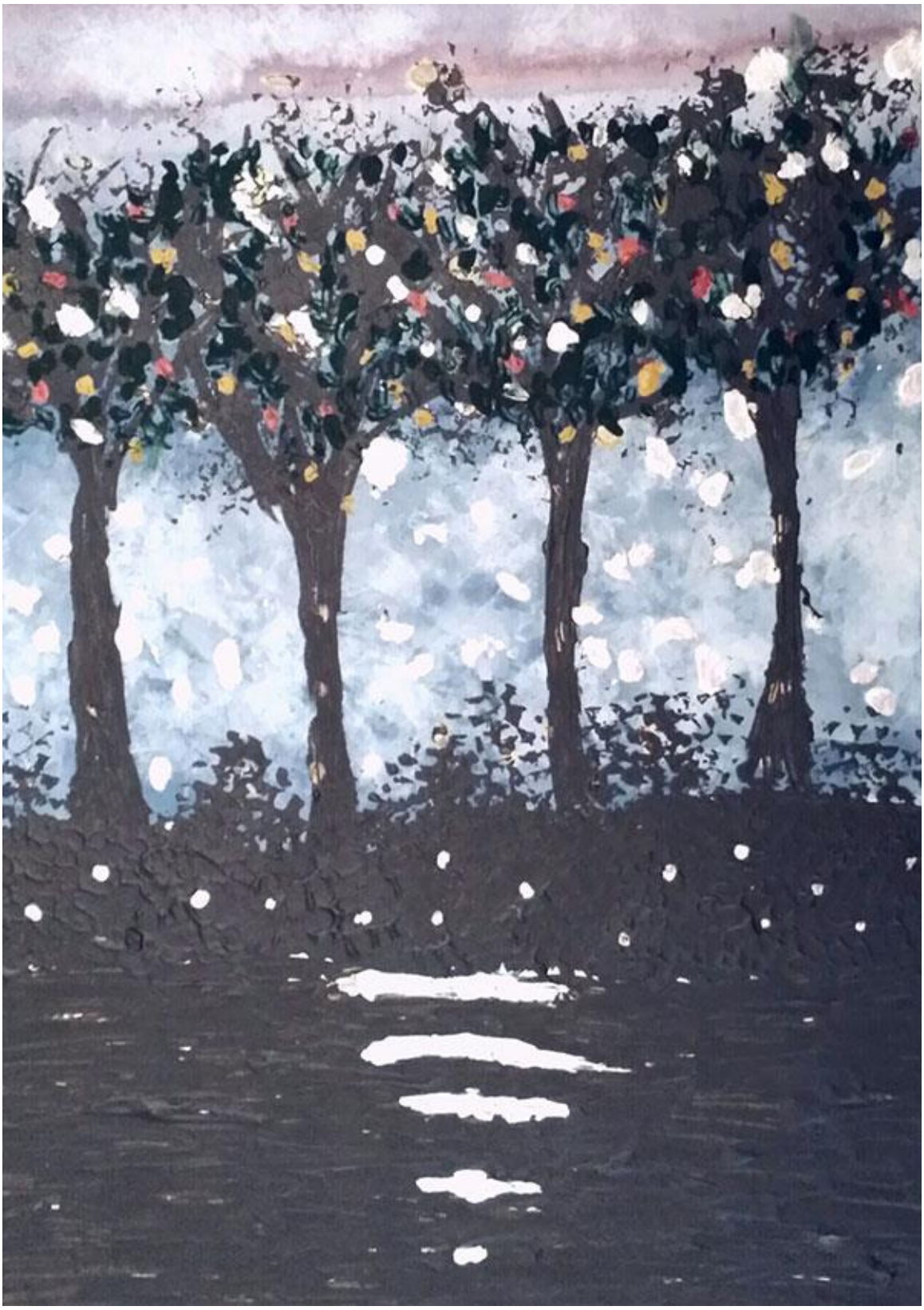

Figure 3. Black garden.

while under the watchful eyes of the mother interpreters, my Deaf self was floundering in a polluted pond, trying to cope with the dislocation brought about by audist practices. Mimicry, the attempt to approximate the expectations of my superiors, and the mother interpreters were facilitating a private re-articulation within myself of the realities surrounding me. I responded like quicksilver to any cultural expectation. With the hearing, I was hearing and used spoken English only; with the Deaf, I used ASL and I took care to make sure that no one saw how I slipped in and out of those identities, especially Mary and Lena.

The difficulty with the position I took, however, was that I felt I was not being honest with my supervisors, my hearing colleagues, and with Mary and Lena. I wasn't who they assumed me to be. There is a sense of irony within mimicry, a sense of mockery, and I could see it within myself. I scowled inwardly at staff meetings, shuddered during meetings with hearing teachers of the deaf (from other programs), and remained silent while feeling offended by their talk about their students being unable to make use of their cochlear implants.

Yet people continued to assume that I could hear well because of my excellent speech, and I continued to let them think that. It was too dangerous to let them know otherwise. My performance as a Deaf educator would be even more closely scrutinized than those held by my hearing colleagues. It was better, I decided, to be invisible, not to have anyone take an interest in my work, despite the longing I had to share my own struggles, thoughts, and discoveries as a Deaf educator with my colleagues. In short, I made sure no one knew who I really was.

Bhabha (1984) describes mimicry as a threat which "comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflicted, fantastic, discriminatory "identity effects" in the play of a power that is elusive, because it hides no essence, no 'itself" (Bhabha, 1984, p. 131). At the same time, I saw Mary as possessing the quality of "oil" that slips through one's fingers; I could not

grasp her, her thoughts, her positions, or real self. Ironically, at that time I had no idea that I possessed similar qualities and that she could have viewed me in the same way. It was quite possible that Mary was engaged in her own form of "mimicry," hoping to garner favour with "hearing colleagues," despite choosing to use sign language with her deaf children. Not allowing her children to associate with other members of the Deaf community was possibly her own form of "mimicry"; she would sign, yes, but not in an indigenous language that was still, for the most part, abhorrent to the professionals who subscribed to the monolingual language policy promoted by the auditory industrial complex in the province. Meanwhile I continued to see Mary and Lena as the "problem." Furthermore, while I viewed them as audist and oppressive, I had never entertained the possibility that I could also be oppressive and audist, especially toward my students or them. Yet, the imagework had facilitated a closer scrutiny of my journals, which suggested that I had been oppressive at times toward Mary and Lena and toward my students.

Pivotal Incident

Keeping my internal conflicts to myself, I waited and kept silent. A break soon occurred. I was summoned to a meeting that Mary and Lena had requested with my principal and board officials. My performance as a Deaf teacher was to be discussed and evaluated. I could sense the air of triumph from the mothers. The meeting got underway quickly, with the mother interpreters indicating how they were uncomfortable with me as their supervisor, how they disagreed with my use of ASL and how they felt they were not part of a "team." I remained silent. Then the principal said clearly (there was no interpreter for me at the meeting), that this was the issue of accepting new leadership, new ways of doing things, and that I was to be their supervisor. The meeting broke up shortly after that. The administrator of the deaf and hard of hearing programs at the school board level came to me right away and apologized that she and others had not given

me much support through this whole ordeal. But she did say, "When I first hired you, I was afraid you'd be on the wrong side, that you would not support oralism or mainstreaming." I merely nodded. The ordeal was far from over.

There was a strange sort of triumph in Mary and Lena's eyes after the meeting. Somehow they felt that they had "won," that they had been heard, despite the administration's admonition to them that they accept my new leadership. Somehow, I understood that. Audism had been at the root of the problem and it was never acknowledged or brought up at the meeting. But they had used their anger to put me in a weaker light, to bring me under the scrutiny of the principal and school board administration who had never engaged in a professional evaluation of my performance. The attempt on the part of the mother interpreters to humiliate me by discussing my performance in front of my administrative supervisors, and their own eagerness to participate in such a review, without reference to my job position or evaluation parameters, was clearly a move to "silence" me, to restrict me, to bind me to their historical anguish and pain about using sign language with their children. Audism had been levelled against them in the first place. Possibly mired in their own mimicry, the mother interpreters had no way to place it against the backdrop of colonialism. They, too, were subalterns and needed a place to tell their story.

Reflection: Ten Years Later

It was only ten years later, long after the departure of the mother interpreters, that I finally understood that the dilemma I had faced was much larger than I had imagined, that the colonial binaries between the deaf and hearing had been created by unknown people, dead and living, beyond the borders of this province. In fact, the conflict had been created by values perpetuated by Western hegemony toward the oppression of Deaf people (Ladd, 2003). By that time, I had more openly established my place as a Deaf professional, although I continued to be

subjected to laissez-faire audism (Eckert & Rowley, 2013). Despite having already written a book about my educational experiences growing up in an inclusive education environment and my work as a Deaf teacher, I had become stronger and more able to tell difficult stories with a greater honesty and clarity because of my engagement with postcolonial theory and imagework. I was learning to see myself as living in a space between two distinct cultural groups, rather than endeavouring to slip in and out of each world like a chameleon. According to Tsalach (2013), the subaltern cannot remain silent forever. Recently, long after the departure of Mary and Lena and shortly after the publication of my book, a series of images surfaced about border thinking, one of which is depicted below in Figure 4:

Figure 4. Two trees.

The touching of the two trees, one ghostlike and one real, suggests a border epistemology, a knowledge springing from the collision of two worlds, the hearing and the Deaf.

The trees, as chalk drawings on tar paper, presented in highly contrasting colors, suggest two vastly different worlds. The white chalk drawing of the ghostly tree is representative of the haunting quality of colonialism and its elusive but very real presence in the world. It is in the position of pondering, and looking, that the crack is revealed and the two worlds are brought together through a double critique against the backdrop of colonialism (Mignolo, 2000).

The double critique, a feature of border thinking, facilitates dialogue between two worlds, which do not protect or support each other. In adopting border thinking, I understood that my own status as a culturally Deaf person was never revealed, honoured, or respected in the conflict with the two mother interpreters by the educational administrators. Educational administrators certainly honoured and respected the gifts, dedication, and commitment of the mother interpreters by giving them powers beyond that of trained educators in their program for several years. But their pain, rejection, and dismissal by the auditory industrial complex in the province, as a consequence of giving Signed English to their children, never came into the public space and therefore was never honoured and truly heard. What ensued was an unresolvable conflict due to the lack of awareness of the colonial discourses about education of the d/Deaf, resulting in audism against the interpreter mothers and me as a Deaf educator. Border thinking revealed how I, in my own mimicry, contributed to that conflict.

I have two further images about the nature of dialogue that is necessary for postcolonial pedagogy and practice. Andreotti (2011) speaks of dialogue as being non-coercive and as always being aware that cultures are not essentialized entities, but are always in a state of flux, hybridizing, adopting features of other cultures in their evolutionary paths. The following images depicted in Figure 5 and Figure 6 respectively, created on tarpaper, using acrylic paint, chalk, tissue papers, and glitter and emphasizing strong contrasts in color and texture, demonstrate the

necessity of creating dialogue and how to do it: The "bird woman" in Figure 5 and the accompanying "wing hat" in Figure 6 suggest that dialogue is created with a sense of

Figure 5. Bird woman.

Figure 6. Wing hat.

embodiment within one's local history and geography (Mignolo, 2000). Birds have their own nesting grounds and specific flight paths. They know when to fly north and south, know how to protect and nurture their young, and know what the best materials for their nests are. This is the result of being embodied in space and time, of being contained in a local history and locality. At the same time, being up in the air suggests the ability to see from afar, to see the whole picture, the backdrop against which one is positioned. This is the ability to provide the "double critique" against the backdrop of colonialism, to allow border epistemology to come to the surface, and to determine the best possible conditions for dialogue (Mignolo, 2000). Being up in the air, and learning from one's own position in space and time, makes for a true and non-coercive dialogue about the realities of audism, the realities of how the colonial enterprise still has d/Deaf children in its grip.

Conclusions

Mary, Lena, and I were submerged entirely within the colonial experience and had not yet acquired the conscientisation in order to transform society (Freire, 2000). It is through dialogue between two distinct cultures, always with an awareness of the impact of colonizing discourses, that a border epistemology can reveal possibilities for change (Mignolo, 2000; Andreotti, 2011). I had told this story before without the postcolonial framework, and the images allowed me to try again to tell it more truthfully, more compassionately, and in a more revealing way.

In summary, this story reveals several sobering truths: 1) language policies can have a profound impact on the lives of hearing and d/Deaf individuals; 2) subaltern knowledges concerning the strengths and richness of ASL and Deaf culture remain suppressed; 3) the conflicts between educational administrators, Deaf teachers, and parents remain for the most part

incomprehensible until placed against colonial discourses concerning d/Deaf people; and 4) the contents of dialogue between myself, my colleagues and educational administrators not only needs to change, but the terms need to be introduced into the conversation.

The implications of this study are threefold. First, multiple entries into colonized spaces through the use of postcolonial theory as advanced by Mignolo (2000), imagework (Edgar, 1999), and the autoethnographic perusal of detailed journals can reveal a rich and complex story where all players are complicit in upholding audism. Secondly, audism needs to be added to anti-oppressive training for preservice and in-service teachers. School boards should have explicit policies, training, and protocols to ensure the removal of audism from the classroom and among teaching staff and administration. Anti-oppressive training must include information about terms such as d/Deaf (lowercase denoting an audiological reality in need of surgical and technological intervention and upper D suggesting membership in the Deaf community); Deaf epistemologies; standard epistemologies; audism; parental anguish over communication and language choices; and linguistic, cultural and social features of ASL as an instructional language. Care must be taken not to present these terms as essentialized, but as always changing, hybridized, and evolving. Finally, attending to the presence of audism as promoted by language policies concerning the education of d/Deaf children and youth is an urgent task. Every school board should have a language planning document which outlines how ASL English bilingual bicultural education is to be provided and identifies appropriate curricula, resources, training, and personnel in order to eradicate the impact of audism on culturally Deaf teachers and d/Deaf students and, in this case, on parents of d/Deaf children.

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