

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to investigate the experience of identity construction of Deaf¹ members in hearing families in South Africa, with particular reference to a deafhearing² family in the South African township of QwaQwa. In seeking to understand this identity construction, I will focus on the life of a young Deaf man, to gain insight into how he contemporarily constructs his identity within his hearing family and in the broader Deaf communities in QwaQwa and the college he attends in the Western Cape.

This focus will both illuminate the gap of understanding in townships between the hearing and Deaf worlds, by bridging the gap in the paucity of family-oriented research, into Deaf identity construction as this relates to the lived experience of South African deafhearing families.

1.2. Research Rationale

In this chapter, I will briefly discuss what research has been done in relation to the research aims listed above. While much research has been conducted on Deaf studies in the international arena, South Africa lags behind. According to Morgans (2010) this is due

¹ The use of the term 'Deaf' in uppercase is now widely used to refer to the cultural category of self identification. The lowercase term 'deaf' refers to the simple fact of audiological impairment and distinct from the process of self identity (Wrigley, 1996: 14). In this research report, I will use the conventional 'Deaf'

² A term coined by West (2012) which will be explained in Chapter 2

to factors such as the lack of recognition of South African Sign Language (SASL) as a natural and complete language of Deaf South Africans, and the lack of human and financial resources to carry out research in this field (Morgans, 2010: 1). Evidently, Marion Heap's doctoral dissertation (2003) is the only substantive anthropological investigations of a Deaf community in South Africa to date (Morgan, 2013: 2).

As mentioned above, the Deaf Federation of South Africa: DEAFSA (2003) asserts that ninety percent (90%) of Deaf children are born to hearing families, with the majority of the hearing parents having no prior experience with deafness³ and thus [they] face many challenges concerning the development of their Deaf child (DEAFSA, 2003: 8). It is precisely this lack of attention devoted to hearing families of Deaf children in South Africa that is most concerning.

In order to help bridge the current gap in family-oriented research in Deaf studies – in this research project I aim to shed light on how the family unit should be considered as the primary group interfacing with both the young Deaf adult and with society at large. Murphy (1979: 278-9) argues that each member of the family unit must be accepted and valued in a mutually, nurtu[ing] environment, including 'the often-overlooked' siblings.

³ 'deafness' is a term rooted in the pathological view designating people whose status as 'deaf' is determined solely by their inability to hear (Perlmutter, 1991: 189).

By speaking to members of a ‘deafhearing’ (a term coined by West (2012) constituting a hearing family with a Deaf child/ren) family in Bluegumbosch, QwaQwa [a phenomenon I shall unpack below] about their choice of form of communication with their Deaf child; I will be stepping into the world “of interrupted and shifting cultural transmission,... and complex intersections of identity, language and cultures (West, 2012: xv).

Additionally, the sense of self-identity of the young Deaf adult born into a hearing family also needs to be investigated and understood as a personal narrative operating within wider socio-political frameworks of modern globalized societies (Grotevant, 1994: 14). It is for this reason that for this research project, I specifically decided to select to study a young Deaf adult male within the age group of sixteen (16) to twenty four (24). My reason for this choice is that the young adult is neither a child nor an adult, but is at a crucial age-stage in which he is able to construct his own identity.

Similarly; Koester and Meadow-Orleans (1990: 315) agree (and I concur) that, between the age of sixteen and twenty-four, “many of the important early decisions about schooling and forms of communication to be used within the family have been made and the appropriate adjustments have become...unconscious aspects of the interactions amongst the family members” (*ibid*).

In documenting the views, emotions and social experiences of the young Deaf adult, as well as those of his parents – I hope, via the use of ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth semi-structured interviews, to assist with the unpacking of the complexity of identity formation in the milieu of a lived experience of a deafhearing family's everyday existence in a bicultural and bilingual South African township household.

1.3 Research Identity as Motivation for this Research

My interest in this area is tied to my own history. In 2012, I took a personal decision to try find a purpose in my life. As a result, I signed up to learn SASL at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* in Riverside, QwaQwa. This was my first encounter with the Deaf community and their way of life. I got to experience how Deaf people communicate amongst each other and with those who are hearing. It was during my classes at *Thiboloha*, that my misconceptions and erroneous assumptions about Deaf people were subjected to new scrutiny.

I had previously thought that Sign Language was a universal language; easy to learn and therefore available to anyone for worldwide communication. That signs are glorified gestures of random hand and body movements accommodated by various facial expressions and that Deaf people had some mental deficit. However, it was through everyday engagement with Deaf students on the campus of *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*, and

reading the literature on Deaf culture, that my ignorance was put to shame. SASL is a language with its own vocabulary and grammar that is not derived from spoken language. There is American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL), and Japanese Sign Language (JSL) to name but a few, each one different from the other as much as spoken languages differ. Also, the Deaf population reflects a normal range of intelligence that is found in any other group of people. The fact that they cannot hear, does not have any relation to their intellectual abilities.

On completing my SASL classes at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*, all the hearing students were given a sign name; which can only be given by a Deaf person. Deaf people use sign names to identify persons according to a characteristic of their physical appearance, or the sound or meaning of a person's name, or surname –to name a few – as opposed to finger spelling their birth names (i.e.; S-H-O-E-S-H-O-E) which can be tedious. Sign names are unique to each individual.

Moreover, my sign name correlates to the first letter of my name (Shoeshoe), and my tiny dimple on the left of my chin. To demonstrate; you place the index finger (“D” hand shape) below the corner of lip, then fist hand (“S” hand shape), with the thumb sealing all the fingers, in hand-fist placed in a frontal position⁴.

⁴ See Appendix A

In August 2012, I was employed as a temporary Class Assistant teacher in the Foundation Phase (Grade R – Grade 3) at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*. During my employment at the school, I was given the opportunity, as a Transcriber, to be part of the Grade 12 examination for the second generation of ‘matric’ pupils to graduate at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*. I was assigned to transcribe for one of the matric pupils.

Before an exam commenced, instructions were read out in the examination venue and then translated into SASL by a qualified Sign Language Translator to the pupils. In answering the questions, the pupil would sign to the translator, who in turn, would translate what was signed to a transcriber, such as myself. I had to then write the translation in English in the official exam answer paper.

It was during the exam sessions and extra class sessions that my friendship with the matric pupil, whom I was assisting, grew. We signed during school intervals and subsequently kept in touch via social networks such as WhatsApp⁵ and text messaging.

During such communications, I remember asking my pupil; “If you had a wish, would you wish to be hearing?” Naturally as a hearing person, I assumed he would jump at the hypothetical advantage of being hearing. But to my surprise he replied with a smile of

⁵ WhatsApp a cross-platform mobile messaging app that allows message exchange without having to pay for SMSes, available on smart phones such as iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, Windows Phone and Nokia. It uses the same internet data plan as email and web browsing.

content on his face, “I’m happy Deaf.” I kept nagging him as to why he wouldn’t jump at this opportunity; priding myself on how he would not *have* to use Sign Language to communicate, but rather speak when and as he wanted. That he would be able to hear every intricate detail of the world; from live music, to babies crying and the birds chirping in the trees. However, from his signed reply, I gathered he was upset at my insinuation. He signed back “I’m happy Deaf, and I’m happy you can hear, but people need to stop assuming we are not happy because we are deaf.” Indeed, I was taken aback at his honesty, but more so at the explicit indication that I might not have been the first to insinuate such offensive wishful thinking.

It was this particular conversation, alongside the narratives I had been exposed to in the Sign Language classes I took at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* that there is a considerable gap of understanding, especially in townships, between the Deaf and hearing world. But most disturbing is that hearing people, especially hearing parents of Deaf children, often don’t take the initiative to learn SASL.

1.4. Selected Field Site & Autho-Ethnography

My chosen field site of QwaQwa is in the South African Free State Province. It is one of nine provinces in the Republic of South Africa, and is centrally located in terms of the geographic land distribution within South Africa (Consensus SA: 2001).

QwaQwa is located in the north-eastern corner of the Free State Province.

It is a tiny mountainous area of 48, 000 hectors, bounded by steep crags of the Drackensberg Mountains. The eastern boundary is part of the main escarpment running to the north-east of the *Namahadi* (Elands) and Tugela rivers – separating the Free State Province and Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, and the high cliff on the north-western boundary is the famous mountain spur that overlooks the town of Phuthaditjhaba, which was previously known as Witsieshoek; then capital city of QwaQwa (Murray, 1981: 134).

Moreover, during the Apartheid⁶ era of 1948–1994, QwaQwa was a Reserve known as a ‘homeland’ for the ‘South Sotho national unit,’ (Murray, 1981: 133). The Nationalist government, who came to power in 1948, had forcibly uprooted 3 - 7 million ‘black’ South Africans from their homes and elsewhere and dumped them into 1 of 10 ‘emerging black states’ or Bantustans, according to their ethnicity and home language.

The ‘blacks’ were unilaterally deprived of South African citizenships and regarded as ‘foreigners’ in the land of their birth (Murray, 1981; 132). According to Pickles and Wood (1992) ‘homelands’ were initially created to absorb the “surplus” ‘black’ population of ‘white’ areas once they were no longer necessary to

⁶ Apartheid was “a government policy which sought by means of legislation to segregate politically, economically and socially, the different racial groups in South Africa” (Keert, 1957 cited in Serota, 2004: 100).

“minister to the needs of the ‘white’ man (Pickels and Wood 1992: 633; Stallard Commission cited in Desmond 1971: 23).

The focus of my research project influenced the selection of a place and people to study. QwaQwa is not an unfamiliar area to me, as I was born in Phuthaditjhaba; QwaQwa. I have lived here for more than twenty years. I have intimate knowledge of the place and I have an affinity with the people; both hearing and Deaf. However, my encounter with the Deaf community came into existence by interest, more than by proximal happenstance. I will further expand on subjectivity in my methodology in Chapter 3.

1.5 Research Question

This research sets out to investigate the following research question:

How does a young Deaf man contemporarily construct his identity within his hearing family and in the Deaf Community in the Free State township of QwaQwa; South Africa?

1.4.1 In the process of exploring my Research Question: I will focus on:

(i) the impact that a Deaf young man has on his hearing family members and

(ii) the social processes of how the young Deaf man constructively identifies himself relationally within his

hearing family unit and more broadly, in the wider context of the hearing community in the Free State township of Bluegumbosch QwaQwa, South Africa

(iii) Furthermore: I will look at how three South African languages (IsiZulu, Sesotho and SASL) and three cultures (Sesotho/IsiZulu hearing and Deaf culture) interactively engage in a deafhearing family household.

In implementing my research approach: I will focus my attention on the intersections of identity, language, and culture in a deafhearing family household living in the township of Bluegumbosch, with particular focus on a young Deaf man as a family member, and how he identifies himself as ‘Deaf’ while living in a hearing world.

This chapter has given an outline of the research report’s aim to understand Deaf identity construction based on the lived experience of a young Deaf man and his hearing family living in Bluegumbosch, QwaQwa, so as to bridge the gap in the paucity of family-oriented research in this area of Deaf studies.

In conjunction with Morgans (2010: 2), the findings of the research also aims to provide South African mainstream society with an understanding of Deaf children and the manner in which they contemporarily construct their identity, alongside the use

and acknowledgement that SASL is a natural and complete language. Personally, I hope to help eradicate cultural attitudes towards deafness, especially in townships, that perpetuate negative stereotypes due to lack of knowledge about Deaf people as well as their unique language and culture. Furthermore, I hope that hearing parents of Deaf children across South Africa may find refuge within the narrative of the Cele⁷ family, by breaking down communication barriers and learning their child/ren's preferred mode of communication, accept, embrace and love their child/ren unconditionally.

⁷ All names mentioned in this Research Report are pseudonyms given by the researcher, except for my primary interlocutor, Modupi who has given consent for his name to be used.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In this Literature Review, I will discuss three important aspects of research in relation to Deaf cultural studies in order to contextualize and provide a framework for my research.

- (i) The first section consists of a discussion of two opposing views of deafness, constituting two opposing schools of thought. This is followed by dealing with issues relating to the Deaf world; formation of Deaf identity through the formation of a Deaf community and Deaf culture. This section will end with an explanation of the bicultural-bilingual models.
- (ii) The next section consists of the history of American Sign Language and understanding of South African Sign Language as an oppressed language, as well as contemporary language policies in South African schools.
- (iii) The final section will look at families as systems, deafhearing families and kinship dynamics in South African townships.

However before discussing this research, it is important that we understand the contextual background of being Deaf.

2.2 Section 1: Constructing an Empowering Deaf Cultural Frame

2.2.1 Two Opposing Views- deaf vs Deaf

I will start by discussing two opposing schools of thought (i) the pathological view and (ii) the cultural linguistic view and the associated deaf vs. Deaf distinction.

According to Lane (1992), the first paradigm views deafness as a disability while the second paradigm views deafness as a socio-cultural identity. The use of the “d/Deaf” written distinction was first made in 1972 by sociolinguistic James Woodward (Wrigley, 1996: 14) in order to distinguish between these paradigms. A lowercase ‘d’ signifies the pathological view of Deaf people as having an impairment that needs to be corrected and fixed vs the cultural linguistic model where Deaf is written with an upper case ‘D’ signifying a positive cultural Deaf identity.

To exemplify this; the use of the lower-case ‘d’ in ‘deaf’ is often used to describe people who are audilogically deaf, including hard-of-hearing and deafened people who do not use sign language as their first or preferred language (Badderburg, Ladd and Gulliver, 200: 290). Moreover, members of a Deaf community prefer to write ‘Deaf’ with an upper-case ‘D’ instead of a lower-case letter (McIlroy: 2008: 42). ‘Deaf’ is used as an indicator of a positive cultural Deaf identity; a sign language user and member

of a visual, cultural, linguistic and global minority community (Padden & Humphries, 1998; Ladd 2003).

For this reason, Deaf people proudly accept and celebrate their sensory status and use sign language as their preferred means of communication, interaction, learning and cultural transmission (West, 2012: 1).

2.2.2 Positionality

I have established that as the researcher, I will *politically* position myself as seeing Deaf people in a positive light, who exist as members of a cultural-linguistic group, who in using sign language as their preferred mode of communication, express their ideas like anyone else and being-in the-world of the hearing, are proud to be Deaf. I have decided to use the upper-case ‘D’ consistently throughout this Research Report. In alliance with West (2012); she accentuates that the deaf/hearing, deaf/Deaf binaries should no longer be intended as an effective means to organize and construct meaning through differences. Rather, meanings should solidify definitions, as made apparent in this Research Report

2.2.3 Pathological View

This view brings to light how Deaf persons are recognized by medical and professional educators as having specialized needs that need medicalization (Aarons, 1994). More precisely, it sees

deafness as negative and a 'deficit' consecutively creating the 'audist establishment' of special educators, teachers, audiologists, medical doctors and psychologists, who work together to create a medical model of deafness (Lane, 1993: 272). This medical model of deafness objectifies Deaf children and Deaf adults, as "technical objects of psychometric investigation... to measure, modify and surgically correct" deafness by making it legitimate (Lane, 1993: 279-280).

With that said, the approach within the pathological view to hearing loss is to administer the following 'treatments': fitting of hearing aids, cochlear implants and intensive speech therapy (Lane et al. 1996).

Furthermore, Lane (1992) takes the argument and likens the effect of paternalism on the Deaf to the colonial experience. That is; hearing paternalism begins with a defective perception because it superimposes its image of the familiar world of hearing people onto the unfamiliar world of Deaf people.

Hearing paternalism likewise, sees its task as civilizing and restoring Deaf people to society. To be exact, hearing people who control the affairs of Deaf children and Deaf adults commonly do not know Deaf people, and do not want to. They cannot see Deaf people as they really are, but make up imaginary Deaf people of their own in accord, with their own experience and needs (Lane,

1992: 37). For this reason, Lane (1992) and I, as the author of this report, agree that paternalism deals in stereotypes.

2.2.4 Bio Power

Let us now consider the dynamics of power relations in more detail using – Lane, (1992); DEAFSA, (2008); and West (2012); who collectively agree that the failure of Deaf people exists always in relation to the strengths of hearing people; *an indication that hearing authorities have not fundamentally changed their view of Deaf people*. The above authors, along side Ladd (1993), draw attention to parallels of Deaf experience and colonialism, by using linguistic and cultural colonization to understand the “formal, structured networks and sets of processes, whereby one group [hearing people] not only controls and rules the other [Deaf people], but endeavors to impose its cultural order onto the subordinate group” (Ladd, 1993: 894).

Lane (1991) and Lane (1992) have brought into discourse the similarities between the Deaf and the ‘savage’ as being childish and lacking development. To consider this in more detail Foucault (cited in Lane, 1992: 84) analyzed the historical evolution in which the control of people’s bodies came to be seen as a legitimate concern of government which he calls ‘bio-power,’ where knowledge and power coalesce. As a regulatory technology, power “is to forge a docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.” Foucault affirms that “such a power

has to qualify, measure, [and] appraise ... rather than display itself in its murderous splendour” (Lane, 1992: 84).

Translating this into localised pragmatic terms – the medical profession in South Africa and the *Ear, Nose and Throat medical specialists, Audiologist, Speech and Language Therapists* favour oralism⁸ by taking a purely medical view of Deafness (Aarons and Reynolds, 1995). It is such prevailing attitudes of the general hearing community in South Africa towards deafness, says Aarons (1994) that allows ignorance to linger. Lane (1992) validates that those who participate in such exercises of power; contend first that technology can isolate deviance, and that it can correct that deviance (Lane, 1992: 85). Also, Deaf people in South Africa and internationally are often associated with exclusion, often labelled in derogatory and discriminatory manners such as; ‘*deaf mutes*’, ‘*deaf and dumb*’, ‘*hearing and speech impaired*’, ‘*language impaired*’, ‘*abnormal*’ (Smuts, 1997: 23).

In the next section, the second school of thought; the cultural-linguistic view shall be examined in greater detail.

2.2.5 Cultural-Linguistic View

In contrast to the pathological view, the cultural-linguistic model is held widely among the Deaf community (Ladd, 2003: 15). Their existential situation is primarily that of a language minority,

⁸ Oralism is a method of teaching a Deaf child that does not allow the child to sign in or out of the classroom. Rather, the focus is on teaching Deaf children to read speech cues. (<http://www.deafwebsites.com/education/oralism.html>).

rather than a disabled group, because their priority is not to focus on gaining disability allowance, but for Deaf children to receive an appropriate Deaf-centered education in their own language, so that the quality of life within the collective culture can be maintained and enhanced (Ladd, 2003: 17).

From the perspective of the Deaf-World, the disability (i.e., pathological) social view is said to constrict Deaf people as those with physical deafness *only* eligible for individual technologies that enhance access to the hearing world, such as flashing light doorbells, text telephones and TV subtitles. Such an approach, (the disability social view) does not address the true nature of their ‘being-in-the-world’ (Ladd, 2013: 17).

Rather, the cultural-linguistic model is not rooted in individualism but collectivism (Ladd, 2003: 17). As for example “Deaf cultures are not cultures of individualism, but of *collectivism*, a trait which they share with 70% of [the hearing] global population (Mindess, 2000 cited in Ladd, 2003: 16). Their priority is “for the majority society to include sign languages in their national curricula in the hopes of [Deaf] children growing up to become bilingual adults; such that two sets of communities (hearing and Deaf) will be able to collectively interact for the first time” (*ibid*).

I will discuss the notions of constructing Deaf identities within Deaf cultural frameworks, as well as the construction of bilingual

and bicultural identities in order to move between the Deaf and hearing worlds.

2.2.6 Identity

In order to contextualize the process of defining the existential state of Deaf being-in-the-world, discussions of an essentialized Deaf identity in South Africa will now be unpacked, followed by a discussion of Deaf Culture, and how through language stability, a particular identity is formulated.

Identity, according to Marcus (1992):

Is many things all happening at the same time. It is about individuals and collectives; it is about what people think, what they do and label, or the names people give themselves; give others; and give to groups... It is about boundaries between groups... [In essence] it is usually all these [above]; relational and situational; and thus must be seen in context (p. 312).

Identity is a delicate concept. According to Breivik (2005:1) identity connotes sameness, just as it differentiates oneself from others; natives from foreigners, Deaf people from hearing people, and so forth. He continues that, “at an individual level, sameness is connected to the process of becoming and creating oneself, [yet] at a collective level, it is about group formation and the process of becoming a group member, by achieving recognition as an equal to other members in certain ways”(Ibid).

To further elaborate on the notion of ‘becoming,’ Breivik, (2005) and Wrigley, (1996) claim that all Deaf people feel a sense of communion and instant connection with other sign language users across the world, where Wrigley (1996) calls “citizenship that needs no place” (Wrigley, 1996: 104).

Morgan (2013) notes that Deaf identity is constituted by a process of ‘becoming’ in which the concept of belonging is formulated, as much as is it released. To make clear, Breivik (2005) and Yuval-Davis (2006) believe that belonging and becoming cannot be separated as both are driven by the longing to belong and wanting to belong (Breivik, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006, cited in Morgan, 2013: 4). “Be-longing” for Breivik (2005) “has more to do with achievement and of an embodied sense of striving towards reaching others” (Breivik, 2005: 105). An individual’s process of becoming is separate, even though it is related to the majority.

Furthermore, Breivik’s (2005) notion of becoming is placed at a collective level and is concerned mainly with group formation and the process of becoming a group member. Erickson (1977) on the other hand, continues further and says that the establishment of trust within [oneself] is in relation to their primary caregivers, through the process of continuous cultural engineering, which in many instances, is obtained at school premises rather than at home. Housemasters, Deaf teaching assistants and peers of the Deaf children help nourish and help establish a sense of ‘Deaf-pride’ within a Deaf child, in order that the child is able to look within himself and see the reflection of

identity within the ‘collective’ just as he sees himself in them (Deaf community), in which a ‘*reflexive–responsive*’ trait is displayed.

Consequently, Ladd (2003) coined the term ‘Deafhood’ as a central notion in reflections on Deaf culture (cited in Morgan, 2013: 4). Ladd connects Deafhood to the notion of Deaf culture where the notion of belonging to a Deaf community as well as becoming, are central (*ibid*).

2.2.7 From Stigma to Construction of a Group Identity

Moreover, having established the tensions and binaries between upper case ‘D’ and lower case ‘d,’ (Chapter 1) one is never exempt from the terrors of stigma. Stigma, according to Goffman (1997) is essentially an attribute that is attributed by others. A person becomes stigmatized “when they are reduced in our minds, from a whole person, to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman, 1997: 214). Having said that, identities influence how people select their self-representations and behaviours; depending on social contexts (Woodward, 1997 cited in Lindgren, et al., 2008: 22).

Jones (2002) and Crocker and Major (1989) convey how stigma appears to play a role in group formation, particularly in minority group formations. That is, individuals who have been stigmatized by society have been known to transform their stigma into the basis for group identification. It is on this phenomenon that Crocker and Major (1989) base their assumption that each individual desires to have a positive self-esteem.

That said, the concept of stigma can be negative, which can further separate the individual from the norm, in such a way the individual must re-define what the stigma means to him/her. People who are stigmatized tend to identify with similar people in order to be 'normal,' (Crocker and Major, 1989: 481). In other words, a stigma can become the norm within the stigmatized population (*ibid*).

On the other hand, a central indicator of successful identity development, according to Erickson (1977) is a person's sense of unity, continuity and establishment of trust within themselves and with their primary caregivers (Erickson, 1977: 371).

Both McIlroy (2008) and Colman (1994) elaborate that Sign Language serves as a significant role in unifying the group around the collective identity of shared Deaf cultural values and experiences, especially when related to educational background and marginalized status, as well as the breaking down of communication barriers that effectively disable Deaf persons through shared narratives such that a community of Deaf learners are empowered to resist the cultural deprivation and opposition that affects them (McIlroy, 2008: 41).

2.2.8 Deaf Culture

Culture, according to Padden and Humphries (1988), is described as:

A set of learned behaviours of a group of people who have their own language, values, rules for behaviours and traditions (p. 4).

It is in this definition, that Deaf culture states that Deaf people behave similarly; using the same language and sharing the same beliefs (*ibid*). Deaf culture was first discussed in the 1970s and early 1980s when Deaf people in the United States of America (USA) took it upon themselves to explain how “a group of people who did not have any distinctive religion, clothing or diet – or even inhabit a particular geographical space they called their own – could be called cultural” (Padden & Humphries, 2005:1).

To make this explicit, Deaf people, particularly in the USA, wanted a definition of culture that focused on beliefs and practices, particularly the central role of sign language in the everyday lives of the community (*ibid*). Taking the lead from James Woodward’s example, they adopted the convention of using the uppercase “Deaf” to describe the cultural practices of a group within a group (*ibid*).

It is in these spaces, these visual-spatial environments, that a Deaf child becomes “acculturated” through language immersion as well as social interaction with others who share the same language as a similar world view (Benedict & Legg, 2010: 4).

As articulated in my rationale, many Deaf children are born into hearing families, and for most of them, the transmission into the culture of the Deaf community does not occur automatically. Rather, Deaf children gain access to the Deaf community through education in Deaf programs (Benedict & Legg, 2010: 4).

Deaf programs are provided for in school, more specifically Deaf schools, in which the Deaf children are surrounded by a sizable number of Deaf pupils/ peers who provide them with a socially accessible environment. In addition, the Deaf child is also exposed to educational programming through which the pupil gains access to the Deaf community, the history and values of Deaf culture (*ibid*). Furthermore, Benedict and Legg (2010) convey that often Deaf children talk about their sense of belonging, based upon their first experience in this type of environment. Expressing a feeling of ‘home’ and community that comes from interaction with other Deaf people -*ranging from housemothers and masters, Deaf teacher assistants, Deaf peers (ibid: 3; My own words in Italics)*.

Cripps (2001) brings these ideas together by emphasizing that Deaf culture exists because Deaf people– who are educated at residential Deaf schools – are able to develop their own Deaf network once they graduate and keep in touch with their peers (Cripps, 2001: 2). Most of them go on to take on leadership positions in the Deaf community, organize Deaf

sports, community events, etc. and become the core of the Deaf community. They ensure that their language and heritage are passed to other peers and to the next generation. They also form links with parents and siblings of Deaf children to strengthen and enlarge the community circle for Deaf children (*ibid*).

To summaries Deaf culture, it is precisely this sense of connection and a shared understanding of what it means to be a Deaf person that is felt most immediately upon meeting another person who is Deaf, as reiterated in the section above.

2.2.9 The Role of Sign Language in Deaf Culture.

Having established the formation of Deaf culture, Bourhis and Giles (1979) express that sign language, in a Deaf community, is viewed as an inseparable dimension of culture and heritage (Bourhis & Giles, 1979: 125). Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) have previously demonstrated that people identify more with people who speak the same language than with people who share the same familial background (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977: 264). That said, language has been shown to be an important tool that people use to express their identity, as well as to make judgements about other people (Bourhis & Giles, 1979: 125).

The use of sign language is important to Deaf culture, in that any perceived threat to the use of sign language is seen as a threat to the efficacy of Deaf culture. Carr (1993) mentions in solidarity that “some [D]eaf people have accused cochlear implant surgeons of committing cultural genocide... that is, if you eliminate all profound deafness at an early age, there will be no more Deaf culture” (Carr, 2003: 65).

2.2.10 Issues Related to Deaf World

Educational institutions have played a central role in the lives of Deaf people. For most people, school has been a place of secure learning, for Deaf people, school means much more (Jankowski, 2002: 19). It is a place where Deaf people meet other Deaf people for the first time. It is at school where they develop socialization patterns and friendships that frequently last their lifetimes; meeting their spouses, acquiring a language that accommodates their visual orientation, and become a part of a culture that extends beyond the school years (*ibid*). The educational systems offer an opportunity for Deaf people to build a community that thrives as a social movement.

2.2.11 Historical Influences on the Deaf community in the USA

In the USA, the Deaf community evolved in the nineteenth century (Jankowski, 2002: 20). The first permanent school for the Deaf was established in 1817, in Hartford, Connecticut.

The school became the setting for the American Deaf community, where American Sign Language (ASL) became a phenomenon that developed naturally among Deaf pioneers who took it upon themselves to establish other Deaf schools in the USA (*ibid*).

By 1875, the flourishing Deaf community was perceived as an antithesis to American society. The majority of the dominant hearing society saw the flourishing Deaf community as undesirable (*ibid*: 23). And since the best avenue to curtail the increasing separation of the Deaf community was through the educational system, reformers chose this route; to eradicate sign language as their mode of instruction and replaced it with speech and speech reading (*ibid*).

Two crucial events played significant shifts from sign language to oralism. First was the International Congress on Education of the Deaf in Milan 1880, where 163 hearing educators and 1 Deaf educator passed a resolution that only the oral approach should be used as a medium of instruction for Deaf students (*ibid*: 24). The second event comprised a

vigorous crusade by Alexander Graham Bell where he gave speeches, wrote articles advocating for the oral method of educating Deaf children. He argues “It is important for the preservation of our national existence that the people of our country should speak our tongue (National Education Association, 1885: 19).

In 1976, the son of Alice and Thomas Hopskin Gallaudet; Edward Miner Gallaudet established a middle ground or ‘combined system’ for the Deaf community, where combined methods involved signing and talking at the same time (*ibid*: 26). In and amongst these difficulties, the Deaf community preserved itself through Deaf-run organizations like the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). These organizations support the rights of Deaf people to use ASL, drive and battle discriminatory hiring practices and repudiated hearing aids dealers for fraudulent operations, (*ibid*: 28) to name a few of their activities.

In conclusion, internationally, Deaf schools often provided a valuable sanctuary for Deaf culture and the Deaf community to develop (Wrigley, 1998: 52). The growth of a strong Deaf culture and Deaf communities was a direct result of the oppressive social structures and attitudes established through mainstreaming. This oppression impacted on the identity of Deaf learners whose identity was branded as ‘subordinate’ (Jankowski, 1997:161).

2.2.12 Deafhood

Having established that language, more specifically sign language, is an important tool of expression and identity, Paddy Ladd (2003) developed and expanded the term ‘Deafhood’ to describe the process in which Deaf people– as members of a previously colonised, cultural-linguistic community– engage in the search for their fullest identity (Ladd, 2003: 28).

Deafhood seeks to address and challenge the power of discursive systems in which Deaf people are talked about as broken, requiring integration, normalisation and/or cure. It does so by drawing on parallels with postcolonial theory and minority cultural studies to counter the dismissal of Deaf lives as lacking, impoverished and pitiable. Likewise, ‘Deafhood’ celebrates Deaf people’s cultural strategies of collective, artistic, performative and political resistance to what is often perceived as “the never-ending ‘scourge’ of deafness” (West, 2012: 1).

Ladd (2003) connects Deafhood to the notion of Deaf culture, where the notions of *belonging* to a Deaf community as well as *becoming* are central (as cited in Morgan, 2013: 4). This sense of *belonging* to the Deaf community emerges as a result of shared oppression by the hearing world, whereas the sense of *becoming* emerges, constituted by West (2012) as a ‘continuous rhizomative life journey... doors open, paths spiral, identities grow, morph, fade and intertwine’ (West, 2012: 180).

2.2.13 Multiple Identities-moving between the Deaf and hearing worlds.

In this section, the use of an ‘alternative model’ will be explored in order to encapsulate the ability of individuals to alter their behaviour to fit their social context, while still being true to their inner sense of self (Coleman & Gerton, 1993 cited in Lindgren, 2008: 23). An example of ‘social context’ according to Corker (1996) is that a Deaf individual may identify themselves as ‘deaf and Black’ in their ethnic community, and as ‘Black and Deaf’ in their Deaf community.

2.3 Section 2: Factors Influencing SASL and Deaf culture in South Africa.

2.3.1 Introduction

In order to understand the ways in which the South African Deaf community have shaped their identity as a cultural, sociolinguistic minority group, I will unpack the historical factors including colonialism and apartheid inequities that have shaped the formation of the Deaf communities, Deaf cultures and sign languages, in relation to race.

2.3.2 The History of South African Sign Language Oppression

In the history of South Africa, the use of SASL and the development of Deaf communities and cultures is said to be influenced by the history of Apartheid (Swanepoel, 2012: 17). In 1920, oralism—based on the recommendations made at the Milan Conference—was announced as an official policy in South African. Oralism is a method of teaching Deaf children that does not allow them to sign in or out of the classroom. Moreover, the focus is on teaching Deaf children to understand speech and to focus on speaking instead of signing (*ibid*). Sign language was therefore forced underground in schools and in the White Deaf communities as it was stigmatized.

Schools in South Africa, for ‘white’ Deaf learners were said to be strictly oralist, whereas Deaf schools of other races had to use SASL (Ross & Deveral, 2004 cited in Swanepoel (2012: 17). Owing to the relative poverty in non-white schools, there was little or no pressure to enforce the oral method in educating non-white Deaf learners, because hearing aids and speech therapy were too expensive. So, *ironically*, non-white Deaf schools were able to build a strong Deaf culture, and the development of South African Sign Language (SASL) occurred (Swanepoel, 2012; 17).

2.3.3 South African Sign Language (SASL)

Contemporarily, SASL is a visual-spatial language (perceived by the eyes, and produced with the hands, face, and upper body) used by the Deaf community of South Africa (CAPS Draft Document). Heap (2003: 23) articulates that the interest in Sign Language both in Africa and more widely in South Africa, is more recent than in America and the United Kingdom (see, Schmaling, 1997; for work in Africa, Morgan, 1995; and Penn, 1993, for South African work). Research into Sign Language in South Africa indicates that linguistically there is one South African Sign Language (Penn, 1993: 12). Morgan (2001) emphasises that there may be dialectal variation on the vocabulary level, because different groups often have different signs, but the grammar of

the Sign Language is the same for all Deaf people “irrespective of age, ethnicity or geographical region” (Morgan, 2001: 6-7).

In essence, sign language is not a manual representation of English with individual signs corresponding to English words. It is a complete language with all the properties of other languages of the world (Drasgow, 1998: 332).

Signs in SASL, as in all other sign languages, are phonologically made up of five parameters (expanding from Chapter 1): hand-shape, location, movement, palm orientation and the non-manual features such as specific facial expressions (.

Klima and Bellugi (1979) discuss the fact that American Sign Language is morphologically complex and that it includes processes by which verbs are altered to indicate grammatical categories such as agreement for numbers and persons (as cited by Klein, 2008: 14).

2.3.4 Manually Coded Spoken Language

Reagan (2001) notes that manually coded spoken languages are constructed systems that attempt to correspond to a given spoken language in a signed modality. These codes are not languages; they consist of the syntactic and morphological structures of spoken language, as well as lexical items from sign language, real or invented.

Reagan (2001: 154) points out that manually coded spoken languages are questionable from a linguistic point of view, as “signing systems tend to be awkward, confusing and often entail violations of the structural and morphological rule and norms of American Sign Language (ASL).” Yet, from a South African perspective, Morgans (2010) reveals that in English a person may say “The cat sits on the mat” who, in turn would simultaneously sign it as *THE CAT SIT-S ON THE MAT.⁹ Penn and Reagan (1990) agree that manually spoken signed language treats signs as ‘word-based’ in nature, which in fact are conceptualized in sign-based nature.

2.3.5 Language Policies in Schools

In 2013, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Curriculum Management Team (CMT) appointed a writing team to develop a Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for SASL. In the same year, it was decided that SASL be developed as a subject at Home Language level (rather than a First Additional Language) to parallel the process of attaining official status for SASL in South Africa.

On the 6th of August 2013, South Africa’s Minister of Education – Mrs. Angie Motshekga, released a media statement on the progress made in the education sector. Vigilant of South Africa’s reality, she comments that the majority of learners at both school and

⁹ A sentence preceded by an asterisk (*) indicates an example sentence that is not acceptable in SASL (Morgans, 2010: 15).

tertiary level, use English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). Moreover, Section 6(4) of the South African Schools Act (SASA) 34 of 1996 recognizes South African Sign Language (SASL) for use in teaching and learning of Deaf Learners in public schools.

December 2012 marked the President of the Republic of South Africa calling for SASL as an official language in order that SASL be offered as a curriculum for grades R-12 at Home Language level from the year 2015 (Department of Basic Education, Media Releases: 08\06\2013). Sadly, SASL is *still* not accepted as an official language of South Africa, although the South African School's Act (November, 1996) states that, "A recognized Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a public schools" (Chapter 2: 6.4). Civil society organizations continue to lobby for the recognition of language rights of Deaf learner (Caps Draft Document).

In the final section of this literature review, a discussion of kinship relations and dearhearing families will be explored.

2.4 Section 3: Kinship Relations and Deafhearing Families

2.4.1 Family Dynamics

Building on Erickson's (1977) successful identity indicator that a person's sense of establishment is centred on trusting themselves and their primary caregivers, in which Luterman (1987) relates this notion to a family paradigm to help hearing families of Deaf children cope with the crisis of a 'deafhearing' family.

Family paradigm is a term coined by Kuhn (1974) in *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, as "any system where families seek to maintain a sense of order, balance and continuity in their family life" (cited in Luterman, 1987: 6). Luterman contextualizes this to declare that the task of any family is to produce and train new sets of humans (offspring) to be independent. The individuals making up the family would in turn grow to form new families and repeat the process as the old sets lose power; declining and dying.

However, when hearing families learn that their child is Deaf (audiologically), the family changes (Luterman, 1987: 5). Whether the change is positive or negative, it involves stress because it challenges homeostasis. To maintain or restore the balance of 'homeostasis,' Luterman (1987) advises that hearing-families need to decide as to how to maintain stability when change occurs. He goes on to further argue that "there ought to be a balance in the face of severe crisis, together with the stress generated by having a child who is deaf" [audiologically] (Luterman, 1987: 5- 6).

An example of maintaining this ‘homeostasis’ consists of an unintentional paternalism called parenting. Luterman (1987) believes that parenting requires executive authority, where “the process of socialization is inherently conflictual; all in the name of love, [as] parenting requires the capacity to nurture, guide, and control” (Luterman, 1987: 31). He continues with a sound observation that parenting a Deaf child is no different from parenting a hearing child; “the issues of parenting are fundamentally the same. With deafness however, one has to impose an enormous complexity on the process; requiring each step to be more thoughtful and caring” (Luterman, 1987: 32).

Shutz (1971) states that there *are* human psychological needs that go beyond the obvious needs for shelter, food and procreation. Such needs consist of affiliation, affection and control (cited in Luterman, 1987: 32). By affiliation; he means the feeling of belonging, by affection; the feeling of being loved and by control; the feeling of having power. He declares that all children, hearing and Deaf must successfully negotiate the issues of affiliation, affection and control in order to achieve satisfaction in living (*ibid*).

Having established the unintentional paradigm of parenting, Parkin and Stone, (2004); Luterman, (1987) and Shutz (1971) make use of the conventional acceptance that nurture is as important as nature in relation to children, who are generally seen as needing a form of discipline for their own, as well as for

society's good. Moreover, the most fundamental concept in family system theory, declares Luterman (1987: 1) is that all the components of the system are interdependent. This means that every member of a family unit affects other member within a family. That is to say, if change in one member was to occur, that will cause changes in all other members; a phenomenon he emphasizes as an 'unbalanced homeostasis' mentioned above. That said; Luterman (1987), as well as West (2012) stresses that all family members of a family unit are to be connected to each other.

2.4.2 Deafhearing Families

West (2012) has coined the term 'deafhearing' for hearing families with Deaf children who need to deal with the new realities of being a Deaf family (West, 2012: 3). This concept implies that when a Deaf child is born into a hearing-family, to some extent, everybody is 'Deaf' (*ibid*). West additionally speaks highly of how hearing families of Deaf children can also become bicultural/bilingual, as previously suggested by McIlroy (2008), defining them as 'deafhearing families.' 'Deafhearing' families, according to West (2012) are hearing families of Deaf children who *simultaneously* fight against rigid systems that ignore, or cannot cater for their Deaf children by allying themselves with the Deaf community as bilingual parents (West, 2012: 29).

On the other hand Foster (1998) challenges the notion that Deaf children are able to feel a sense of shared identity and acceptance; traditionally associated with the family, and often feel emotions of enormous loneliness and isolation (Foster, 1998: 36). She stresses that without a shared means of communication which McIlroy (2008) emphasises (above), the Deaf child will frequently be left out of casual conversations within the family, missing out on information that is transferred in an indirect manner, such as the information that children pick up by overhearing their parent's communication. This communication barrier can have a very harmful effect of inhibiting the formation of close relationships with hearing people at large, including the Deaf child's hearing parents (Foster, 1998: 36-39).

2.4.3 Kinship Dynamics in South African Townships

In this research project, it is important to consider rules about who counts as kin; because what is considered kin in Western terms, many not be the same for South Africans. As my research project will be conducted in a former Bantustan residential area of QwaQwa, in the Free State province of the Republic of South Africa. Rules about who counts as kin and who amongst those counted as close kin, are really kin, will be unpacked in this content.

Parkin and Stone (2004) claim that kinship involves relationships based on the biological connections created through sex and birth,

or conception and parturition, with the conventional view of the West that children are the biological issue of both parents equally and that groups of children of a particular couple, are siblings (Parkin & Stone, 2004: 2). In addition, Nzimande, (1987); Clark & van Heerden, (1992); Steyn, (1993); and Amoateng, (1997) argue that 'black' South Africans are in the process of transition from an extended lineage-based consanguine family system, to that of a Western style nuclear conjugal system.

Russell (2002: 6-7), notes that contemporary Black families in the townships of QwaQwa follow European customs of households in town – consisting of a man, wife and their child – where previously children would have been sent to live with their grandmothers, or their mother's brothers, or their fathers' sisters (Wilson, 1961: 459- 461).

2.5 Conclusion

Finally, in spite of the lack of research in Deaf Black communities in South Africa, I have been able to draw on pertinent international and local literature on Deaf culture, sign language, family relations and kinships paradigms to inform my study of identity construction by a young Black Deaf adult living in a hearing family context in QwaQwa.

Having unpacked the contributing dynamics of factors that influence an individual's identity construction; I will now – through a discussion of the process of data collection and analysis

within a case study approach – investigate in ethnographic detail the ways in which a Deaf person is able to move fluidly between the hearing world and the Deaf community so as to illuminate how Deaf People develop and construct their identities.

This is because, contemporarily, the two worlds (hearing world and the Deaf community) are amalgamating in social, political and cultural spheres through social network paradigms that include “individuals within families, among peers, and in relation to representatives of other social or cultural institutions” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999: 53).

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

I adopt a ‘qualitative research’ approach in my study of the processes integral to identity construction by a young Deaf man in a hearing family and within a Deaf community in QwaQwa as well as the Deaf College in Worcester, in the Western Cape Province.

This is because qualitative research enables a researcher to gain in-depth insights into human agency and the reasons informing an individual’s personal understandings and choices – i.e. the *why* and *how* of human behaviour. Aptly, (Moriarty, 2011: 3) notes that qualitative research methods provide an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research interlocutors, through the process of learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives, and histories. Moriarty (2011) goes on to argue that qualitative research methods also allow for close contact between the researcher and the research interlocutors; allowing for emergent issues to be explored (*ibid*).

Thus, in pursuing this qualitative research project – I use, in particular, the qualitative ethnographic research methods of: (i) participant-observation and (ii) signed and spoken narratives in semi-structured interviews, with the interlocutors of my research study. My reasons for selecting these ethnographic research

techniques from the ‘tool-kit’ of qualitative type research methods are:

- (i) participant-observation will involve immersion in the context of Deaf-hearing culture and thus give me access to the emic or ‘insider’ perspective of my interlocutors
- (ii) Signed and spoken narratives enabled me to gather informative ‘life-story’ narratives from my interlocutors while semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore the perceptions and opinions of my interlocutors and to probe in detail, pertinent aspects of my key research question.

3.1.1 What is Ethnography?

According to Fetterman (1998: 1) ethnography is an art and science of describing a group or culture in which the ethnographer keeps an open mind about the group or culture in which they are studying, by writing about the routines and daily lives of their interlocutors (*ibid*).

With an open mind, ethnography allows a researcher to explore rich, untapped sources of data not mapped out in the research data (Fetterman, 1998: 2) In addition, the ethnographic study allows multiple interpretations of reality and alternative interpretation of data throughout the data (*ibid*).

Doing ethnography, Delamont (1992:7) argues “implies that the researcher values the views, perspectives, opinions and beliefs of the informants...she is studying”. Thus in (also) drawing from Ladd (2003:28) and the conceptions of ‘Deafhood’ as a process in which Deaf people engage in a search for their fullest identity – this research focuses on capturing the lived experiences and narratives of a young Deaf interlocutor and his hearing family.

Therefore the quest of my research has been best accomplished through the use of a naturalist approach in conducting fieldwork and accordingly avoid artificial responses, typical of controlled or laboratory conditions.

Fieldwork according to Fetterman (1998: 2) is the heart of ethnographic research design whereby the key anthropological concept of *emic* or ‘insider’ understanding and the primary – data collection methods of participant-observation, ‘deep hanging out’ and analysis are applied. Furthermore; I engage in the use of ethnographic methods and techniques to conduct my research fieldwork, as these helped “guide me through the wilderness of personal observations, and [enabled me to] classify accurately the bewildering variety of events and actions that form a social situation” (Fetterman, 1998: 31).

In addition to the above, Fetterman (1998) argues that; “an ethnographer conducts research in the native environment to see people and their behaviour, in a context of real-world incentives

and constraints” (*ibid*). This situatedness has been very much the case in my fieldsite research with a deafhearing family and the broader Deaf community in Bluegumbosch, QwaQwa.

3.1.2 Ethnography in Conjunction with a Case Study

In investigating identity construction in deafhearing families – I have elected to conduct an illustrative ‘case-study’ of one young Deaf man’s real-world situation as a particular instance of identity construction because “the case study aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context” (Punch, 1998:150).

3.1.3 What is a Case Study?

Simons (2009) notes that there is no single definition of a case study, and it has been variously described as a research design, research method, research strategy and data collection method and teaching technique (Anthony & Jack 2009; Merriam 2009).

According to Gerring (1994) the definition of a case study has many meanings to different researchers. Suggesting between definitions, he refers it might mean (a) its method is qualitative and small, (b) the research is ethnographic, clinical, participant observation or otherwise “in the field” (Yin, 1994, cited in Gerring, 2004: 342), or (c) the research is characterized by process-tracing. Having said that, Gerring (2004) remarks that “one cannot substitute case study for *qualitative, ethnographic*, or

process-tracing without feeling that something is lost in transaction” (*ibid*).

Rather, he proposes to define the case study as *an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units* (Gerring, 2004: 342). To clarify the notion of unit, it connotes a spatially bounded phenomenon – i.e., a nation-state, a family, a political party, or person observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time (*ibid*). “What is important,” declares Gerring (2004), “is that we have recourse to a narrower and clearer definition when methodological confusions arise so that we have a way to arbitrate such confusions” (Gerring, 2004: 342).

3.1.4 Benefits of a Case Study

Importantly, conducting a ‘case study’ of a young Deaf man in a hearing family has allowed me to employ the multiple germane data collection methods of observation in a natural setting, to collect narrative accounts, and conduct interviews – “that incorporated a holistic approach [of the ‘case study’] that aims to preserve and understand the wholeness of the case (Punch, 1998:150).

Consequently through, the use of ‘a case study approach,’ my aim has been to understand the complexities of deafhearing family dynamics, alongside bicultural and bilingual cultural identity construction(s) in an IsiZulu family unit.

3.2 Data Collection

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I was born and raised in Phuthaditjhaba, QwaQwa. Moreover, my interlocutors – the Cele family – live in Bluegumbosch, QwaQwa. The distance between the two extensions is about 7kms. While conducting my fieldwork I stayed at home, in Phuthaditjhaba, with my mother.

Once I had proven my trust to the Cele family, I made regular visits to their household to interact, observe, participate and engage in their daily activities, learning “and seeing patterns of behaviour over time” (Fetterman, 1998: 35). In addition to ‘hanging out’ with the family as a unit, I also spent considerable fieldwork time with Modupi¹⁰ –a young Deaf adult who s the key interlocutor in this Research Report –so as to gain an in-depth analysis of his life narrative. For; as Fetterman (1998: 34) notes, intensive participant-observation “characterizes most ethnographic research and is crucial to effective fieldwork.”

Thus field immersion entailed my participation in the lives of the people of my study, but conversely, keeping a professional distance was required so as to allow for the objective collection of my data. As a researcher immersed in deafhearing culture, I was able to witness the patterns of behaviour in a deafhearing family unit of: how, for example: (i) a Deaf young adult is treated compared to his/her siblings, (ii) what impact the young

¹⁰ Pseudonym Footnote; Modupi is a real name

Deaf adult has on the hearing family, and most importantly; (iii) the integration of the Deaf young adult into a hearing-world.

Participant observation also allowed me, as the researcher, to investigate how his parents had adjusted to their Deaf child's deafness, as well as their emotional expression towards their child. I was also able to observe the modes of communication used in the household in communicating with the young Deaf adult.

3.2.1 Spoken and Signed Narrative

The use of spoken or signed narratives, as a form of qualitative research, has been used as my secondary tool of collecting data. Madan Sarup (cited in Preston, 2001: 10) argues that with such a method "we construct our identity at the same time as we tell our life-stories/narratives."

Thus, gathering spoken and signed narratives as a data collection method has allowed me to grasp a better understanding of personal relationships between parents and their children in a deafhearing family as well as the attitudes towards and perception of deafness held within such families and amongst the wider community in QwaQwa. Such narratives provided insight into a young Deaf adult's self-understanding of and processes of identity construction.

Similarly, West (2012) notes that storytelling is a central strategy for cultural affirmation and the transmission of wisdom, heritage

and solidarity to future generations. It is also a form of political resistance to marginalization, prejudice and ignorance (West, 2012: 28).

3.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

My third data collection instrument in conducting research –semi-structured ethnographic interviews – enabled me to explore the perceptions and opinions of interlocutors regarding complex, and sometimes sensitive issues (Barriball & While, 1994: 330). Thus, I interviewed the young Deaf adult of my case study and his parent/s and siblings in his ‘deafhearing’ family.

Cohen (2006) points to the benefits of using semi-structured interviews in that, questions can be prepared ahead of time, allowing the interviewer to be prepared and competent during the interview. However, my semi-structured interviews not only afforded me the choice in wording each question, but also allowed for focused probing in the data collection process. For; as Hutchinson & Skodal-Wilson (1992: 117) note, probing is an invaluable tool for clarification of interesting and relevant issues raised by the interlocutors. Probing is also said to maximise the interactive opportunities between the interlocutor and the interviewer, reducing the risk of socially desirable answers, (Patton, 1990; cited in Barriball and While, 1994: 331).

Furthermore, and importantly, the use of semi-structured interviews as claimed by Oppenheim (1992) serve to break down

interviewer and interlocutor barriers; reducing tension, by maintaining rapport so that the interlocutor keeps talking (cited in Barriball and While, 1994: 331).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the preferred language of each interviewee, i.e.: Sesotho or English for hearing interlocutors and SASL for the Deaf young adult. The interviews were simultaneously audio recorded (subject to my interlocutors' consent) and 'jotted down' in writing. In that; audio taping provided a detailed insight into the performance of the interlocutor and the interviewer, as well as helping in validating the accuracy and completeness of the information collected (Barriball & While, 1994: 332).

Thus, in using my chosen qualitative ethnographic research methods in an ethnographic case study incorporating (i) deep meaningful participant-observation immersion research, (ii) spoken and signed narratives, via semi-structured interviews, as data collection techniques – my aim has been via a triangulation of research methods, to ensure the integrity of my research data.

3.2.3 Interlocutor meets Researcher, or Vis Versa?

The primary reason for my choice of one particular young Deaf adult as my key interlocutor is due to my becoming personally acquainted with him during my time of studying South African Sign Language (SASL) and subsequent teaching-assignment work, with him at the *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*. Over

time, this young Deaf man expressed an interest in my research project and a personal willingness to participate in and assist with my study. He is also an ideal primary interlocutor in the age range of sixteen to twenty four – an age during which the individual is neither a child nor an adult, but is able to construct their own identity both politically and socially (as also previously noted above, p. 9).

Secondly, his family live in the township of Bluegumbosch QwaQwa, my chosen field site, and are a deafhearing family. Lastly, with respect to the specific focus of my research into identity construction in deafhearing families – I was struck, during my time at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*, by how his entire family was so involved in his schooling years; attending scheduled Parent's Meetings and communicating with him in SASL. This was evident, even during random conversations amongst his hearing family unit (which I observed), so as to include him – which is in contrast to the stereotype of Black hearing families of Deaf children living in and around QwaQwa tending to shout or use random hand gestures to get their point across or even choosing not to be present in their children's life.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Fetterman (1989: 137) rightly claims that ethics guide the first and last steps of ethnographic research. Thus, I recognise that it is my responsibility to conduct my research in an ethical manner according to the University of the Witwatersrand Code of Ethical and Professional Practice as outlined in the University's Code of ethics for Research on Human Subjects (<http://www.ac.za/research/ethics/html>). And, I have received clearance from The University of the Witwatersrand's Ethics Committee (non-medical) (Protocol number: H13/08/28) for this research project. I have also been guided by the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) of the UK and Commonwealth: Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice (<http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.htm>).

In respecting the rights of all participants in the research, it has been important to be open and honest about the nature of the research, so as to ensure their willing and informed consent. In this respect; I notified my interlocutors of (i) the aim of my research topic, (ii) the fieldwork methods of my research, (iii) the confidential nature of their responses during my research, (iv) the use of pseudonyms to protect the privacy of all research participants, and (v) their rights to abstain from participation at any point during the research. The findings and results may be presented at a Conference and my Masters Research Report will

submitted to the Wits Department of Anthropology for safekeeping and may be available, on request, to other researchers in Deaf Studies.

3.3.1 Consent Forms

During my participant-observation and semi-structured interview with Mme Makhotsa Cele (Modupi's mother) I explained in detail what Anthropology, as a discipline and methodology is.

Mme Makhotsa Cele pulled out her copy of a crushed Participant Information Sheet and a Participant Consent Form and made clear to me she had read them both with understanding, emphasized that her taking part in my research project was completely voluntary. She continues that at any time of her participation, she could withdraw without any explanation, penalty or loss of benefits. Moreover, she preferred our interviews not be recorded via technical measures, such as tape recorders or video cameras but rather through the method of transcriptions. Mme Makhotsa further wished her name not be associated with the results of this study. I have complied to these requests.

I reassured her that her identity would not be used in the transcripts or the research report, but were solely for the purpose of this study. The transcripts have been handled securely in that they will be stored with care until the period of field immersion is completed and upon return to Johannesburg. Furthermore, they will be stored in a locked filled cabinet and a computer with

access codes and will be destroyed two (2) years after the completion of the research.

Furthermore, on the 4th of December 2013, a formal meeting between Modupi and I took place on the premises of *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* with the assistance of a professional SASL Interpreter; Mrs Tinaka. Mrs Tinaka is a SASL Foundation Phase teacher and Interpreter at Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind.

Having previously read the consent forms, Mrs Tinaka signs slowly and clearly to Modupi, of what the 'Consent Form' entails. It states that his participation in the anthropological research is completely voluntary, with the sole purpose of me (Shoeshoe Setai) completing my Masters Research Report. To which Modupi agrees to.

Mrs Tinaka continues signing to Modupi that, he has the right to withdraw from this study at any time he chooses without a given explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits. Furthermore, he may not receive any monetary forms of payment in return for his participation. In addition, him consenting to the interviews will mean that the interviews can be transcribed unless, he requests otherwise.

Ticking off the relevant boxes, Modupi is more than excited to allow his name be used in my research report. Signing his signature on the 'Consent Forms' we move onto the 'Consent Form: Being Videotaped.' Again, Modupi gladly signs his name at the bottom of the sheet after Mrs Tinaka had explained to him in SASL that the videotape on which

the semi-structured interviews are to be recorded, will be handled securely – stored with care until the period of field immersion is completed upon my return to Johannesburg, and that they will be stored in a locked filled cabinet and a computer with access codes – and destroyed two (2) years after the completion of the research.

3.3.2 Limitations of Research

The limitations of the study are two fold in respect of being ‘limited by’ (i) the constraints of time for academic study, and ‘limited to’ (ii) a case study focus on a single Deaf individual in the context of his hearing family and Deaf community.

In respect of (i) time limitation – the proposed time of a Masters Degree via Course Work and Research is limited to one academic year. Thus inevitably, the duration of conducting actual ethnographic field work is limited to one month. However, it was possible for me to return to QwaQwa for short weekend research visits with my interlocutors during the data analysis and writing up phase of my research project.

In respect of (ii) a case study – this case study is of ‘how a young Deaf man contemporarily constructs his identity’ – is restrictive in that “identity is a life-long process of self-discovery.” However, McIlroy (2008: 62) notes that an interlocutor’s narrative may be authentic at that moment in time, “but their identity may not be definitive”. Also, with the use of the case

study research method, it is impossible to generalize from a single case and there may be an element of verification, with Simons (1996); and Flyvbjerg (2006) suggesting that there is a tendency for researchers to use data to confirm their preconceived notions.

Lastly, as a hearing person having recently learned South African Sign Language, my fluency in SASL has, to a certain degree, limited me in the frequency and effectiveness of signing to my interlocutor. Having said that, I decided to use a SASL Interpreter for the sole purpose of conducting formal meetings with Modupi – my key interlocutor. In addition to the permission of the SASL Interpreter, I was able to audiotape her, enabling me to transcribe her voice for the purposes of accuracy.

As a result, I made an effort in my research methodology and the interpretation of my findings, to provide a ‘sufficiency of evidence’ so as to meet the accepted standards of plausibility, credibility and validity of the interpretive research paradigm.

3.3.3 Subjectivity

According to Mottez (1990) identity can be broken into two: (i) first is a given trait, and (ii) the second, is a chosen trait. The first, explains that people are born with traits which they cannot change, and with the second trait, they can change. To illustrate, let me use myself as a subject: (i) I am given the name Shoeshoe and was born a Black female. I have small feet and thick

eyebrows. I am hearing. For the latter (ii), I am a student at a tertiary institution, I am currently single (marital status), and a member of the African Congress National (ANC). I am interested in minority cultural groups (Deaf) and have an interest in allowing them a voice in my research report (Mottez: 1990, cited in Morgans, 2010: 64).

With that said, I was very aware of the fact that, I was stepping into territory I did not have first-hand experience of an insider's perspective of Deaf culture: the dynamics of being Deaf, or precise ways of being in a Deaf community –but credit needs to be given when I took the initiative to immerse myself into the Deaf world and learning SASL.

Moreover; being a young Black woman might also have resulted in a 'blind spot' in which I may have perceived certain elements of oppression, from the perspective of an individual of a historically oppressed race in South Africa prior to 1994. However, the triangular technique of participant-observation, signed and spoken conversational narratives and signed and spoken semi-structured interviews have been selected to ensure the validity of my research findings.

3.3.4 Conclusion

In the following chapter, a journey into a deafhearing family's experience of their son's diagnosis of deafness to Deafhood will be explained and illustrated through forms of supportive systems

of kinship networks, structures of interpersonal relations and constructs of social realities.

Chapter Four: A Deafhearing Family's Journey from deafness to Deafhood

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I look at the cultural context (in relation to the Cele family) in which Modupi contemporarily constructs his identity. This includes the ways in which the family constructs their interpersonal relations, perceived meaning and communication amongst each other.

Kinship is to Anthropology what logic is to philosophy and the nude is to art; it is the basic discipline of the subject (Fox 1983: 10).

This chapter attempts to understand how kinship support systems, coupled with community dynamics can be used to bring about change in deep rooted misperceptions of the Deaf world in comparison to the hearing world. As the above quote states, kinship is a key concept in the discipline of anthropology, and I draw on various theories to build my argument that kinship is a form of supportive social system(s), meanings, communication and intimacy in the context of a Deafhearing family's journey from deafness to Deafhood.

Kinship definitions are diverse, yet challenged within the discipline of anthropology. However, for the purpose of this research report, I draw on Holy's definition below:

Most anthropologists [take] kinship to be the network of genealogical relationships and social ties modeled on the relations of genealogical parenthood (Holy, 1996: 40).

In this study I bring to light how the positive family dynamics of a deafhearing family in Bluegumbosch: QwaQwa, have transformed the negative notions of deep seated cultural perceptions of deafness through social networks in their community. Transformation, according to Medick and Sabeen (1977: 2) is a way in which social systems take place through structures of interpersonal relations. Viljoen (1994: 8) concurs that people do not merely react to stimuli, but construct their own social reality, in terms of perceived meanings.

Historically and theoretically, the basic structure of African life was the family. Ekpe (1983: 484) notes:

Even before the arrival of the white man in Africa, the social structure possessed a system of organizing behaviour and economy, a cultural system for the preservation of its uniqueness and independence, a system of control and integration.

Viljoen (1994: 5) notes that during the pre-colonial era, traditional kinship structures and the extended family were the basic family norms. Family members – those not part of the

nuclear family – were also part of the household and embedded in the web of relationships with tribal lineage and kinship groups. However, post-colonial periods brought along change; change that introduced processes of industrialization, urbanization and modernisation, impacting negatively on kinship structures. Viljoen (1994: 6) says these social processes disrupted families and communities with disorganising effects on the structure of ‘black’ families.

However, traditional kinship structures and the extended family persisted as basic family norms (Viljoen, 1994:5). The Cele family; my core interlocutors, are a patrilineal family of four; a father, mother and their two sons, together with a niece who lives with the family. Narrating her story, Mme Makhotso Cele explained how her family came into being.

In the late 1980s, when in her early teens, while visiting family in Rietz¹¹, she came across a fine-looking young man who was ambitious and determined to be a civil servant as part of the South African Police Academy (SAPS). Furthermore, he had a heart of gold and knew how to serve God.

Still under the roof of her parents, she fell pregnant with her first born – Modupi in 1991. Mid 90s, the couple decided to move to QwaQwa after their beautiful traditional wedding took place.

¹¹ Rietz is an agricultural town in the Eastern Free State Province, 45 minutes outside of QwaQwa.

QwaQwa is mid-way between the wheat cattle farm village of Reitz where Nthate (Mr.) Cele lived and worked, and Kwa-Zulu Natal province, where Mme Makhotsa was based. Well settled in the dry, yet freezing winters of QwaQwa, their last born son completed the Cele family in 2003.

Her husband; Nthate Cele, is an honourable and well respected Station Commander at the South African Police Service (SAPS) Kestell¹² branch. She on the other hand, is a warm, nurturing stay-at-home mother with a Diploma in Electrical Science under her academic belt, alongside teaching experience.

In addition, Mme Makhotsa Cele is the eldest of her four siblings. When the lastborn daughter of her maiden family; Zenzile, fell pregnant during her Grade 11 year. She gave birth to a beautiful baby girl; Candy. However, due to family stresses (as neither of her siblings were working, coupled with her mother's terminally ill condition), the Cele family thought it best, as an act of love and support, to take Candy in and raise her as their own; simultaneously helping Zenzile in the process. Indeed, Zenzile appreciated the gesture and concentrated on getting through her Grade 12. She passed her final school year with a National Certificate without hurdles and distractions. Sadly; two years later (2010), their mother passed away.

¹² Kestell is small town in the Eastern Free State, 15 minutes outside of QwaQwa

Zenzile often visits her sister (Mme Makhotso) during the holidays, helping out with chores and seeing her daughter Candy, now three years old. Zenzile lives in Kwa-Zulu Natal, where she is currently completing her Marketing Diploma at an FET College.

4.2 Route to Field Site: Bluegumbosch, QwaQwa

In this section, I will give a rich description of my journey from Phuthaditjhaba; where I lived during my fieldwork, to Bluegumbosch, where my interlocutors (the Cele family) live.

Phuthaditjhaba is boiling hot outside; there are no signs of heavy clouds closing in, the air is fixed with no breeze to help cool the body down; just the sun excruciatingly beating down on me. I manage to pull a blue Wendy umbrella out of my elongated, gold and brown hand bag to minimize the scorching sun. The brick paved road leading to the main road is rather narrow but wide enough for cars to move about.

It is built in such a way that, at any time a car drives by, pedestrians have to scoot off and walk on the dusty sandstone island. It gets rather annoying having to constantly move from a level paved ground to one where my shoes are showered in dust, coupled with tiny stones, that not only makes walking uncomfortable but slows my pace. Eventually I reach the main road. Vigorously stomping my feet of dirt on the pavement, I

cross over to the other side of the dual road in order to catch a taxi heading to Bluegumbosch.

The newly painted ‘bus stop’ is crammed with other pedestrians finding refuge under the shade and signalling their specific signs of destination. I manage to squeeze myself under the bus shelter next to a lady with a baby on her back, wrapped in a blue and white blanket.

With enough shade over me, I close my umbrella and place it back into my handbag. Facing my back to other pedestrians who have full coverage from the sun, I am visibly clear to taxis of my intended destination, as my hand is stretched out and signalling a ‘two’ sign. In Phuthaditjhaba, this hand gesture indicates that one is heading to Bluegumbosch. Your palm faces in towards you, while you simultaneously put out your index and middle finger facing upwards¹³.

A dark green ‘four-plus-one’ 1998 Toyota Corolla sedan pulls into the marked island near the ‘bus stop’ with a bright yellow beckon marked “TAXI” on its roof and the windows open. I bend down leaning onto the passenger side, to confirm with the driver his destination. He nods his head frantically, simultaneously indicating that I get in.

Sliding myself into the taxi, I greet everyone inside “*Dumelang.*” There are two other passengers in the back seat. I sit in front. I

¹³ See Appendix B

open my purse and scoop out some coins, steadily counting each coin to reach the fare.

At the same time as I get comfortable, the road ahead stretches out as we drive to our destination. It curves up and down, as if one is riding a roller coaster. The heat from the tar is noticeably evaporating. The road runs between acres of green land with cattle grazing, yet adjacent to the fields is an area crammed with 'four-room' houses with barely any room for a yard, but enough for a barbed wire fencing to mark and separate each house.

Still with the windows open, but hope that the hot wind blowing in would cool us down makes it no different; everyone is uncomfortably hot. Evidently so, the driver's forehead is drenched with perspiration. Later, the silence in the taxi is broken by my "*dree ranteng*" [three rand] where the driver pulls up near a faded red and blue post-box.

The sun continues to show no mercy as I pull out my umbrella and make my way up the lonely, hilly, brick paved road. Yet determined to walk the narrow road up this hill, I can't go by without noticing the stacked 'four-room' houses on either side of the off-white bricked road. Each house is crammed next to each other, separated by an elongated wired fencing of patterned squared-boxes. For at least every fourth house I pass, neighbours are making conversation over their fence.

Having frequently walked this path, making my way to the Cele family household, the sight of a green telephone booth marked ‘Coins’ in white with a bright green outline on top, brings relief. “A couple more steps” – I console myself. Turning right into a slim ‘*double-up*’ [short cut] dusty stone road, I find refuge in walking on the drain side of the road to prevent dust further settling on my shoes.

I make my way into the Cele family’s yard. The reflection of the shiny polished red stoop confirms the blazing heat of the sun. Today, the living room curtains of the Cele family house have been taken down; an indication that the festive ‘spring-cleaning’ is taking place. To make this explicit, their laundry line is full whereas other garments are hung on their property’s wired fencing.

Making my way to the kitchen door; I walk around to the front where the bottom of a two-way door is closed. Dusting my shoes off of dust on the ‘Welcome’ mat at door, I simultaneously knock, coupled with vocal indications of my presence by calling out “*kho-kho-kho.*”

Mme Makhotso greets me with a warm welcome smile, welcoming me in as she wipes her hands dry from washing the dishes. She has broad shoulders, relaxed black hair and big contoured eyes. Humbly apologizing for the mess, she asks me to come in. “*Keke,*

tlo phuta lithoele tseo” [come sweep off this dirt] asking her son to remove the remainder of the dirt.

It’s a beautiful petite kitchen with built-in white cupboards; the top layers of the cupboards have transparent doors filled with white cups and sauces. A huge metallic Samsung fridge competes for the limited space, which Mme Makhotso walks me past to the sitting room and into the dining room and asks me to take a seat; she’ll be with me soon. The radio, tuned into LesediFM is blaring rather loudly. The large flat screen television is on, but on mute. Modupi slouches on a green stripped sofa with his feet dangling over the edge. I sign ‘Good morning’ and he embarrassingly straightens up and greets me back. He is still sipping on a cup of tea; an empty plate with crumbs of food indicates I came in time after the family had their breakfast; also a time when they all sit in front of the television enjoying their meals.

Mme Makhotso comes back after a few minutes with a different top on. She is now wearing a black t-shirt with a Pirates soccer logo and a contoured red collar around the neck. She explains how busy she has been over the past weekends, attending funerals of family members and giving her time to members at other important gatherings. She apologizes profusely for deserting me but due to unforeseen circumstances – she had to deal with pressing family issues.

4.3 Medical Malpractice

In this section, firstly I deal with a family's experience and emotions. Emotions in reaction to a process of diagnosis of deafness, theoretically. And then, I look at the empirical example of the Cele Family. I present how the theory of embeddedness supports my findings. I use the term 'embeddedness' as a way of capturing the meanings and ideas of actions individuals choose that are importantly refracted by the social relations within which they function.¹⁴

Lane, (1992); DEAFSA, (2008); and West (2012); collectively agree that, in line with the 'pathological' view; the failure of Deaf people exists always in relation to the strengths of hearing people.

Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahn (1996) argue that for parents, in particular hearing parents; dealing with a diagnosis of deafness in their child can be traumatic. This is aggravated in that parents often do not know any Deaf adults or know very little about Deaf people. And therefore are unable to comprehend that there are scores of Deaf children who grow up to be Deaf adults who are fully engaged in the world, and who succeed in all aspects of their lives.

¹⁴ Taken from the "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness" *American Journal of Sociology*, 3.(9): 481 – 510.

Sitting comfortably on the green stripped sofa, facing Mme Makhotso with my notepad on my lap, I hear the 12h:00 news announced on the radio. Mme Makhotso's youngest son Kekeletso is stretched across the two-seat sofa to my right, wearing a 'YMCM' purple cap with yellow stitching on the side. He is resting his head on his arm, while frantically clicking at the television with the remote. I ask Mme Makhotso how she learned Modupi was deaf (audiologically)?

She leans back into her chair making herself comfortable and explains.

He was two years old at that time." He was struggling to breathe; continuously gasping for air regardless of the position he slept in. He snored a great lot. I could tell he was in pain. We [referring to her husband] took him to our family doctor, who diagnosed him with tonsils, but in good spirits, advised us to go see a Paediatrician. It was the Paediatrician who suggested we consent to a medical procedure where they would surgically operate and remove his tonsils. With good intention of course!

Giving a shrug of suspicion, she continues.

After the tonsils were removed and the surgery went well, we took him home with relief. *Ahh*, after a while *kea ka bona hori haa shapo* [He's condition was not improving]. He was running a fever, and this fever was not budging.

Kekeletso interrupts her by asking whether he knows the story.

She nods and continues:

His temperature was running high, and he was in so much pain [She signs in disbelief, shaking her head.] I

remember it like it was yesterday Shoeshoe! *Ke ala ka betsoa ke leptoalo* [Suddenly overwhelmed with emotions of fear]. I called [Modupi]'s father; who, at that time, was working in Reitz.

Her eyes wide open; emphasizing every word she explains how her husband drove them to Bethlehem – a district that is 45 minutes outside of QwaQwa – to a private hospital *Hoogland Medi-Clinic*.

On their arrival, a doctor attended to Modupi. He explained to them, in detail, the diagnosis of their child. He clarified that the doctor who had performed Modupi's surgery, had ruptured his eardrum. That the ears, nose and oesophagus are all closely connected and if operated on without serious precaution, there might be consequences.

It was at that moment, while the doctor was explaining to us; I knew something was seriously wrong with my son. [Modupi] had become deaf (audiologically).

I ask Mme Makhotsa how she felt and without hesitation, she cries out:

I was shocked! I felt betrayed and hurt! I was angry at the doctor who had [Modupi's] tonsils removed. He did us wrong. He injured my baby because he was negligent.

Swallowing back, trying to keep her tears from streaming down, she sighed:

We trusted him as a doctor because he obviously knew more than we do medically and professionally. It's the

same as you say you're going to the doctor, you automatically put your trust in this man wearing a white coat with stethoscopes dangling around his neck, because *o balile*, [he is well read/educated] and knows more than you do. Yes?

I nod to confirm.

The house is filled with silent pain. Even with the radio blasting away.

4.3.1 Overcoming the Hurdle

Letting some time pass, I allow Mme Makhotso to gather herself. “What happened after?” I ask, after she signalled to continue.

“We received some treatment,”

Shrugging her shoulders saying:

But it wasn't specifically for ‘children’.

It was some treatment for children and adults who had removed their tonsils. They said to use in order for [Modupi]'s healing to speed up; with hope that his hearing might return. But it didn't.

Mme Makhotso noted that before Modupi was diagnosed with tonsils he was able to make sounds, calling out to them with words such as ‘*mama*’ ‘*papa*’ ‘*lijho*’ [mom, dad, food] and so forth. Smiling in awe as she remembers. She remarks:

However, after his surgery he became very withdrawn and quiet.

The doctors in Bethlehem, *Hoogland Medi-Clinic* later referred them to Bloemfontein, the capital city of the Free State Province in the Republic of South Africa and about 145kms outside of QwaQwa for more tests to confirm their diagnosis, and other medical advice. It was after several tests, that the Cele family grew to accept that their first born son was deafened. He was fitted with hearing aids to assist him in his home environment.

My husband wanted to sue the doctors, but instead, we claimed for the trauma caused on the family, alongside the medical malfunction caused on my son.... He (Modupi's father) ran around filling in forms, certifying this and that. It took a while. They kept sending us back and forth, but eventually we were able to claim from the Department of Health.

Mme Makhotso continued,

Half the time I just cried because of the emotions. I mean, every parent hopes and prays their child is born normal, not disabled. When I learned my child was [D]eaf, it really did affect me. It was so traumatic; I was worried sick and lost so much weight. In fact, I'm naturally big boned; you can imagine how much weight I lost.

Giggling, she gestures her arms out to the side, indicating her past weight. "It wasn't easy *hle* [hey]."

Mme Makhotso further mentions that the doctors gave no further information concerning Deaf culture, South African Sign Language, or schools in and around the eastern Free State that catered to children with barriers. However, she explained that her mother helped her family find a school for children with barriers

-Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind. She knew of the school through a friend's relative who worked there as a teacher.

4.4 Support Systems

Treading very cautiously with my words, I ask Mme Makhotso how she grew to accept her son's deafness? With difficulty and pain in her voice, she explains that her mother has been her cornerstone. "My mom has been my biggest supporter." She rests her back, leaning back into the armchair, taking her time to answer.

"She has always consoled me through out my life's journey. Continuously speaking words of encouragement; assuring me that God has a greater plan for my family." She explains in detail and great emotion how her mother taught her to love her son, even though she felt she couldn't. It was with her mother's words of encouragement and constant prayers that she learned that everything in life happens for a reason, far greater than what we humans can fathom.

"I needed to be a blessing in his life before I could expect others to love him or accept him."

Similarly, Mme Makhotso indicated that her mother helped her direct her energy to that of being positive. "I guess that is where 'KB' comes from". She giggles and explains:

Actually, Modupi's first name is 'Karabelo'. I don't know where and how his last name 'Modupi' surfaced, but 'KB' [shortened for Karabelo] is his first name, that's what we call him at home. The meaning behind this name affirms him; he has been accepted and acknowledged as our first born son, who is just as normal as any other.

She continues to express how she feared people, especially in her community, of how they would think her child was disabled. Or talking about her that she had bore a 'disabled' child, or not accepting Modupi when he grew up. However, this difficulty only brought her and her husband closer. She tells of how supportive he has been throughout the times they learned Modupi was Deaf and how he tries, in any way possible, to include himself within the Deaf community.

Mme Makhotso speaks of how her mother in-law has also been supportive. Sharing words of encouragement and giving her time when needed.

Nodding, we both acknowledge that the road she, and her family have traveled, has not been easy.

"It has not been easy," she says; her sad tone confirming her words.

"My husband's side of the family felt I was to blame for Modupi's deafness". She says straightening up and describing how his uncles in particular, strongly felt that if she had not taken Modupi to the doctors, he would still be 'normal.' Shaking

her head in disbelief, she cups her palms out, simultaneously shrugging her shoulders and asked “What was I to do? He was sick and needed medical attention”. Defensively, she replies, with her eyebrows close together, “It wasn’t my fault. I did what any mother would have done in my situation.”

Later, Mme Makhotso enlightens me about how her husband took a great deal of time to convince his family that the blame was not on her, but was due to medical malfunction.

She assures me that matters have improved between the families and everyone has accepted and continues to love Modupi. Chuckling, she says sheepishly:

Sometimes I feel they love him more than me. They always asking about him and getting him stuff. It’s like he’s the center of attention

Kekeletso gives her a side eye, coupled with a smile. They both laugh it off!

4.5. Way Forward

The television screen switches off and a purple message pops up. Kekeletso asks his mom to assist him. The radio cord alongside the television and the DSTV cord are dangling down the glass frame of the room divider but held together by an elongated extension cord. Mme Makhotso gets up to plug in one of the cords that have fallen out.

While waiting for the visuals to roam, she reaches up on her tip-toes to the radio sitting on the room divider to lower the volume, sheepishly apologizing for the noise. To think I had blocked it out while talking! We laugh it off as she sits down.

4.5.1 Past Treatment

I ask Mme Makhotsa whether she feels she treats Modupi any different to her other children. Without hesitation she replies:

No, not at all. I shout and reprimand him like any of my children; as should a parent. If he does something wrong, I will put him in order. Why should I treat him as a 'special child' because he's [D]eaf? He is no different; he is a human being and should be treated like any other child.

Mme Makhotsa makes clear that Modupi continuously contributes to the daily household chores; washes dishes, cleaning, getting bread from the shop, and so forth.

She recalls when he was young that many of the children would laugh at him because he was Deaf, which would upset him greatly. "It hurt me too," she confesses, "to see him in pain because of how his friends treated him. So I confronted them! They had no right to do that. It wasn't his fault he became Deaf".

She told them that at any given day something could happen to either of them whether it be an accident or they could go blind, God forbid. Asking, a rhetorical question she answers it.

How would they feel if they were disabled and people were laughing at them? Mmh? It wouldn't be nice.

I asked if they had stopped? Mme Makhotso replies that the children did eventually stop, after she had had a word with their parents.

4.5.2 Recent Occurrences

In this connection, Mme Makhotso discloses that the previous year (2012), Modupi was in the process of completing his Grade 12 academic year, also known as 'matric,' at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*. It was during his prelims that Modupi moved into the school's boarding house with the other three Grade 12 pupils. Mme Makhotso stresses their level of dedication, determination and zeal, for the school pupils studied fervently. From Monday to Sunday, they kept working with certain teachers who taught them given subjects, volunteeringly taking their time off to give the pupils extra classes. *Ba qetha laata ka 8pm.*" Only completing their studies at eight in the evening.

Mme Makhotso lays emphasis on the fact that the 2012 Grade 12, Deaf class at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* was the second generation of matriculates produced under the leadership of Mr. Mokgoni. She persisted that the school deserved great applause because it is the first special school in the eastern Free State and in the entire Free State Province in South Africa, to

produce Deaf matriculates. Modupi had passed with a National Senior Certificate, with a distinction for Mathematics stressing with praise that Modupi had taken Mathematics as one of his subjects, instead of Math Literacy.

However, she went on to explain that, not long before the 2012 nationwide Grade 12 results were to be announced, members from the Department of Education were poking around, questioning how it was possible for Deaf pupils to have passed so well on a national papers, especially Mathematics? They questioned whether the teachers had assisted them in any way while they were writing or if any form of cheating had taking place. With a sad heart Mme Makhotso cries out “*Ke lenyatso!*” [an act of disgust; disapproval; subordinate].

She maintains that the pupils were brought in for questioning during the December holidays at the school premises and individually interrogated as to whether they had cheated or received any form of assistance from their teachers. With emotions of despair, concurrently seeking for answers, she asked why the government thought it best to single-handedly pick at a school for special children referring to *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* and questioning their academic performance.

“*Ke lenyatso!*” Mme Makhotso repeats, this time with more confidence in her voice. Throbbing at such questions, she probed at such insinuation arguing that; had a mainstream school passed

with such great results no Government official would have paved their way through the dusty roads of QwaQwa seeking answers of fraud. Rather, they would have applauded them with gifts and front page articles in our local newspaper '*Issue*'. Certainly, this calls for further investigation!

4.6 Being Deaf Impacting the Family

The house is injected with warmth while Candy and her friend Njabulo are running around the dining room, laughing and screaming as they play. Kekeletso is still on his back with the remote control in his hand, flicking through the channels yet attentively listening in to our conversation. I ask Mme Makhotsa how having a Deaf child has impacted her as a person, alongside her family.

Without pausing, she reveals how, when she had come to terms with the fact that Modupi had become Deaf, all her hopes of him succeeding drifted away. Not only was she not sure about his future because society has bred a perception that any person who has any form of disability, or is not considered 'normal' is most likely to live a short, unfilled, unsuccessful life.

Yet, in the same breath, she highlights that had her son not become Deaf, she and the rest of the family, would not have known SASL. They would not have know the ethics of how to communicate with Deaf people – tapping them on the shoulder if

they seek their attention, not shouting, or over exaggerating lip patterns when speaking, facing them directly when signing, and so forth.

Mme Makhotso notes that in African culture, a child is not supposed to stare directly into the eyes of an elder. However, when communicating in SASL, it is mandatory for persons, of any age, to have clear indications – facially and bodily – of what is being signed.

With excitement in her tone, she recalls a moment while getting her hair done at the salon, Kekeletso and herself were communicating in SASL merely because the distance between them was so great. That; if they had to verbally speak, it would have resulted in them shouting at each other. The other clients in the salon were perplexed as to whether one of them was Deaf; whispering and snickering amongst each other.

Kekeletso laughs, slapping his mom on her wrist “*Ya nne mama?*” confirming the incident. Now both laughing, Mme Makhotso mentions that after great speculation one of the hair stylists came up to her to ask if her son, pointing at Kekeletso was Deaf? With pride, she boasted that they both knew how to communicate in SASL. Within split seconds, everyone in the salon, both clients and Hair Stylists, were asking them to teach them signs and were in awe of the fact that they knew how to communicate in SASL.

4.6.1 Inspired by the Deaf World.

In addition, Mme Makhotso mentions that she has been inspired to get a diploma or a certified document that will enable her to sign in public arenas, like the church. She explains:

I have always been involved in the church and I grew up in the church. On Sundays when we have to go to church, I have to beg [Modupi] to come with us; not because he does not want to go, but there is no one to interpret for him. We would be singing, praise and worshipping, or the Pastor would be preaching; he, on the other hand, would want to know what is being said.

Rubbing her forehead at the situation.

Its awkward trying to listen and hear the message of the day; yet at the same time, having to translate what is being preached. He [Modupi] would find it frustrating. And rightly so!

She mentions how Modupi felt he was tagging along, showing off to everyone that they came to church as a family, but he could not relate to them in the context of what was being said at church. “We even opted to record the message preached at church so that when we get home, I could sign back what was preached” Mme Makhotso, noted. With frustration in her voice, she confesses that their method did not work. Modupi would continuously question his role of attending church if all he did was ‘hear’ the Word of the day when he got home.

It was with difficulty but with understanding that the family allowed Modupi to separately attend the Sunday service at

Thiboloha School of the Deaf and Blind. Mme Makhotso indicates that Modupi found great pleasure in attending the Deaf adult services, because he would fully participate in singing and worshipping God in the language he knows best (SASL), without the need for an interpreter. “When he comes back from church, we all sit down discussing the Message of the day,” she smiles.

4.7 Changing Perspective in the Community

In the same breath of positivity, I ask Mme Makhotso how other people in her community have reacted to her son as a Deaf child. Sighing a breath of relief, she tells of how positive everyone has grown towards Modupi and the family. “I think because [Modupi] is so vocal and proud to be Deaf, people seem to have adopted his attitude and way of life.”

She gives an example –“We were doing our groceries or some sort,” shrugging her shoulder dismissively, “and a lady I know; *e ke mo psebang tjhe*; [an acquaintance] comes to greet. I think Modupi wanted something, so he signs to me and I respond, but the look on this lady’s face was shock! She immediately asked if my son was Deaf and I confidently replied ‘yes’.

Clapping her hands together to emphasize her words, Mme Makhotso notes that Modupi can read lips.

So mme o are ‘Aoo shame, o Deaf!’ ‘Oh shame man, your child is Deaf [this lady says]. Kere [I tell you] immediately Modupi intercedes, reprimanding her that he does not need her pity or shame!

Who was translating at that time, I ask.

“His brother did. Yho! Was I proud of him (Modupi). The lady immediately apologized, profusely so and went about her way.” She further notes that the one thing Modupi hates is when people take pity upon him, or stares while he signs.

In spite of that, last year during his matric year, [Modupi] made his mark.” “How so” I ask. He often took time off from campus to help other Grade 12 matriculants in the mainstream school who were struggling with mathematics. At first they were weary of how they would communicate, but because math is such a technical subject, it’s easy to grasp formulas and concepts. *Kea o joepsa* [I’m telling you] they were so shocked at how well he explains things, step-by-step, with patience.

With tones of excitement and pride, she paints a picture of how her community has grown enviously in awe of her son’s success. Their perceptions of children who attend *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* have been overturned with their speculations that deaf and blind children do not ‘make-it’ because of their disability. However, Modupi has become a pioneer for many, she enlightens me. Not only has he obtained his matric, he also has a valid driver’s license, is well behaved and is furthering his studies at the Deaf varsity in Worcester to empower himself. Comparing her son to other children of his age, she highlights how victorious Modupi has been. Those other children who are

hearing are quick to pick at his disability but have not come close to what he has achieved, she compares.

4.8 Analyzing Ethnographic Data¹⁵

In this chapter, I have firstly illustrated what Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahn (1996) assert that hearing parents of Deaf children experience a traumatic ordeal when dealing with a diagnosis of deafness. The Cele family learned their son – who in this Research Report is my key interlocutor – became Deaf after a medical doctor performed surgery on their son, and ruptured his eardrum, with intension to removing his tonsils.

Luckner and Velaski (2004) support Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahn (1996) by extending their claim and declare that when hearing parents learn their child is Deaf, a range of emotions are experienced. The Cele family endured emotions of anger, betrayal, shock and hurt. To substantiate, Mme Makhotsa Cele revealed that her weight plummeted because she wallowed in pain. Sadly, the doctors gave no further information concerning Deaf culture, SASL or schools in the Free State province of the Republic of South Africa catering to children with barriers; rather, they continued to perform more tests on Modupi, which confirmed their diagnosis. In addition, the extended Cele family also experienced emotional trauma in their efforts to

¹⁵ In this Chapter I indicate analysis of my ethnographic findings with a section sub-heading: 4.8 and present my analysis in italic script. Hereafter, as appropriate at the end of a chapter I replicate this format. However, in some future chapters; for example Chapter 6 in which I interweave analysis with description of my ethnographic findings, a change to italic font is indicative of analysis of the ethnographic data.

understanding how Modupi became Deaf. In their efforts, they blamed Mme Makhotsa for Modupi's deafness.

Secondly, this chapter illustrates the relation of kinship support systems, meanings, communication and intimacy. This took place through the process of Deafhood, in which Mme Makhotsa's mom's role took precedence. Mme Makhotsa's mom was the pillar of strength for her daughter. She taught Mme Makhotsa to accept Modupi's diagnosis of deafness through words of encouragement and constant prayers. Reassuring her that Modupi becoming Deaf was not unknown to God, but the family had to adjust, accept and appreciate him. Erickson (1977) asserts that an individual's identity is centered on trusting themselves and their primary caregivers. With Mme Makhotsa directing her energy to that of positivity, Modupi grew up in a supportive, loving and nurturing household, on which he was enabled to contemporarily construct his identity in the cultural context of his hearing family.

Transformation, according to Medick and Sabea (1977: 2) is a way in which structures of social systems take place through interpersonal relations. Through the process of accepting and embracing Modupi's sensory status, The Cele family also became Deaf. Thus; West (2010) coins such families as deafhearing families. The Cele family politically positioned themselves against negative notions of deep seated perceptions of deafness and accepted that Deaf people exist as members of a cultural-linguistic group. They learned the ethnic way of how to

communicate with Deaf people and learned their preferred mode of communication; SASL.

Having established that, Viljoen (1994: 8) advocates that people do not merely react to stimuli, but construct their own social reality in terms of perceived meanings. In accordance with Medick and Sabeen (1977) Mme Makhotso, no longer refers to Modupi's sensory senses using terms such as 'disabled' of a pathological view in which being Deaf needs fixing. Rather, the Cele family still use words such as 'special child' and 'normal' however, in this context, the words are not to problematize his sensory status, but interchangeably used in a positive light. With that said; the cultural context in which such words are used in the Cele household, are culturally relevant to their cultural perceptions.

Positive encounters outside of the Cele household took place at the salon and the super market. At the salon, Mme Makhotso was accompanied by her youngest son, Kekeletso. While getting her hair done, the distance between them was so great that they decided to communicate in SASL. The clients and staff at the salon were so fascinated at their preferred mode of communication that they all wanted to learn SASL. Moreover, at the supermarket, Mme Makhotso went shopping with her sons (Modupi and Kekeletso) and a lady approached her, who didn't know Modupi is Deaf. When she witnessed the family signing, she was shocked and projected her pity towards the family. In

defiance, Modupi reprimanded her by saying he did not need her pity but is proud to be Deaf. The lady apologized.

In that, two critical paradigms took place. Firstly, Mme Makhotso allowed both her sons the opportunity to stand against persons whose understanding of being Deaf leans towards the medical model. She did this by allowing them the power to speak/sign their mind. Modupi signed in SASL, simultaneously allowing the lady and other people in the store to 'hear with their eyes,' as well as witness the existence of SASL and the interaction of interpreting (via Kekeletso interpreting), that Deaf people do not need hearing people to take pity on them because of their sensory status. Secondly, Mme Makhotso affirmed to her children that she was proud of them for vocalizing their opinions against rigid, deep seated cultural perceptions of deafness.

In that, feelings of belonging (affiliation) became apparent. These positive social stimuli proves Shutz (1971) appeal that all children, hearing and Deaf, must successfully negotiate the issues of affiliation, affection and control, in order to achieve satisfaction in living (cited in Luterman, 1987: 32).

In the following chapter, the concepts of language and culture will be sketched out in order to demonstrate their power in enabling a Deaf young adult to internalize his hearing family's identification with that of the Deaf world.

Chapter Five: Language and Identity Construction

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will look at how three South African languages (Sesotho, IsiZulu and South African Sign Language) and three cultures (Sotho, Zulu and Deaf culture) are interactively employed in a deafhearing family household in Bluegumbosch; QwaQwa.

I will show how the Cele family, a deafhearing family, use diverse languages such as South African Sign Language [SASL], IsiZulu and Sesotho and a mixture of the two languages called total communication (attempting to sign using SASL signs in Sesotho word order while speaking Sesotho) in their household to communicate amongst each other and within their communities.

5.2 The Importance of Language

Sign Language, i.e.: South African Sign Language, is of vital importance to my research project as it is the only language that is fully accessible to Deaf people. Furthermore, language according to Bourhis and Giles (1979: 125) has been shown to be an important tool that people use to express their identity and to make judgements about other people. With that said, the notions of language and identity are intertwined and impossible to separate although they are seen as separate entities. I will attempt

to juxtapose the two, focusing more on language in this chapter and identity in the following chapter.

Bourhis and Giles (1979) emphasize that individuals identify more with people who speak the same language than with people who share the same familial background. In relation to the Deaf community, the use of sign language is so important to Deaf culture that any perceived threat to the use of sign language, is seen as a threat to the efficacy of Deaf culture (Bourhis & Giles, 1979: 125- 126).

The Deaf Community's perception of itself is constituted in the cultural-linguistic model that is rooted in the idea that Deaf culture is a collective phenomenon rather than an individual one (Burch & Kafer, 2010: 36). Additionally, through this collectivist action, Deaf communities put effort to building strong communities while simultaneously persuading the hearing society to learn sign language so that both communities – hearing and Deaf – can move in and out of each other's world (Ladd, 2003: 16).

In the same way Magongwa (2008: 49) notes that protagonists of the socio-cultural perspective, including the Deaf community, experts in linguistics and cultural Anthropologists concentrate more on what a Deaf person has and less on what s/he does not have. Accordingly, this perspective emphasizes the reality of the Deaf community, Sign Language, the experiences of Deaf people and the ways in which they

overcome challenges (*ibid*). As mentioned above, language is an important tool that people use to express their identity. More importantly, it is in this section that I draw out how Modupi uses SASL as a means to communicate with his family, friends and surrounding community members, yet does not acknowledge it (SASL) as his primary ‘first language’.

With that said, in the next section, I will apply the notion of the Deaf community’s effort in persuading the hearing society to learn sign language so that both communities – hearing and Deaf – can move in and out of each other’s world (Ladd. 2003: 16). I will show how my key interlocutor (Modupi) came to learn SASL informally, more so, outside the classrooms via Deaf peers, Deaf adults and the Deaf community at large.

Although the Deaf community, in context to QwaQwa; Riverside, considers SASL to be its first language. Most schools for Deaf learners do not use SASL to teach Deaf learners, but a mixture of two languages (total communication) which are not accessible to Deaf learners. This was the case when Modupi was at school.

5.3 Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT).

Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind is a government school dedicated to children with barriers; either Deaf, visually impaired, blind or experiencing various other barriers to learning. It is the school Modupi first enrolled at, at the tender age of three years. *Thiboloha*

School for the Deaf and Blind is situated in Riverside; QwaQwa, about 10kms outside of Phuthaditjhaba and 17kms outside of Bluegumbosch.

The school further upholds that Deaf learners communicate and be taught in South African Sign Language (SASL) while their reading and writing be English. The visually impaired & blind learners communicate and are taught in their 'Home Language' Sesotho. English is taught as a 'First Additional Language' subject (School Brochure: 30/08/13).

There is a lack of documented information regarding the school's policy in the late 1990s when Modupi was still a pupil at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*. However, the school is now in the process of adjusting to the Basic Education's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) where, from Foundation Phase (Pre –Grade 3), it is mandatory that Deaf learner's Language for Learning and Teaching (LOLT) be South African Sign Language (School Brochure: 30/08/13). Accordingly, the Pre and Grade R classes were established and registered to help and support deaf learners to have a better understanding and foundation in SASL before they are exposed to 'Formal Learning' in Grade 1 (*ibid*). 'Formal Learning' is the process in which English becomes their language of reading and writing (*ibid*).

5.3.1 The Truth behind Language Policies in Schools

To compensate for the lack of information regarding the school policy in the late 1990, during Modupi's school years. Mrs A – who has

worked at the school for many years and asked not to be named –gave me the ‘scoop’ of the policies *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* is adhering to. Back in the 1990s the school followed a programme called ‘PAGET,’ which today is otherwise known as Paget Gorman Signed Speech (PGSS); a practice that aims to provide representation of the English language.

Devised by Sir Richard Paget, whose studies were largely concerned with the origin and development of human speech and communication. PGSS; a manually coded system, stipulated that signs are always to be accompanied by speech, using normal patterns of English, where pupils are encouraged to speak as they sign. The Paget Gorman System is therefore an artificially developed manually coded system to represent English on the hands.

Sadly, Mrs A makes note of the fact that *most* of the (hearing) teachers in the school are not fluent signers of SASL, or fluent speakers of English. Rather, they teach Deaf pupils by speaking to them in their own respective native language ranging from Sesotho, IsiZulu or IsiNdebele, coupled by what they assume is SASL. With relief she further notes that the Department of Basic Education has recently introduced SASL as a LOLT while English will be taught as a subject of writing and reading.

Mrs A mentions how the principal of the school; Mr. Makgoni, refuses to adhere to the recommendation made by the Department of Basic Education, saying “the government continues to alienate Deaf students

by limiting them to one language that society does not understand, or want to understand.” I am standing behind her desk, attentively listening to her while she cuts out shapes of paper onto her desk for her pupil to paste into their books.

In outrage, Mrs A gets up from her seat, places both hands flat on her palms, arching her body in and announces, “Shoeshoe, I’m going to tell on him! I can’t take this nonsense!” Simultaneously placing her index fingers together to make a cross “*Ke sen’* [I’m telling you!] “[Mr. Goldberger] is coming for a departmental seminar and the training of the School Management Team (SMT) in the acquisition of SASL as a LOLT and a Home Language, I’m going to tell him.”

Flicking her hand over her shoulder as if hurrying off a flood of information. “You watch and see, I’m going to tell on him!”

Mrs A gives detail of how the principal justifies his motive for the school not to use SASL as a fully-fledged language of its own, simply because Bartimia School for the Deaf – in Thaba Nchu, 20kms outside Bloemfontein, the capital city of the Free State province – still uses the old system of Paget, as well as encourage their pupils to speak Sesotho. Additionally, Mrs A says the principal wants the barrier of communication between hearing parents and their Deaf children, to be bridged.

Likewise, she explains her defiance.

If the government says we [the school] should instil bilingual relations, who is he to defy it? Understand this.

When you teach a pupil how to sign, for example a cow, you sign without any voice. Now, these teachers sign this particular object and speak in Sesotho 'kgomo.' Now, when the pupils have to go into the English class and write about what their holidays. Perhaps they were herding cows, how are they to express 'cow' if all they know is to mimic what their teacher taught them to lip read and vocalize as 'kgomo'?

Still standing, as if defending her argument Mrs A continues.

It absolutely does not make sense. How will these [D]eaf pupils ever learn? Should they not have the liberty of walking into an exam venue without an interpreter or a transcriber to write their English papers as other pupils in mainstream schools? *Hmm?*

Glaring at me as if to challenge me.

From an etic or outsiders' perspective, this calls for a critical diagnosis into the ways in which Deaf young adults identify themselves in the hearing and Deaf world. If hearing individuals with seats of power and influence take it upon themselves to relentlessly degrade the use of and recognition of SASL, how then would a Deaf young adult associate himself with a language thought to be of lower status, than that of their first home language? Everyday hearing teachers, society at large and family members can indirectly and directly, be a contributing factor to Deaf young adult's identity formation.

From the above, Mrs A brings to the surface, the 'underground' policies in many Deaf schools in townships, more specifically in QwaQwa, go against an inclusive education system (CAPS) in which the

government of the Republic of South Africa is attempting to bridge, by means to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives.

Furthermore, defiance from the principal of Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind perpetuates hearing teachers not to adhere to government policies, in order to develop and implement SASL as a fully fledged, visual language. This may link to why Modupi prefers to say IsiZulu is his first language yet SASL is his preferred language of communication, which I will make clear in the following section.

In the next section, I explain how SASL was informally taught at schools to young Deaf learners, by Deaf teaching assistants, Deaf hostel mothers and fathers, Deaf kitchen staff and the larger Deaf community. This was the case, as many hearing teachers at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* were not fluent in SASL. Rather, younger Deaf learners found refuge in acquiring learning SASL during break times on playgrounds, behind closed doors in dormitories and in bathrooms rather than in classrooms (Researcher's personal observations during fieldwork).

5.4 Acquiring SASL Informally at School

Swanepoel (2012: 5) affirms that the “the majority of Deaf learners are at first exposed to SASL when they attend schools for Deaf learners and socialize with other learners and Deaf adults. However... the majority of hearing teachers in the schools are not proficient in SASL and therefore, place Deaf learners at a further disadvantage” (*ibid*: 2).

Furthermore, a survey promoted by DEAFSA (2006: 5) highlights that only 14% of teachers in [schools for Deaf learners] can sign proficiently. The teachers who are not proficient in SASL, subsequently use Total Communication or manually coded spoken language as the LOLT. However, Reagan (2001: 14) argues that the use of Total Communication and manually spoken languages are problematic. Because they are not natural languages, instead, they bring confusion to Deaf learners.

That being said, the Deaf-World¹⁶, according to Harmon (cited in Burch & Kafer, 2010: 33) comes to mean the nexus of interrelations and venues for transmission of culture that link together Deaf communities. It is in such settings that Deaf people converse in a language that suits their sensory modality; visual and tactile; instead of vocal (*ibid*). Moreover, having established that language is an important tool of expression, Paddy Ladd (2003: 28) developed and expanded the term ‘Deafhood’ to describe the process in which Deaf people engage in the search for their fullest identity. Likewise, ‘Deafhood’ celebrates Deaf people’s cultural strategies of collective, artistic, performative and political resistance to what is often perceived as “the never-ending ‘scourge’ of deafness” (West, 2012: 1)

Curious about West’s (2012) point, I asked Modupi if he had any Deaf teachers or Deaf adults or older students who influenced him during his school years at *Thiboloha*?

¹⁶ Deaf people; a groups of people possessing a unique language [Sign Language] and [Deaf] culture; who refer to relationships among themselves, to the social network they have set up; not in any notion of geographical location (Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan, 1996; ix, 5).

He responded:

Yes, Kgethang and other Deaf adults on the premises. They did that.

Kgethang and Motsumi are a married Deaf couple who work at Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind, as Deaf class assistant teachers in respective phases. Motsumi (D) works in the Foundation Phase (Pre, Grade R – Grade 3) and Kgethang (D) works in the Further Education & Training Phase (Grade 10- Grade 12). Both Kgethang and Motsumi place an uppercase 'D' behind their name on formal documents to indicate that their positive Deaf identity was individuals who use SASL as their preferred mode of communication and are proud of their sensory status.

To make it explicit, I asked Modupi how he learned SASL. He gives detail that from a young age, he learned SASL from his peers by observing how they signed to each other; usually during informal occasions like on the playgrounds or after school, outside classrooms.

Modupi elaborates:

I came here [*Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*] when I was very small. Everybody (peers) could sign and I couldn't sign. We were ignored because we couldn't sign at that time, so I ended up just socializing with my peers; the ones who couldn't sign. Until later when I could sign and became better at understanding what was going on. But I must say, the ways/or demeanour of Deaf people, I learned here at Thiboloha [*School for the Deaf and Blind*].

Asking that he further explains, I asked him who in particular influenced him, besides his peers?

Mostly, through Kgethang and Motsumi, I learned how to sign from them. Many of the [D]eaf Class Assistants also helped in me learning of sign language [SASL]. I realised, 'Oh, so that's how you're suppose to sign.' But even from the other teachers like [Mrs Tinaka], we learned to sign.

In the same breath, I ask Modupi whether he is a fluent Storyteller.

Yes, we [his friends] were taught by other Deaf adults. When we are bored, just hanging around, it's the perfect opportunity to tell Deaf stories. We use every part of our bodies to give meaning and emphasis into our story. For example, we'd open our eyes to exaggerate and so forth (he giggles), use hand gestured and body movements. It's really fun.

To expand further, the next session will show how Deaf role models have contributed to Modupi contemporarily constructing his identity – through the acquisition of SASL as a language that is fully accessible to Deaf people – from his school years at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* as well as how institutions (schools) 'serving' the needs of the Deaf continue to oppress Deaf people.

5.4.1 Deaf Role Models and the Acquisition of SASL

Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind has 75 Support/non-Teaching Staff members; in different departments such as, teaching assistants, hostel staff, laundry staff, cleaning staff, and nursing staff to name but a few; the majority of whom live on school premises. Moreover, their

numbers over exceed that of the schools' 53 Teaching Staff (School Brochure; last accessed 30/08/2013). The Support/ non-Teaching staff members are a community, regardless of their barriers; of [D]eaf, blind, visually impaired, dyspraxic and autistic (*ibid*).

Many of these Deaf men and women need to be acknowledged in the making of the new Republic of South Africa, as they have, and continue to transmit knowledge – in the context of the Deaf community – to younger Deaf children, by teaching them the norms, behaviors and socio-political dynamics in communicating through SASL. Sadly, their contribution to society is not acknowledged in the South African literature on Deaf culture, Deafhood, and the constitution of Deaf communities.

In this connection, it is rather unfortunate that my research paper is limited to that of a case study of a young Deaf man constructing his identity in a deafhearing family. But the acknowledgements of Kgethang and Motsumi – two crucial role models in Modupi's life during his schooling years – have not gone unnoticed. However, I am not taking away from the fact that, many other Deaf adults on the premises of Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind have had an instrumental impact on Modupi in his learning SASL. Moreover, they have not only transmitted cultural values that link together Deaf communities, but they have influenced Modupi into teaching the hearing society (inclusive of his family) to learn SASL, so that they (hearing) can also move in and out of the Deaf and hearing world.

5.5 Bilingual Process

In this section, I will now show that the Cele deafhearing family – especially the father – attempted to learn SASL, but are using a manual approach with Modupi. Only his younger brother (Kekeletso) is fluent in SASL. Furthermore, this section will look in detail at what constitutes a deafhearing family practicing multilingualism through the use of SASL, spoken Sesotho/English/IsiZulu to each other, and sign supported Sesotho to Modupi.

Even though Modupi enrolled with *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*, his parents preferred he not enrol at the school's boarding house. He became a day-scholar; travelling back and forth from Bluegumbosch to Riverside every weekday. This parental desire is evidence through what Lakoff and Johnson (1999) personify as “spatial closeness is sameness,” arguing that you belong to the place where your biological roots are (cited in Breivik, 2005: 20). It is to my understanding that Breivik (2005) uses this sense of belonging in terms of hearing cultures that belong in the place where their biological roots are.

Deaf people, in opposition to the hearing culture, more often express a sense of belonging where their signing communities are and therefore, are not attached to a physical place of biological origin. They usually express a preference for being at boarding school with other Deaf learners, to being with their biological families (Ladd, 2003: Lane et al, 1996).

West (2012: 3) sees hearing families with Deaf children, who need to deal with the new realities of being a Deaf family as ‘deafhearing’ families. This is a term ‘deafhearing,’ she devised to show that both Deaf and hearing family members are part of a single and unitary system. This concept implies that when a Deaf child is born into a hearing-family, to some extent, everybody is ‘Deaf’ (*ibid*).

In turn, the ‘deafhearing’ families *simultaneously* fights against rigid systems that ignore, or cannot cater for their Deaf child/ren by allying themselves with the Deaf community as bilingual parents (West, 2012: 29). Bilingualism is the ability to competently switch between two languages. For the Cele family, bilingualism constitutes the ability to switch from sign supported Sesotho (which they use when speaking to Modupi) and spoken English/ or Sesotho/ or IsiZulu. Moreover, Modupi’s brother – Kekeletso – is able to switch from SASL to Sesotho competently. To elaborate, I will expand on this further.

Supporting the above, Modupi signs his version of how his family made efforts in learning signs thought to be SASL.

I was born Deaf, and my entire family is hearing. Growing up my mom and dad noticed I was Deaf because I didn’t speak. They were very worried in the beginning because they didn’t know to communicate with me in South African Sign Language (SASL), so my dad decided to take me, to look for a special school where I could learn Sign Language. All that time I could not sign.

He tried so many times to sign with me, but I couldn’t understand what he was signing, until we found a Deaf school... here in *Thiboloha* where I learned how to sign. When he left, I met all the Deaf people, socialized and learn[ed] [SASL]. I felt much more confident where I could express myself; my experience was great.

When I went home, my dad now couldn't sign because I brought these new signs. I came with a book to teach him and the rest of the family how to sign.

Mme Makhotso agrees with the above

[Modupi] taught each of us how to sign... He first brought home pamphlets *psa li* [containing of] rules of how and how not to talk to a Deaf person; and about Deaf culture; just the basics. Then we learned the alphabets; first spelling out our names. For example, he calls me 'Ouma' [simultaneously finger spelling it out].

Giggling, she sheepishly mentions how disrespectful it is. "Why *vele a sari 'mama'*? [Why doesn't he simply call me 'mama'] shrugging her shoulders and shaking her head playfully; Kekeletso and I laugh in on the joke. Mme Makhotso continues:

When we became fluent in spelling our names, he later taught us how to sign specific words by pointing out at an object such as 'bread,' 'eat,' 'to wash' 'dishes,' 'laundry' and signing it [she would simultaneously sign as she spoke of the words].

From the above, it is evident that there has been, amongst the initial obstacles faced by the Cele deafhearing parents, communication difficulties that appear prominent.

Li, Bain and Steinberg (2007) reveal that parents of Deaf children may choose the 'aural-oral method.' Eleweke and Rodda (2000: 379) explain that the 'aural- oral method' emphasizes the use of amplification devices such as hearing aids to maximize the child's residual hearing. Furthermore, these amplification devices make

use of auditory verbal training, oral training, lip reading and cued speech among other training methods (Li et al., 2007).

Alternatively, parents may choose what is currently known as ‘Total Communication.’ According to DEAFSA (2006) total communication is a combination of sign language and speech, in which one would sign and speak at the same time. Morgan (2001) emphasizes that “manually coded spoken languages are constructed systems that attempt to correspond to a given spoken language in a signed modality (Morgan, 2001: 6-7). “These codes are not languages,” she highlights. “They consist of the syntactic and morphological structures of spoken language, as well as lexical items from sign language, real or invented” (*ibid*).

With that said, total communication is *thought* to be the ‘middle-ground’ in the disputes between oralism and manualism (sign language) (Morgans, 2010: 15). Because it uses both manually-coded-spoken language and speech, it is equivalent of learning two foreign languages at the same time (*ibid*). Deaf people find total communication or manually coded spoken language or sign supportive spoken language to be largely unintelligible because it is not a full representation of either language.

It is of empirical importance that one understands that bilingualism is not a mixture of a spoken language infused with sign gestures thought to be a constituted language. Rather, bilingualism is the ability to switch between two languages, i.e.:

spoken or/ and manual- visual languages. For example; between English and Sesotho/ or between IsiZulu and SASL/ or between SASL and British Sign Language [BSL] competently.

In conclusion, it is evident that the Cele family, more specifically the father, came to acknowledge that language differences amongst family members needed to be bridged. The father took initiative to learn SASL, or rather, the idea of SASL. However, because Modupi had not been exposed to the sign language (SASL), he could not understand what his father was attempting to communicate. Rather, up until Modupi surrounded himself with the Deaf community at a school for the Deaf and learned SASL through the process of socialization and observation, was he then able to understand SASL and better express himself.

It is precisely this act of the family acknowledging they are 'Deaf' and 'fighting against rigid systems that cannot cater for Deaf children,' that the Cele family qualify to be acknowledged as West's (2012) concept of a deafhearing family.

Even though Modupi has made attempts at teaching his family SASL; as highlighted in the previous section, both the mother and father continue to use sign supported spoken language or total communication. However, total communication and/or sign supported spoken language; as mentioned above, are not a fully-fledged language because neither are a full representation of either language (SASL, or in this case Sesotho). Moreover,

Kekeletso (Modupi's brother) and Candy (Modupi's niece), are the only two in the Cele household who are able to communicate to Modupi in SASL. They are able to competently switch between SASL and Sesotho (for Kekeletso) and SASL and IsiZulu (when Candy signs to Modupi and speaks to Mme Makhotso).

In the following section, I will bring to light how Modupi makes evident that he identifies with his family's Zulu ethnicity, before he acknowledges he is Deaf.

5.6 Zulu Ethnicity in a Deafhearing Family

I have established that the Cele family are well rooted in the dusty acres of Bluegumbosch; QwaQwa; a former homeland reserved for the 'Basotho' people. In this section I will make clear as to what the Cele family home language is. I will further investigate how my key interlocutor; Modupi, chooses to classify his identify on the bases of his family's ethnicity, rather than that of the Deaf community where he socializes and interacts at college.

Mme Makhotso states that her family identifies with the Zulu ethnicity, as well as practicing its customs and tradition. Furthermore, she notes that the family speaks IsiZulu in addition to adopting Sesotho and SASL. Religiously, the family walks a Christian lifestyle –that of Roman Catholics.

In order for me to validate the points above, I asked Modupi what he considered his first home language to be? He self-assuredly replied:

IsiZulu. Because when someone speaks in IsiZulu, I can lip read better than when they are speaking any other language.

Taken aback, I probe his response to my question. “So South African Sign Language is not your first language?” Annoyed he signs back, “No, it’s Zulu!”

Evaluating Modupi’s response, it occurs to me that during my fieldwork, while conducting my participant-observation ethnographic research: at the Cele household, not once had I heard the family communicate to each other in IsiZulu. Perhaps they were being hospitable by catering to languages I understood and spoke; that being Sesotho and English. However, Mme Makhotso did at times speak to Candy in IsiZulu, warning her not to play outside when it was too hot, or reassuring her when she sulked that she would get her ice-cream if she remained indoors. Other than Mme Makhotso and Candy’s conversations, there were no other instances of the family speaking IsiZulu.

Albeit Mme Makhotso declaring her family identifies with the Zulu ethnicity: practising its customs and traditions. I questioned myself as to why I found it difficult to understand that Modupi had chosen IsiZulu to be his first home language.

Was I, by default of being an academic researcher and an outsider to the Deaf world, indirectly bringing notions of eurocentricism? According to Pop (2010: 1) eurocentrism “is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing emphasis on European (and generally, Western) concerns, culture and values at the expense of ... other cultures.” In this particular research report, I will coin this phenomenon as ‘deafcentric.’ Deafcentrism is influenced by literature that stipulates Deaf individuals who form part of a cultural and linguistic minority group, choosing to use the upper case ‘D’ as their cultural category of self identification (Wrigley, 1996: 14). It follows *automatically* that their first language should be Sign Language, rather, in this case, South African Sign Language.

Modupi is a part of a cultural and linguistic minority group of Deaf SASL users *but* chooses IsiZulu as his first language. He strongly identifies with his hearing cultural roots of his family who claim to speak IsiZulu at home while living in QwaQwa; a Sesotho environment.

Based on my findings, I am contesting Bourhis and Giles (1979: 127) argument that Deaf individuals identify more with people who speak (or sign) the same language, than with people who share the same familial background. Acknowledging their claim, I have demonstrated above the preferred choice of a young Deaf adult, who has internalized his hearing family’s cultural and linguistic identification over that of the Deaf world. Although he

says he identifies primarily with IsiZulu. I have observed through my fieldwork, his equally strong identification of being a sign language user who is proud to be Deaf and part of Deaf culture.

5.6.1 Bilingualism and Biculturalism

Back at the Cele household, Mme Makhotsa adjusts the white table cloth on the dining room table that separates her and myself. I ask her how the family communicates with each other; inclusive of Modupi.

We try use [South African] Sign Language where we can, but we speak to him like a hearing person. Or if it's something really difficult to either sign, vocally express it, or we write it down. But it has to be in English, [Modupi] doesn't understand Sesotho. If I were to write him a message [in Sesotho] of '*psamaya ee o lo reka borotheo* (Go buy bread) he wouldn't understand what was written, (she giggles). They were never taught [Sesotho] in *Thiboloha*, so everything has to be either signed [SASL] or spoken/written in English.

Further probing about the family's communicative methods, I ask Mme Makhotsa whether she has considered taking formal classes to learn South African Sign Language? Without hesitation, she replies:

Yes, I would like to learn [South African] Sign Language...I feel like I'm the only one who isn't as fluent as [the rest] in the house. But if I was to go, I will encourage everyone in the family to come along with me, [to] do it collectively. Perhaps also get a certificate afterwards, *nkae thabela* [That would be nice].

I share with everyone in the dinning room; Kekeletso, Zenzile the two children playing about energetically, Modupi (who is using his iPad) and Mme Makhotso, of how I learned SASL by enrolling in a short ‘South African Sign Language Course’ at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*, under the leadership of Mme Tinaka and her Class Assistant, Mary Ann (D)¹⁷ in early March 2012.

I explained that having completed my SASL class with first level achievements, all the hearing students enrolled, were given sign names by Mary Ann (D), the Deaf Class Assistant. As evidence, I demonstrate to everyone; placing my index finger (“D” hand shape) below the corner of my lip, then fist hand (“S” hand shape), with the thumb sealing all the fingers, in hand-fist placed in a frontal position¹⁸. Modupi looks up from his phone, and signs ‘I know your sign name,’ with a confirming smile. His mom; Mme Makhotso dismissively, yet playfully flicks her hand back at him “*o ho, rea pseba hle*” [Yes, we know you know.] We all laugh while Mme Makhotso practices signing my sign name. “*Ah mama, e easy n’tho eo,*” [It’s easy mom] says Kekeletso competitively showing off.

* * *

¹⁷ Mary Ann had asked I place a capital ‘D’ behind her name to represent her Deaf identity ‘of a positive cultural Deaf identity of a sign-language user and a member of a visual, cultural and linguistic minority community’ (Padden & Humphries, 1998).

¹⁸ See Appendix A

To verify, I ask Modupi the same question of how his family communicates with each other? “We try to mix a bit of Sesotho and Sign Language” he signs back.

I am not sure whether he felt uncomfortable with the question as he signs ‘next.’ Continuing, I ask Modupi what mode of communication does his family use to communicate with him.

My mother and father can sign very well... but my baby brother can sign excellently [facial expression of pride]. My father has really tried [to] make the effort to learn. Both of them [Mom and Dad], I try to teach ... how to sign. Right now my family is excellent at signing.

Inclusive within the Cele family is Candy – as explained in page 65, is Modupi’s niece. She is three years of age and she communicates in SASL with Modupi. With many attempts in trying to win her over with my trust; i.e., playing with her and her dolls, letting her scribble in my note pad, or attempting to spark a conversation. She barely spoke to me, perhaps in her eyes I was still an acquaintance, but she did respond in gestures that made me feel welcomed in her space and home.

The odd occasions when Modupi offered to drive me back home in the afternoons; Candy would jump at the opportunity and ask her uncle Modupi, in SASL, if she could ride with him in the car. Strapped into her car-seat in the back, and I in the passenger seat on our way to Phuthaditjhaba, I recall asking Modupi if Candy can sign? He proudly confessed that he *is* teaching her SASL and that

she understands him when he signs to her. Thus as much as Modupi advocates for his brother; Kekeletso as his Interpreter amongst hearing people; as illustrated below, I believe Candy is also in the initial stages of becoming as fluent in SASL, as Kekeletso is.

She is has the ability to competently switch between two languages; SASL and IsiZulu, just as her uncle, Kekeletso is able to competently switch between two languages; SASL and Sesotho.

Continuing: I ask Modupi how his family came about learning SASL

I taught them most of it [SASL] but my father was involved in the school SGB (School Governing Body), allowing him to ... get in contact with a lot of Deaf people here at the school [*Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*].

According to the school's brochure (last updated: 30/08/2013), the function of the SGB is to promote the best interests of the school, ensuring its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school. They must recommend to the Head of Department, the appointment of educators at the school, subject to the Educators Employment Act, 1994 (Proclamation No.138 of 1994), and the labour Relations Act, 1995 (Act No.66 of 1995). Additionally the SGB must recommend to the Head of Department, the appointment of non-educator staff

at the school, subject to the Public Service Act, 1994 (Proclamation No.103 of 1994), and the labour Relations Act,1995 (Act No.66 of 1995).

At the request of the Head of Department, the SGB must allow the reasonable use, under fair conditions of the facilities, of the school for educational programmes not conducted by the school. Furthermore, the SGB must adopt a constitution that adheres to the mission statement of the school, as well as adopt a code of conduct of learners at the school.

In addition, the SGB also plays an important role in deciding on the language policy of the school. It is up to the SGB to determine the LOLT and the drawing up of the school's language policy, i.e., whether the school is to use SASL, Total Communication or Oralism as language of LOLT.

Impressed, I asked Modupi who in his family can sign the best?

My baby brother. Because he loves [South African] Sign Language and he finds it very fun. Even at home or [when we are] not at home. He enjoys signing. I think he enjoys it more. He's basically my interpreter whenever I'm with him. It's good.

"Can you understand the rest of the family when they communicate with you?" I ask, "Perfectly!" he signs; kissing off his thumb in enthusiasm. Further probing, I ask Modupi whether or not his family can express themselves fully in SASL? Shaking

his head simultaneously signing ‘no’ with a clenched fist wagging from side to side, he replies:

No, but my brother can and very well. My mother and father; not so much, not fully. But my baby brother can express himself fully.

Mme Makhotso shares with me of how Kekeletso, her youngest son outshines them all with his ability to sign.

Everytime *re tswele*, Keke would interpret for [Modupi]. *Ekari ke* second nature. *Hape ke nahana hori o monyane*, so *o kgona ho ‘graspa’* language *ka s’peti*. Mrs. Thomas would always compliment him; *a mo kgotatse hori e bee* an Interpreter.

[Everytime we; the family together are out and about, Kekeletso would interpret for Modupi. It’s almost like second nature to him (Kekeletso). Also, I think his age is a contributing factor for him being able to sign so well. Mrs. Sechaba [former Principal of *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*] would always compliment him (Kekeletso). Encouraging him to study to be a qualified South African Sign Language Interpreter].

5.7 Analyzing Ethnographic data

In summary, this chapter has considered how three South African languages – SASL, Sesotho and IsiZulu – are utilized by the bilingual Cele deafhearing family, by furthering the importance of language used as a tool to express their identity. Accordingly, the Cele deafhearing family, in alliance with West (2012), identify themselves as ‘Deaf’ by simultaneously “fighting... against rigid systems that ignore, or cannot cater for Deaf children, by allying themselves with the Deaf community as bilingual parents” (West, 2012: 29). As much as Mme Makhotso and

Ntathe Cele proudly accept and celebrate their son's sensory status and attempt to use sign language, they have politically positioned themselves in seeing Deaf people in a positive light, existing as members of a cultural-linguistic group who use SASL as their preferred mode of communication.

In the context of biculturalism, the cultural-linguistic view stands in support of the notion that it is not rooted in individualism but collectivism (Ladd, 2003: 17), in that Deaf culture (embodied by the Cele deafhearing family) is a culture of collectivism, shared with 70% of the hearing global population (Mindess, 2000 cited in Ladd, 2003:16). For this reason, Modupi is able to embody two South African cultures – one hearing (Zulu) and Deaf culture; enabling him to move between the Deaf and the hearing world, in a space in which his family has inherited two speaking cultures (Zulu and Sesotho) and Deaf culture.

That said, the proposed concept of an alternative bilingual-bicultural model (Chapter 2) drawn from the pathological view and the cultural-linguistic view, seeks to understand whether there is a middle ground in which a Deaf individual is able to fluidly move between the two worlds; so that both Deaf and hearing can be validated. McIlroy (2008: 48) validates this claim in that “for [D]eaf persons, the alternative bilingual – bicultural model is a case of ensuring survival in social settings with hearing family members.” This alternative bilingual – bicultural model does not seek to choose between either opposing

identities, but co-exists within the bicultural space of being culturally Deaf and culturally hearing (ibid: 50).

To support the above claim, Modupi has internalized his hearing family's linguistic and cultural identification (Zulu), over that of the Deaf world. He prefers to say IsiZulu is his first language, even though he uses SASL as his preferred language to communicate with his family, friends and the larger Deaf community (in Worcester where he attends college). With that said, there has been no apparent verification of Zuluness beyond that of indicators (Mme Makhotsa declaring her family identifies with the Zulu ethnicity).

Chapter Six: Identity Construction and Culture Context

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explain how a young Deaf adult constructs his identity within his hearing family and the hearing community of the South African Free State township of Bluegumbosch; QwaQwa.

Drawing on the theoretical definitions of identity, discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), this chapter will allow me to show how my key interlocutor –Modupi – seeks to understand himself *within and in comparison* to his family and his friends (Deaf and hearing), as well as in the Deaf community in Worcester. I will examine how he fluidly moves between two worlds – the hearing world and the Deaf world –yet choosing not to be defined by either one; rather, he is positioning himself as being part of both worlds.

6.2 Formal Semi-Structured Interviews at Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind

One Thursday afternoon, Modupi and I agreed to meet for a formal semi-structured interview outside of the Cele household with the assistance of a professional SASL Interpreter; Mrs Tinaka. Mrs Tinaka is a SASL Foundation Phase teacher and Interpreter at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*. That afternoon, she allowed us to use her class room.

Walking into her classroom, one is welcomed by brightly coloured posters and pictures on the surrounding walls. Signposts of words

animated in SASL with block shaped alphabets in different colours pasted against the blackboard. In the middle of her spacious classroom are white tables placed in a ‘horseshoe’ shape on a navy blue carpet, with light blue chairs tucked neatly inside every table. Against the wall, are shelves labelled ‘Grade R’ ‘Grade Pre’ all the way to Grade 3, with colour coded books in each cabinet. A silver television on a wooden stand is placed at the end of the ‘horseshoe’ shaped tables.

Mrs Tinaka’s table is on the left of the door, as you walk in. Books are neatly stacked on the table, ranging from SASL dictionaries to story books. Her wall is almost completely covered by an elongated whiteboard that is filled with photographs, a timetable roster and plenty of important school emblem stamped papers. In addition, every 5cms is a neatly cut out cardboard SASL alphabet on the window, emphasizing the joy of learning SASL.

As explained previously (page 62) I decided to use a SASL interpreter for this particular meeting with Modupi because my level of fluency in SASL is rather new and having learnt SASL recently, I hadn’t had opportunities while in Johannesburg, to practise my signing. Mrs Tinaka agreed to assist me as she has taught SASL for more than 10 years, as well as gained experience in SASL interpreting. She signs to Modupi to take a seat facing her, who is dressed in a purple ‘*Ama Pik Pik*’ t-shirt, a pair of denim jeans and a stylish red and black embroidered cap.

6.2.1 Decorum to signing in SASL

Mrs Tinaka (the SASL Interpreter), Modupi and myself take a decision to move away from the elongated table that is piled with books and stationery, to a more spacious area – in the center of the class. Dragging their chairs, Modupi places his against the blackboard, where Mrs Tinaka positions herself at arm's length from Modupi so that they are parallel to each other. I take a seat at the last of the white tiny 'horseshoe' placed tables.

It is agreed that I will direct the relevant semi-structured interview questions to Modupi in a language I am most comfortable with and one that Mrs Tinaka (the SASL Interpreter) will understand fully. In this context, it is English.

Recalling what I had learned in 2012 from my South African Sign Language class on how to speak to a Deaf person using an Interpreter, I directed every question I had for Modupi directly to him and not to Mrs Tinaka. She simultaneously vocalized; clearly and slowly, her words and translated his signing into English, in order for me to capture, understand and record with the assistance of my tape recorder.

6.3 Taking His Decision

Seeking to understand how Modupi contemporarily constructs his identity, I ask him how he would classify himself amongst the terms 'deaf,' 'Deaf,' 'DeaF,' 'hearing impaired,' or 'hard-of-hearing?'

As mentioned previously (in Chapter 2), the use of the word ‘deaf’ in academic culture is representative of the medical model; yet in this research report, it would be that of the pathological view of deafness (DEAFSA; 2006). Moreover, the word ‘Deaf’ (written in upper case) is linked to the cultural-linguistic view representing individuals who have a strong Deaf identity and have close ties to the Deaf community, using SASL as their primary mode of communication (*ibid*).

In addition, Calderon and Greenberg (1997) emphasise that the definitions of ‘deaf,’ ‘hearing impaired,’ and ‘hard-of-hearing’ are largely dependent on whether an individual adheres to a medical or psychological perspective. That said, the term ‘hard-of-hearing’ is often used interchangeably with the term ‘deaf’ by medical professionals (Calderon & Greenberg, 1997: 456- 460). Lastly, the term ‘DeaF’ substantiates an interface where a Deaf individual can become a bicultural-bilingual DeaF person fitting into both worlds; the Deaf and hearing communities (McIlroy, 2008: 48).

With repeated signing back and forth between the Mrs. Tinaka – the SASL Interpreter and Modupi, discussing and analysing the different terms. Modupi chooses to identity with the upper case ‘Deaf.’ I then ask, “How do you feel about being Deaf?” Looking rather puzzled at the question asked, as if to say I’ve asked a rhetorical question, he responds

I feel great! As a Deaf person I can’t speak, and have never spoken, so I don’t know what I’m missing out, or what I’m

not getting from not speaking. I'm absolutely fine with it. I'm proud to be Deaf.

I investigate further and ask Modupi whether he belongs to a Deaf community and if so, where?

Here in QwaQwa I'm not really involved in the Deaf community because I'm hardly here. In Worcester, there is a lot more of socializing, teamwork (support), group studies, sports... so there is a lot more community that side. Except that it [is] very much Afrikaans, its structures are different, but I'm learning.

Seeing as Modupi affiliates himself more with the Deaf community in Worcester than in QwaQwa. I probe as to whether he felt (emotionally and actively) apart of the Deaf community in Worcester?

Yes, I do. Very much so. Everyone gets along well with each other, and we interact on many occasions. I'm active physically; playing soccer, athletics.

“When and how do you interact with Deaf people in the Deaf World?”

We talk/chat [via SASL], go for jols, have study groups, share family issues and communicate via sms or WhatsApp a great lot. It's usually online, on our phones as well as face-to-face occasions [SASL].

In the past, Thiboloha [*School for the Deaf and Blind*] would have special occasions were we'd have dinners, soccer events, and so forth.

Heap (2003) likens Deaf people to diasporic communities, because Deaf people are usually displaced in majority hearing cultures and for the most part, do not feel a strong connection to their hearing families

of origin (cited in Morgan, 2013: 4). Significantly, they feel a sense of communion and instant connection with other sign language users, in their ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1991, cited in Morgan, 2013: 4).

Taking into consideration Heap’s (2003) notion of Deaf people being displaced in majority hearing cultures is not the case for my key interlocutor – Modupi. The reason being is that he is able to fluidly move between the two worlds; the hearing world and the Deaf World. Moreover, Modupi has found a space in the Deaf World where he is able to freely sign to his Deaf peers and the larger Deaf community because he has established his sense of belonging in the Deaf World.

With regards to the hearing world, Modupi stipulates that he does fit in, just not completely. With that said, he is not ‘displaced in majority hearing cultures’ (Heap, 2003) but makes every effort to fit in by not alienating himself from the hearing culture. Rather, he continues to take initiatives by observing their ways of life and lip-read where possible, as described in his description of Afrikaans culture and his participation in sports culture during our formal semi-structured interview in Mrs Tinaka’s classroom, at Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind above.

To support Modupi’s actions, the hearing world – in the context of his deafhearing family, his hearing friends and the community in Bluegumbosch – have made efforts to include him in the hearing world by making him feel like he belongs. For example, Modupi attests that

his parents do not treat him differently to his brother because he is Deaf. Shutz (1971) declares that “all children, hearing and Deaf, must successfully negotiate the issues of affiliation, affection and control, in order to achieve satisfaction in living (cited in Luterman, 1987: 32). Consequently, by ‘affiliation’ the word attests to the feeling of belonging. It is without doubt that Modupi belongs to the hearing world and the Deaf World because he declares that he is “part of both worlds” (page 131) and participates actively in the both worlds by engaging with the Deaf community (playing sports and socializing) and signing in the Deaf World, while also participating in the hearing world, hanging out with his hearing friends, going to gym together and communicating through measures such as social networks.

Having said that; Modupi’s identity is connected to the process of becoming and creating [him]self at a collective level. Proposed by Breivik (2005: 1), his identity is about group formation and the process of becoming a group member by achieving recognition as an equal to other members in certain ways (ibid). With that said, Deafhood is not fixed and static, for it allows Deaf identity to be constituted by a process of becoming (cited in Morgan, 2013: 4).

6.4 Moving between Different ‘worlds’

In this section I illustrate how Modupi – in being conscious of the hearing and Deaf ‘world’ chooses not to define himself as belonging to a particular world. Rather, he is a part of both ‘worlds’ using the

necessary communicative tools such as SASL in the Deaf world and lip reading in the hearing world – to fluidly move about from one ‘world’ to the other.

Ostrove and Oliva (in Burch & Kafer, 2010: 106) believe that alliances across Deaf and hearing people require phenomenal understandings of broad social contexts grounded in effective communication, mutual respect and a recognition that identities are complicated. They further propose that all relationships exist in social contexts: “for example, relationships between people of colour and white people exist in a context of racism. Similarly, relations between Deaf and hearing people exist in a context of audism” (*ibid*).

Audism, according to Humphries (1975) is “the notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears” (cited in Bauman, 2004: 240). Respectively, audism is a term first coined by Tom Humphries (1975) who named the discrimination against Deaf people by giving the term currency to be part of discussions on human rights, [D]eaf education and employment (Dirksen & Bauman, 2004:239). Dirksen and Bauman (2004: 240) note that Humphries (1975) captured audism as manifesting itself in the beliefs and behaviours that assume the superiority of being hearing over being deaf, alongside larger systems of oppression that “appears in the class structure of the Deaf culture when those at the top are those whose language is that of the hearing culture or closet to it” (Dirksen & Baumam, 2004: 241). Lane (1992) on the other hand,

believes audism becomes most prevalent in the institutions that “serve” Deaf populations, especially in medicine and education.

In this section, I will demonstrate the relations between Deaf and hearing people as reciprocal and connected to each via networks of family ties, friendship and membership.

Still seated in our respective positions in Mrs Tinaka’s classroom, I ask Modupi *how* he moves between the Deaf world and the hearing world. He again repeats:

I’m part of both worlds. In the Deaf world I sign, in the hearing world I lip-read.

To support Modupi’s declaration, I recall when I was methodologically ‘hanging out’ with him on a particular Tuesday. I WhatsApped him to pick me up from *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* on his way to getting groceries for the family in town. I knew this, because we were in constant communication during my time conducting fieldwork. Modupi arrived driving a white 2008 Toyota Corolla sedan. In the car was his hearing friend Mpho sitting in the passenger seat and his younger brother Kekeletso, who was seated in the back seat.

I greeted everyone in Sesotho and signed to Modupi in SASL (‘B’ hand formation/ or flat hand on forehead stretching out, away from face)¹⁹

¹⁹ See Appendix C

and make my way into the back seat next to Kekeletso. Driving off into town, Mpho reminds Kekeletso in spoken Sesotho that they should not forget the burgers their mom insisted on. Standing on tip-toes in the back seat, Kekeletso signs in SASL to Modupi through the review mirror that he should make a stop at *Chicken King*.

Frantically looking for parking, Modupi finally parks the car neatly on the pavement with the emergency lights flicking. Kekeletso quickly makes his way out into the restaurant while we wait in the car. With the windows down, Mpho switches the radio on and taps Modupi on the shoulder. Adjusting his body position, Mpho faces towards Modupi and reminds him not to forget the vegetables at the market. Slow in his spoken Sesotho, but not over exaggerating, he informs Modupi that he should rather drive down to the factories, at the market.

Flicking his index finger against his thumb with his hand against his forehead, Modupi signs he understands, coupled by a vocal murmur of *mmh*.

After what seemed like hours, Kekeletso swings himself into the back seat with two white plastics filled with polystyrene containers. The scent of the food enveloped the car with rich, spicy auroma that got me salivating. It smelt good. Before we drove off, Modupi signs to Kekeletso that we are heading to the market. Within seconds, Kekeletso is munching on his scrumptious burger.

Ostrove and Oliva (in Burch & Kafer, 2010: 110) draw attention to the importance of how Deaf people want and expect more in alliance with

hearing people regarding “good communication.” They reveal that “good communication” is when each party [hearing and Deaf] has the ability to express their thoughts and feelings clearly, to listen well and to listen in a relationship-enhanced way (*ibid*). Deaf people, however, have additional requirements. Ostrove and Oliva (in Burch and Kafer, 2010) maintain that these additional requirements involve environmental and behavioural factors.

This entails that when a hearing person is not fluent in sign language, adequate lighting and the absence of noise needs to be considered. At best, the hearing person needs to be patient and willing to repeat, clearly and slowly, what s/he is trying to convey (*ibid*). With that said, they emphasize the importance of communication as a critical factor in a positive relationship with hearing people (*ibid*: 111).

From these observations made while in the car and numerous other occasions spending time with Modupi, it is clear he chooses not to separate himself from the Deaf world or hearing world. Rather, he affiliates himself as an individual who fluidly moves about the two worlds. This, according to Coleman and Gerton (1993), fits the ‘alternation model’ which encapsulates the ability of individuals to alter their behaviour to fit the social context while still being true to their inner sense of self (cited in Lindgren, 2008: 23).

Based on my observations in Modupi’s car and on Coleman and Gerton (1993) I ask Modupi to explain his perspective, on how he fits into the hearing world.

I fit in yes. Just not completely. I try to adapt into the hearing world by mostly watching them and lip-reading where I can. But I can't say I'm completely involved in the hearing world.

“How are your lip reading skills?” I ask him

Modupi responds:

They okay... half

From the perspective of the cultural-linguistic view, lip reading is a phenomenon that is not encouraged. Simon (1992: 66) verifies that speech is not static but flows. Simon (1992) further declares that words and sounds are invisible as they are made entirely inside the mouth with little or no jaw, mouth or lip movement. That said, lip reading is almost impossible to read by most Deaf people except for a few sounds made on the lips, coupled by highly visible lip movements.

To reiterate, the cultural-linguistic view certifies that lip reading is *inconsequential* because it is a functional method in which Deaf people attempt to receive information. With that said, SASL – in the context of the Republic of South Africa – is the only sign language that is fully accessible to Deaf sign users.

To summarize, this section of this chapter has demonstrated the ways in which Modupi fluidly moves about from one ‘world’ to the other. He is able to function in the hearing world on a functional level by lip-reading when the majority hearing group or community speak or use

sign supported spoken language when addressing him. However, these interactions are limited as typically they involve *functional* communication rather than allow for in-depth discussions.

6.5 Assimilating His Identity within the Family Unit

In this section, I investigate in our Semi-Structured interview, the measures taken by Modupi and his family that contribute to their co-existence as a unit – both aside from and within the context of him being Deaf. These measures are both psychological and emotional in nature, so as to capture the ways in which he is included within the family and how he responds to his family's caregiving.

I start by asking Modupi whether he feels different from his siblings because he is Deaf.

I think we are the same, exactly the same. Yeah!

I request that he elaborates.

Because when he was born [referring to his brother; Kekeletso] I was already quite big. And I noticed that my parents treated him exactly the same way they did me. Everywhere they took him, they took me along with. So that's why I don't see any difference between my siblings and me.

Cautious of the dangers of problematizing his identity, I review his response. "In what situation have you felt excluded from your family?"

I haven't, not really. My problem is when people look at me as if I['m] scary, but if people are kind and behaving well, I,

good, and I get involved. There's nothing [in] particular I can think about.

"How are you involved within your family?" I search

I am involved. Maybe, like example, during Christmas, I am a social person I like having fun; my family knows I'm a fun person. So I am involved. We try and chat and talk as much as we can.

Striving to find out the role his family plays in his life. I inquire how they support him in difficult situations.

If I have a problem, or maybe I'm struggling with something, a lot of Deaf people help me as well. My parents help me... they try to help me with everything I need and buy me what I need and they try to talk to me as well. If it's emotional things, my dad will try help me and bring me pamphlets, or things to read about. I never feel alone. If I need anything, I usually have money, and they give me their time, so yeah, I never feel alone.

I then ask whether he has more Deaf friends than hearing friends? He replies:

In Worcester, all of my friends are Deaf, but here at home, the majority are hearing. We hang out quite often. In the group, two can sign relatively well, while the others I have to lip-read, or they either write things down on paper, or via text or WhatsApp. We often go out to the gym, play soccer, and go on jols and hangout. Usually, if they need a ride, they'd call me to pick them up and we hang out. Sometimes just to watch girls and to 'catch up.'

I then inquire whether his Deaf friends feel more like family. He replies:

No. They just my friends.

In this section, I have investigated the measures taken by Modupi and by inference his family, in order to illustrate their co-existence as a unit. Erickson (1977) maintains that the central indicator of 'identity development' is an individual's sense of unity and continuity, and the establishment of trust within themselves and with their primary caregivers.

That said, Modupi's sense of belonging has been based on how he has internalized his hearing family's culture; as illustrated previously. Consisting of their Zulu ethnicity, their use of diverse languages in the household – IsiZulu, sign supported Sesotho and SASL. To confirm with Erickson (1977), Modupi's identity indicator has been formulated on trust.

As mentioned above, his family has and continues to care for him beyond the obvious needs of providing him with shelter, food, protection and money. They have also catered to his 'human psychological needs' constituting affiliation, affection and control (Shutz, 1971, cited in Luterman, 1987: 32). Modupi is able to internalize his family's hearing culture because he trusts them. He is able to trust them because he feels a sense of belonging to them.

Furthermore, the Cele family continue to display their affection by making him feel loved and appreciated, which further enables Modupi to trust his family, which is sufficient reason for him to internalize his

family's hearing culture. In essence, this gives Modupi control; the feeling of having power; power to temporarily construct his identity as a young Deaf adult.

His successful identity indicator lies not in connection to the pathological view of how hearing paternalism sees its task as civilizing and restoring Deaf people to society, by controlling and imposing their cultural order (Ladd, 1992: 37). Rather, his successful indicator lies in the fact that he can proudly accept and celebrate his sensory status (Deaf) and use sign language (SASL) as his preferred means of communication, interaction and cultural transmission, (West, 2012: 1). Similarly, Modupi is able to internalize his hearing family's culture and languages (IsiZulu and Sesotho), further allowing him to move between the hearing world and the Deaf World.

Subsequently, Modupi's successful identity indicator is allowing for him to be a part of both worlds, where he has created a space of 'belonging,' through the process of 'becoming' (Morgan, 2013: 4).

6.6 Stigma

In this section, I highlight the contrasting measures at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind* that fall in line with the pathological view of hearing people wanting Deaf pupils to hear. This is initiated by hearing teachers and staff medical practitioners enforcing Deaf learners to use instruments such as hearing aids, to 'assist' them to hear.

Conrad Ammad (1873) in conjunction with Lane (1992) believe that Deaf people are continuously in a state of being coerced into adopting hearing norms whether they want to or not (Ammad: 1873, cited in Dirksen & Bauman, 2004: 241). Lane (1992) who draws much of his work from Michel Foucault (1975), “interrogate the organizations that attempt to care for the Deaf but actually perpetuate the condition of disability (cited in Dirksen & Bauman, 2004: 241).

In our Semi-Structured interview, I ask Modupi, “Do you have hearing aids?” He replies:

Yes, I have.

Vigilant that he is not wearing his hearing aids, I query “Why have you stopped wearing them?”

I still wear them, but for now I’m not wearing it because the batteries are flat.

According to Lim and Simer (2005: 75), the use of digital hearing aids enable Deaf and hard of hearing individuals to maintain maximum acoustic neurological benefits. They further propose that persons who use hearing aids are able to use sound to access auditory brain centres which enables the stimulation of growth (*ibid*).

Historically, hearing loss has been seen as an ailment and some thought it a disability because children who had hearing loss had trouble learning. According to a report by Healthy Hearing (2013: 1), people

viewed the Deaf and hard of hearing "with a mixture of fear, scorn, distaste, misunderstanding and pity"(ibid).

During my employment as a Class Assistant at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*, there were occasions when Deaf learners were individually taken in by the school's Speech Therapist and Audiologist to measure their degree of hearing loss. Each learner was fitted and allocated a hearing aid without their consent. According to Lim and Simser (2005) the degree of hearing loss is measured by an audiogram, where the measurement is recorded in decibels and hearing levels (dB HL).

Certain teachers of pupils of younger Grades would keep their learners' hearing aids in their storerooms, saying it was to prevent loss or damage. Every morning, the learners would line up in one single file – one behind the other – and be fitted with their respective hearing aids, which they wore throughout the day. After school, the pupils would again form a single line, and were instructed to take off their hearing aids and place them in their respective pigeon holes, then dismissed to go about their evenings; without their hearing aids.

Inquiring as to why the teachers practiced such, they defended themselves by saying that they were ensuring their learners utilized their hearing aids, so they could 'adopt' to the hearing world by attempting enhance their hearing.

On the other hand, the older Deaf learners found refuge in their rights 'not to be babied.' Within weeks of them having received their pairs of

hearing aids, most had thrown them away, physically destroyed them or refused to wear them. These learners protested that hearing aids were instruments that deliberately made them ‘deaf.’ Ewing (1959) coincides that “the worst thing about hearing aids is their ugliness, and the best thing about the most efficient of them is the comfort of mind which they can bring to the great majority of patients with impaired hearing” (Ewing, 1959: 36).

The anti-thesis of Ewing’s (1959) statement is that, during my time at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*, many of the learners did not enjoy wearing their hearing aids, especially the pupils in higher grades. When pupils of smaller grades complained to their respective teachers that their hearing aids was too loud/ uncomfortable/ or hurt them, the teacher would dismissively flick her hand and murmur something out loud, pretending as if nothing had happened. It was a daily struggle for the learners.

To support the above, I asked Mme Makhotso whether Modupi has hearing aids and if he wears them? In a not-so-confident tone, she reveals that Modupi’s hearing aids are neatly placed in their respective packaging in his bedroom drawer. She further points out that he does not wear them. Shrugging her shoulders, she concludes, “I don’t know why.”

6.7 Personal Preference & Lifestyle

In this section, I touch on lighter elements in Modupi’s life, concerning his personal attitudes, preferences and lifestyle.

On a lighter tone, still in Mrs Tinaka's classroom I asked Modupi in the semi-structured interview of December 2013 if he has a girlfriend? Almost caught by surprise, he blushes, hopelessly managing to suppress his smile, he confidently replies that he has a girlfriend.

For clarity purposes, I ask if she is Deaf or hearing and he informs me that she is Deaf. Curious, I ask whether her being Deaf (audiologically) factored in his decision to court her. He replies:

It's easier because we have the same mode of communication.

Interested, I query whether he has had a hearing girlfriend. He confidently signs, "Yes." Intrigued at his experience, he shares that he did not fully enjoy being with his hearing girlfriend because she would take advantage of him by not being present when they were together. She would not want to sign, expecting him to lip read her speech, or resort to texting and/ or WhatsApp.

Modupi revealed that that made him feel used. He further discloses that the reason he has had hearing girlfriends is, he didn't want his deafness limiting him to dating Deaf girls, as he is a part of the hearing and Deaf world.

He mentions that his current girlfriend is his first Deaf girlfriend and he is madly in love with her. They met at Worcester in the beginning of the year. Their relationship blossomed from friendship when he plucked up the courage to ask her out. Modupi communicates that he plans on introducing her to his family.

In the spirit of love, I playfully ask to be invited to the wedding. Laughing it off, he signs ‘yes, yes.’

In conclusion; this chapter has highlighted the delicacy of the process of identity in that, an individual’s identity can constitute sameness and difference simultaneously. Identity, according to Marcus (1992):

Is many things all happening at the same time. It is about individuals and collectives; it is about what people think, what they do and label, or the names people give themselves; give others; and give to groups... It is about boundaries between groups... [In essence] it is usually all these [above]; relational and situational; and thus must be seen in context (p. 312).

As a young Deaf adult, born to a hearing IsiZulu family, Modupi positively accepts and celebrates his sensory status, defining himself as ‘Deaf’- an indicator of a positive cultural Deaf identity, in alliance with members of a Deaf community who use SASL as their preferred mode of communication. It is acknowledged that much of his Deaf culture was learned and transmitted through the informal socialization process at Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind, by him observing his Deaf peers as well as being taught by other Deaf adults like Kgethang (D) and Mutsumi (D).

He learned “a set of behaviours of a group of people who have their own language, values, rules for behaviours and traditions (Padden & Humphries, 1998: 4). He learned important factors such as the acquisition of sign language (SASL), the role of story telling, the benefits of dating/ and marrying Deaf partners. In that process, he

made Deaf friends whom to date, and with whom he has remained friends.

In this connection, Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind has allowing Modupi the space to constitute his sense of belonging to a Deaf community, allowing him to assert his Deaf identity through the process of becoming. Ladd (2003) coined this process 'Deafhood' in which a Deaf individual engages the search for his fullest identity. It is clear that Modupi is anchored in the Deaf World – in terms of his communication, his friendships and his girlfriend – illustrating that this as one of the most profound forms of his identity construction, because a mutual form of communication became the key factor to a more meaningful relationship with a young Deaf woman, than with that of a hearing young woman.

Similarly, Modupi's hearing family has also had a profound affect on how he contemporarily constructs his identity. The Cele family communicate in three South African languages in their household – Sesotho, IsiZulu, and SASL. Because their son (Modupi) is Deaf, the Cele family have come to terms in dealing with the reality of being a Deaf family, simultaneously fighting against rigid systems that ignore or cannot cater for their Deaf children. And in so doing, the Cele family have in some way; through the father; allied themselves with the Deaf community, as bilingual parents. Modupi's brother, Kekeletso and his niece; Candy, are both how to and communicate in SASL.

Consequently, Modupi has internalized his hearing family's linguistic and cultural identification (IsiZulu) over that of the Deaf world. He says IsiZulu is his first language, even though he uses SASL as his preferred language to communicate with his family, friends and the larger Deaf community (in Worcester in which he attends college). He further declares that he is not defined by either the Deaf World or the hearing world, but is a apart of both, enabling him to fluidly move and co-exist between the two worlds; the hearing world and the Deaf World. Modupi moves functionally between the two 'worlds,' because he belongs to them both, allowing him to be culturally Deaf and culturally hearing (IsiZulu).

Furthermore, Modupi feels accepted and supported in his family, where his brother – Kekeletso – interprets for him when needed.

6.8 Analysing Ethnographic Data

In conclusion, this chapter has brought to light, as well as confirmed with literature, that the failures of Deaf people exist always in relation to the strengths of hearing people, in that "hearing authorities have not fundamentally changed their views of Deaf people" (Lane, 1993: 894). Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind, in relation to the pathological view, treats its Deaf learners as having special needs that need medicalization by further objectifying them as "technical objects of psychometric investigation... to measure [and] modify... [their] deafness by making it legitimate through coerced fitting of hearing aids (Lane, 1993: 279- 280).

Foucault (cited in Lane, 1992: 84) analyzed the historical evolution in which the control of people's bodies came to be seen as a legitimate concern of government, which he calls 'bio-power,' where knowledge and power coalesce. Lane (1992) validates that those who participate in such exercises of power; contend first that technology can isolate deviance, and that it can correct that deviance (Lane, 1992: 85). It is in such 'treatments' that Deaf people in the Republic of South Africa and international, are often associated with exclusion, or labelled in derogatory and discriminatory manners such as; 'deaf mutes', 'deaf and dumb', 'hearing and speech impaired', language impaired', 'abnormal' (Smuts, 1997: 23).

Having said that, one would ask, "How then does a Deaf person – generally made invisible until s/he signs – render the presence of a 'visual Deaf identity?" (Harmon, cited in Burch & Kafer, 2010: 39). To answer this, Brewer (1995: 481) suggests the individual "converts the stigma from a feature of personal identity, to a basis of social identity."

I recall this particular incident, early 2014 before Modupi had left Bluegumbosch; QwaQwa for college in Worcester. I had scheduled a formal meeting with Modupi that took place through the assistance of Mrs Tinaka, a SASL Interpreter, on the premises *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*. Before our (Modupi and I) meeting, I WhatsApp-ed Modupi and asked him if he could please pick me on his way to

Thiboloha. No later parked outside my house in Phuthaditjhaba, Modupi honked the horn of his car to indicate his arrival and that we should leave.

Grabbing my things and making my way out, I find Modupi leaning against his car, nodding his head to the beat out of the music blasting out the car. All the car windows are opened, amplifying the frequency of the music. I greet him in SASL, but he jerks his head, as if tilting his chin up, and makes his way inside. I follow suit. Chuckling to myself, I found it weird that he did not sign back, only when we got into the car, did he sign.

With the music still blasting, we make our way to Riverside. Modupi decides to pull his car seat so low that his body is slouched into the seat. However, his body is slouched so far back that only his arms are made visible. Arriving at *Thiboloha*, we are meet by a boom gate. I roll down my window and the security guard comes over to the passenger seat where I am seated. Greeting us both in spoken Sesotho, Modupi utters “*heita Buddhha*” simultaneously raising his hand off the steering wheel and jerks his head as if to say ‘yes’. I signed us in on the register, while the security checked the boot of the car.

Wrigley, Taylor and Moghaddam (1990: 996) claim that, for an individual to “pass” in the majority group, that individual will seek to identify with the majority group. *Having witnessed Modupi’s change in behaviour when he came to pick me up at my home; leaning on car,*

blasting music, choosing not to sign to me in public, riding low and depicting an image of 'being cool' and speaking "tsotsi-taal" [slang] when an elder addressed us, is an ethnographic case in point.

To answer Harmon (cited in Burch & Kafer, 2010: 39) of "How then does a Deaf person – generally made invisible until s/he signs – render the presence of a visual Deaf identity?" I asked Modupi why he had had his music blasting so loudly, with the subwoofer suspended. He clarified to me that he likes to feel the vibrations of the sound from the speakers. However, when asked about the rest of the acts, Modupi gave me a sheepish giggle shrugged his shoulders; leaving me to speculate that, this is also a mechanism he uses to 'be-in-the-hearing-world' which does not make him visible in rendering the presence of a 'visual Deaf identity (Harmon, cited in Burch & Kafer, 2010: 39).

Though out this Research Report, an in-depth ethnographically based analysis investigating the experience of identity construction of Deaf children in hearing families in South Africa, with particular reference to a deafhearing family in the South African township of QwaQwa has brought to light, through the method of a case study, of how a young Deaf man contemporarily constructs his identity within his hearing family and the broader communities (hearing and Deaf) in QwaQwa, South Africa.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter of my Research Report, I seek to analyze the misconceptions of hearing people towards Deaf people, much like those made by Cooper, Rose and Mason (2004: 386). They claim that many hearing people believe that Deaf people are, for example, generally less capable than hearing people, have a medical problem that needs to be fixed, should not have children, and are unsafe drivers. Furthermore, they claim that hearing people are also dismissive of, or ignorant about, the idea that Deaf people have a legitimate identity, culture and language (*ibid*: 386).

In addition, I share my personal experiences of how I have moved from an audist mindset, to that of accepting and celebrating the sensory status of Deaf individuals. Furthermore,

The telling of stories, according to De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012)

allows the teller to bring the coordinations of time, space and personhood, into a unitary frame so that the sources “behind” these representations can be made empirically visible for further analytical scrutiny in the form of “identity analysis”(De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012: 159).

Space, according to Delaney and Kaspin (2011) is neither empty nor neutral. Moreover, it is filled with things and with

meaning (Delaney & Kaspin, 2011: 31). Space also constitutes the ways in which people orient their world; physically, socially, emotionally and politically. With that said, spatial concepts order and organize lives between the inside and outside, public and private and Deaf and hearing.

The Cele family have been gracious enough to allow me into their private space of residence. Allowing me to actively engage and interact in their lifestyle.

It was not easy getting in – not into their private space of residency per say, but being *accepted* into their space of residency as a researcher with the intention to conduct fieldwork on a deafhearing family in Bluegumbosch, QwaQwa.

7.2 Recapping Research Question

To reiterate, the aim of this Masters Research Report was to investigate the experience of identity construction of Deaf children in hearing families in South Africa, with particular reference to a deafhearing family in the South African township of QwaQwa. I focused my study on the life a young Deaf man, aged twenty three (23) in order to gain an emic perspective of how he contemporarily constructs his identity within his hearing family and the broader communities (hearing and Deaf) in QwaQwa and Worcester.

In the process of investigating the experience of identity construction of Deaf children in hearing families in South Africa, I posed a critical question asking ‘How does a young Deaf man contemporarily construct his identity within his hearing family and in the Deaf community in the Free State township of Bluegumbosch, QwaQwa; South Africa?’

In the process of exploring my research question, I focused on (i) the impact that a Deaf young man has on his hearing family members and (ii) the social processes of how he contemporarily identifies himself relationally within his hearing family unit and more broadly in the wider context of the Deaf World, as well as (iii) how three South African languages (IsiZulu, Sesotho and SASL) and three cultures (Sesotho/IsiZulu hearing and Deaf culture) interactively engage in the Cele deafhearing household.

7.3 Summary

In summary, Modupi, my key interlocutor, was born hearing. However, at the age of two(2), he fell sick with tonsillitis and developed a spiraling temperature when his mom; Mme Makhotsa Cele, took him to the family Pediatrician. The doctor indicated to the Cele family that an invasive method, such as an operation, would be the best way to remove their son’s tonsils. In turn, he would have a healthy and speedy recovery.

Consenting to the medical procedure, the Cele family permitted that Modupi’s tonsils to be removed. Tragically, due to an

apparent medical malpractice, Modupi was wheeled out the hospital theatre deafened. Mme Makhotso reveals that the news came as a shock to her and their extended family, who in turn, blamed her for taking Modupi to the doctor, as if she hadn't, he would have remained hearing. Moreover, Mme Makhotso confessed that she feared that people, especially in her community, would think she bore a 'disabled' child, or would not accept him when he grew up.

After several tests performed on Modupi, where he was fitted with hearing aids, the Cele family grew to accept that their first born son was deafened. Through continuous support from family and extended members; in-laws and maternal family, the Celes learned to accept, nurture, support and love Modupi "like a normal child," (page). The Cele family learned to transform negative notions of deep seated cultural perceptions of deafness in their community through supportive social structures, communication and creations of positive meanings through interpersonal structures, by constructing their own social reality in terms of positive perceived meanings.

In my research, I have explored whether and how there is a middle ground in which Modupi is able to fluidly move between two worlds; the Deaf World and the hearing world. I also wanted to understand how he constructs his identity in the Deaf World via a "set of learned behaviour of a group of people who have their own language, values, rules for behaviour and tradition" (Padden & Humphries, 1998: 4).

Modupi identifies himself with the upper case 'Deaf,' used as an indicator of a positive cultural Deaf identity of a sign language user and a member of a visual, cultural, linguistic and global minority group (Ladd, 2003). In addition, he declares that he is proud of his sensory status and finds it offensive when hearing people take pity on him, or make suggestions to him wishing he could hear. He ignores that he was born hearing and became Deaf, by pronouncing that he was born Deaf, yet his parents told me that he became Deaf after a medical malpractice.

In respect of his being-in-a-hearing-world, he consciously states that he is a part of both worlds (hearing and Deaf) using necessary communicative tools such as SASL in the Deaf World and functionally lip reading in the hearing world (as only forty percent(40%) of speech can be 'made' and thus read on the lips). Modupi makes clear that his decision in choosing not to belong to a particular 'world' is influenced by how both his hearing family and the Deaf community at large, have contributed to making him feel like he belongs to both worlds; separate to each other, yet equal in validation of each other. Thus, allowing Modupi to formulate a sense of 'belonging,' constituted by a process of becoming, in both worlds (Morgan, 2013: 4).

Politically defending his sensory status, Modupi chooses not to wear his hearing aids because he associates them with instruments that perpetuate the condition of perceived disability, which is in alliance with the views of the Deaf community with whom he associates

himself. Rather, Modupi says that the hearing aids making him visibly Deaf (audiologically).

The data reveals that the Cele family, a deafhearing family, use diverse languages such as South African Sign Language [SASL], IsiZulu, Sesotho and mixtures of sign-supported-Sesotho or total communication in their household to communicate amongst each other, inclusive of Modupi.

The Cele family identify themselves to be ‘Deaf’ who in turn, “fight against rigid systems that ignore, or cannot cater for Deaf children, by allying themselves with the Deaf community as bilingual parents” (West, 2012: 29). They have politically positioned themselves in seeing Deaf people in a positive light, existing as members of a cultural-linguistic group who use SASL as their preferred mode of communication. That said, my key interlocutor is able to embody two South African cultures –one hearing IsiZulu and Deaf culture; further enabling him to move between the Deaf and hearing worlds, in a space in which his family has inherited two speaking cultures (IsiZulu and Sesotho) and Deaf culture.

In essence, Modupi has internalized his hearing family’s linguistic and cultural identification (IsiZulu), over that of the Deaf World. He prefers to say IsiZulu is his first language, even though he uses SASL as his preferred language to communicate

with his family, friends and the larger Deaf community (in Worcester).

7.4 Discussion

As mentioned, my interest in this research is tied to my own history in the year 2012 when I took a personal decision to try find my purpose in life. As a result, I signed up to learn SASL at *Thiboloha School for the Deaf and Blind*, in Riverside, QwaQwa. This was my first encounter with the Deaf community and their ways of life.

In the words of Tom Humphries (1975) I was, at that point, an audist. Not only had I judged Deaf people's intelligence on the basis of their ability in the language of the hearing culture, I had also assumed that Deaf people's happiness depended on acquiring fluency in the language of the hearing culture (Dirkensen & Bauman, 2004: 240).

It has been through the process of critical analysis and the art of anthropology as an ethnographic discipline and methodology that I have been able to understand the social lives, thoughts and feelings of Deaf people in contextual relation to what they believe, how they behave, and give meaning and value to and conceptualize their world. Having said that, I have politically positioned myself to perceiving Deaf people in a positive light;

existing as members of a cultural-linguistic group, using sign language as their preferred mode of communication and proud to be Deaf. This is why I decided to use upper-case 'D' consistently throughout my Research Report.

In this last section, I will give a brief analysis, or etic perspective of my key interlocutor's idea of his identity.

In an attempt to understand whether there is a middle ground in which a Deaf individual is able to fluidly move between worlds; the Deaf World and the hearing world, it is noteworthy that Modupi chooses to be Deaf, though I have observed him fluidly moving between the two worlds (Deaf and hearing) with ease, communicating with whatever means (through SASL, social media, WhatsApp texting, sms-ing, lip reading) possible. Modupi fits the profile of a bicultural-bilingual Deaf individual who is 'DeaF,' fitting into both the Deaf community and the hearing communities, by co-existing within bicultural spaces of being culturally Deaf and culturally hearing, as suggested by McIlroy (2008: 48-50). He chooses to stay committed to both worlds by not allowing either 'world' to define or restrict him.

In the context of the hearing world, Modupi asserts that his first language is IsiZulu, yet he uses SASL as his preferred language of communication. Moreover, to ensure his survival in social settings within the hearing community, Modupi personifies the image of a

township hearing *tsotsi* [Sesotho word meaning ‘thug’]²⁰. That is, he is continuously conscious of his dress style and the label attached to his clothing. He drives slow and ‘low’ with the car windows open; simultaneously drawing attention to the car that is blasting music, making sure he is ‘invisible’ by slanting the car seat away from the steering wheel. Furthermore, he utters slag words such ‘*heita Buddha*’ [hello Chief [a leadership title], ‘*Sho-sho*’ [hello] and ‘*Bosso*’ [leadership title] when engaging with the hearing community. His usage of *tsotsitaal* [township language] is an important element of cultural style in the hearing community, which, however, he does not discuss with me or make apparent.

My key interlocutor is able to switch identities – being Deaf first in the Deaf World, using SASL as a preferred mode of communication, and switching to being Black then Deaf by adopting a hearing culture of a township *tsotsi* persona. With Modupi being able to switch between identities, he is also able to move fluidly between the two worlds.

It is rather unfortunate that I could not get the opportunity to witness how Modupi contemporarily constructs his identity within a Deaf community, such as in the Worcester College he is currently attending in the Western Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa, due to the limitations of this Masters Research Report. However, I futuristically propose to extend this as a theme within my future research in Deaf Studies.

²⁰ In this context, ‘tsotsi’ refers to a specific youth sub-cultural style in the township, (Glaser, 2000: 22).

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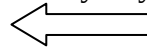
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Shoeshoe Setai's Sign Name



This is my tiny dimple on my chin.



To demonstrate:

Place your index finger ('D' hand shape) below the corner of your lip then...

Fist your hand ('S' hand shape) with the thumb sealing all the fingers in a hand-fist placed in a frontal position.

Taxi Hand Sign to Bluegumbosch, QwaQwa



In Phuthaditjhaba, QwaQwa, this hand gesture above indicates that one is heading to Bluegumbosch to taxi commuters.

Your palm faces in towards you, while you simultaneously put out your index and middle finger facing upwards.



Greeting in South African Sign Language (SASL)



To demonstrate:

Place a flat hand/ a 'B' Hand shape on your forehead. With a welcoming facial expression, you then stretch out your hand away from your face.



