

Introduction:

On the Importance of Deaf African Perspectives for Engaging Citizenship, Politics, and Difference

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Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most linguistically, culturally, and geographically diverse regions of the world. Making up the largest land area on the African continent, its forty-eight countries (at the time of writing, including South Sudan) are home to some 2,000 languages (Heine & Nurse, 2000; Ethnologue, 2014). In addition to these, many languages are not included in official accounts or research agendas. This edited volume aims to bring attention to one subset of such languages and the language-embedded interests of its users: sub-Saharan signed languages (SSSL). Sub-Saharan signed languages are used mostly by African deaf people, who share many aspects of life with their nondeaf African counterparts: They live in cities and rural areas, are schooled and (mostly) unschooled, marry, raise families, take part in community or village life, and, where circumstances and personal interests allow, participate in national, regional, and international activities. Despite their presence all over Africa, deaf communities are commonly overlooked by both social policy and scholarly projects. The result is that there is little written about African deaf people's cultural lifeways, educational initiatives, socioeconomic livelihoods, political participation, or transnational interactions.

In the last 50 years, linguistic research on signed languages has grown alongside other social scientific descriptions of deaf communities. Describing connections between signed language usage and social action, modalities of cultural experience, and forms of community and society building, such sources offer fresh perspectives on a broad range of issues of importance to contemporary multicultural and multilingual societies, particularly issues of inclusion and exclusion. Focused largely on signed languages and user groups located in the Global North, SSSL

have received little attention—this despite the swell of SSSL-related research, as well as a groundswell of political and activist projects, starting in the 1990s (see the section on depoliticization, later in this chapter).

This edited volume brings together perspectives from the emergent body of work on SSSL and related deaf community organizing. By assembling SSSL-related perspectives in one place, we hope to celebrate the work of sub-Saharan deaf intellectual workers by expanding discussion of their insights on language and citizenship to audiences within and outside sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing examples from all regions of sub-Saharan Africa—western, eastern, central, and southern—the authors of the volume chapters and section introductions also illuminate circumstances pertaining to cross-border, cross-regional, and global engagements with SSSL.

The context for this focus on SSSL-related work involves practical activities and theoretical debates bringing researchers and activists into conversation with each other, transcending disciplinary boundaries and local, national, and transnational spaces. Responding to specific nation-building projects, ongoing post-colonial transition, development-oriented planning, livelihood production, HIV/AIDS, civil conflict and war, the chapters demonstrate the ways that language issues are embedded in sociopolitical and economic concerns.

Given the large geopolitical, sociocultural, and linguistic territories making up sub-Saharan Africa, the variety of disciplines represented by the volume's 10 chapters, and the expanse of qualitative and quantitative datasets included, it is impractical (if not impossible) to try to contextualize all of the materials included herein. The purpose of this chapter is then to introduce the aims of the book in connection to its central themes of politics, citizenship, and difference; frame key issues and debates emerging from this interdisciplinary focus on the perspectives of those who use SSSL; and outline the structure and contents of the volume.

CITIZENSHIP, POLITICS, DIFFERENCE: AIMS AND CENTRAL THEMES OF THE VOLUME

This volume has two interrelated aims: to examine sub-Saharan African deaf people's perspectives on citizenship, politics, and difference in relation to SSSL practices, and to examine SSSL practices in relation to sociopolitical histories and social change interests (including addressing aspects of culture, gender, language usage, race, ethnicity, sexuality, or ability). In addressing these aims, the volume contributes to the burgeoning literature on deaf citizenship, both scholarly treatments and practice-based examples of language-centered sociopolitical activities undertaken by deaf persons and groups. In so doing we hope to participate in moving deaf citizenship into the center of broader citizenship theorizing, and to move citizenship theorizing toward sites and sociopolitical questions it all too rarely considers.

CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship is not an autonomous construction but a status that gains meaning only within the complex geographies of the state, civil society

and the family and within economic structures that diversify and stratify everyday life within those domains.

William L. Leap, "Language, Belonging, and
(Homo)sexual Citizenship in Cape Town, South Africa"

The focus on citizenship emerges at the juncture of several developments—two decades of social scientific reengagement with concepts of citizenship to examine and theorize relationships between social change and power, the growing emphasis within international forums and documents to formalize human and linguistic rights, and recent empirical research detailing disparities in social and civic participation for the world's deaf populations.

Extending Marshall's classic definition of citizenship as rights and responsibilities bestowed "on those who are full members of a community" (2009, 149), social science work since the mid-1990s has shown citizenship to be a highly productive conceptual device for thinking about relationships between social change and power. Such work effectively demonstrates the ways that individuals and groups create conditions of possibility in the absence of official forms of recognition. Such treatments include anthropological approaches to cultural citizenship (Ong, 1996; Rosaldo, 1994); critical cultural studies of new forms of citizenship (Hall & Held, 1989); studies of sexual practices, identities, and belonging as claims to citizenship statuses (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Duggan, 1995; Leap, 2004, 2005)—as well as approaches from other disciplines (for a view from feminist studies, see Beasley & Bacchi, 2000, and with regard to deaf citizenship, see Brueggemann, 2009; Cooper, 2014; Emery, 2006). These efforts take place in context of other projects reexamining and critiquing the very concept of citizenship, its roots in liberal democratic traditions and empire building associated with countries in the North Atlantic (Hardt & Negri, 2001; see also Hailu, this volume), notions of sovereign authority differently constructed in pre- and postcolonial historical moments (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006), and forms of autochthony—primordial origins claims to belonging as one new mode of citizenship in Africa (Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005; see also Geschiere, 2011a, 2011b).

Taken together these sources show citizenship to be a useful analytic device for examining agents (governmental actors, transnational development workers, local power brokers) relative to rights (typically associated with legal and political frameworks and statuses), choice (typically associated with individual and cultural statuses), and the ways of being and belonging in particular social-historical moments.

POLITICS

Occurring in everyday locations, the social negotiations just described are remarkably political in that they involve forms of inclusion and exclusion, regulation and disciplining. "The issues around membership—who does and who does not belong—is [*sic*] where the politics of citizenship begins" (Hall & Held, 1989, 17).

Membership is predicated on interaction and communication exchange—processes involving uses of language. Language usage is, in turn, mediated by

patterns of language socialization and social structuring: To the extent that persons are excluded from membership because of language, then their participation in decision making will be explicitly excluded, and their perspectives insufficiently represented. Thus, language difference may lead to exclusion from decision making in areas such as educational design, civil infrastructure, healthcare delivery, political governance, and a whole range of social, political, and economic enterprises. These circumstances are abundantly clear for spoken languages in multilingual sub-Saharan African countries (Bamgbose, 1991, 2000; Mugane, 2006; Spitulnik, 1998; Tollefson, 2012). Whereas postindependence transition may shift formerly excluded populations into centers of sociopolitical control, colonial structures often perpetuate within regimes of naming, counting, sorting, documenting, standardizing, teaching, and enforcing language usage (Makoni & Meinhof, 2004; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

These circumstances are also abundantly clear for signed languages, as many of the chapters in this volume attest (particularly, Hochgesang; Lutalo-Kiingi & De Clerck; and Moges; see also Branson & Miller, 2007). Misconceptions about signed languages and signed language-based socialization practices continue to dominate social policy, most commonly in the instrumental treatment of signed languages. For example, ideological discourse in the areas of policy and development often frame the use of signed languages as a “choice,” something that majority-language decision makers can elect to address or not.¹ Inasmuch as invented sign systems that imitate the word orders of (majority) spoken and written languages are proffered as “better” vehicles for teaching deaf students majority languages, signed languages are often excluded from institutional settings.

That governmental leaders largely choose not to engage SSSL-usage groups is borne out by *Deaf People and Human Rights*, a 2009 comprehensive worldwide survey conducted by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD).² With more than one-third of the total responding organizations (36 out of 93 countries) located in sub-Saharan Africa, a preponderance of these (29 out of 36) reported that they did not hold “equal citizenship” in their society (Haualand & Allen, 2009). Although 15 of the 29 organizations indicated that they enjoyed some formal recognition of their signed language(s), only 6 reported the availability of signed language dictionaries or other materials. These data show clear evidence of the relationship between language status and sociopolitical position: Where signed languages are not recognized as language per se, language users often face various forms of marginalization (e.g., civic, educational, employment, social). The WFD survey is presently the primary source of data on the sociopolitical participation of deaf groups in African countries and worldwide; readers will note that the chapter authors cite the survey extensively.

DIFFERENCE

Focusing on citizenship action from the perspective of the politics of mobilizing difference, this volume pursues connections between (a) the construction of deaf people as stigmatized subjects who are assigned to a social category of differ-

ence and (b) strategic mobilizations related to categorizations of difference in sub-Saharan locations. Trenchant meditations on difference, such as Foucault's (1970) *The Order of Things*, Stuart Hall's (1992) *The West and the Rest*, Michel Mbembe's (2001) *On the Postcolony*, and Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, demonstrate that many contemporary categories of difference have emerged in European thought. As philosopher-statesmen began carving up the world, they classified societies according to characteristics they assigned to certain oppositional statuses (e.g., superior and inferior, positive and negative). Informing the Enlightenment construction of scientific rationality, including the acquisition of information about race, gender, kinship, social structure, class hierarchies, sexual practices, political and economic organization, and ways of speaking, such knowledge produced global effects as it circulated through patterns of contact, colonial occupation, and "development" of its Others.³

One key technology of power that picked up speed in nineteenth-century knowledge production is normalization; given in new social scientific methods of measurement, descriptions of the statistically average features of a population established both the norm and the criteria by which deviant features and behaviors could be described and investigated. Thus, such activities created frameworks for categorizing and differentiating human bodies and experiences into certain kinds of problematic differences.

The persistence of particular ways of (ideologically) categorizing human beings, practices, cultures, and societies, as well as the appearance of new categories and articulation between them, underlines the importance of understanding how discourses on difference emerge and how they change. Mills offers a helpful definition of discourses as groups of statements "which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context, and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence" (2004, 10). Discourses prominently involve evaluations of others informed by beliefs, values, and attitudes—or ideology. Putting citizenship and difference in the context of ideology helps explain how decision makers come to frame signed languages as simply choices that could be (given individual will) and should be (given citizens' proper social commitment) substituted for languages used by dominant groups.

Often categorized as subjects lacking intelligence and ability, deaf people have been denied the tools (notably, education) that might help them improve life for themselves and their societies. The education of deaf children is a particular point of contention. In fact, clashes occur over everything from content taught to the language of instruction, frequently to the detriment of deaf children; moreover, local deaf community members are rarely consulted on matters of education, and they do not possess decision-making authority. In this volume, this contention is addressed by several authors, including Annelies Kusters on Ghana, David Penna on South Africa, Rezenet Tsegay Moges on Eritrea, and 'Gbenga Aina on Eastern Africa. Having in common certain roots in mission- and development-based projects, each of these descriptions of education clarifies the forces active in particular sub-Saharan locales along with particular sociopolitical interest.

Other contributors in this volume describe various stigmatizing categories applied to deaf people throughout Africa: Alem Hailu describes “a cultural legacy” in Ethiopia that holds that deaf people are “possessed by evil spirits, accursed or persons incapable of cognition”; Julie Hochgesang finds that “a deaf person in Kenya is generally thought to be unintelligent, language-less, and not able to contribute to general society”; Janet Lord and Michael Stein interview a Gabonese advocate who contends that “Deaf persons are considered incapable of pursuing an education and mistakenly regarded as unable to work”; and Euphrasia Mbewe connects the stigmatization of deaf people to gender marginalization, addressing restrictions on deaf women’s participation in deaf organizations and other activities throughout Africa. Even in comparatively higher-performing economies, deaf people tend to be excluded from mid- and upper-level social, economic, and political strata. Many governments implicitly neglect the concerns of deaf people, thereby requiring private citizens to organize in order to carry out the duties more commonly undertaken by government.

One example of such organizing can be found in postapartheid South Africa, where various constituencies convinced the drafters of the new South African constitution to include a variety of minority subject groups (e.g., people with disabilities; gays and lesbians). They also lobbied for legal recognition of South African Sign Language (SASL) in order to ensure broad-based language inclusion in the institutions of the new South Africa. Although the newly adopted constitution makes nominal reference to generic “sign language,” official recognition of SASL remains on the horizon. Meanwhile, deaf people organized to achieve the inclusion of SASL as one of South Africa’s many languages represented on the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB). Thus, deaf citizen-activists have pursued social, political, and juridical access and protections on several levels—as language users and as persons who work with organizations that focus on other social groups and issues. Whereas mechanisms that underwrite forms of exclusion are interrelated in significant ways, the descriptions of the technologies of normalization and difference as applied to deaf people in particular sub-Saharan locations illuminate the nature of such technologies more broadly.

To summarize, by connecting citizenship, politics, and difference, the chapters in this volume demonstrate the ways that language access—in this case, access to the languages used by deaf adults in particular sub-Saharan African locales—is mediated by diverse mechanisms of classification and resource allocation. That individuals and groups must negotiate such mechanisms in order to use signed languages in everyday places such as schools, community organizations, shopping centers, and private homes indicates the politically and socially charged nature of signed languages in the late-modern moment. The now infamous case of the “fake interpreter,” who appeared onstage during the memorial ceremony for Nelson Mandela, provides a powerful example: Despite repeated attempts to intervene in the hiring of that individual by DeafSA (Deaf Federation of South Africa), the fake interpreter still managed to appear for one of the decade’s most highly televised world events and in the process caused embarrassment to the South African

government on the world stage. Such events warrant examination of deaf people's citizenship practices, including the signed language-related work that is required to reposition SSSL into locations of social and political power.

DEAF PEOPLE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: COMMON ISSUES AND DEBATES

This volume focuses on four themes connected to the examination of citizenship, politics, and difference in sub-Saharan Africa: development, depoliticization, language ideology, and forms of self-identification and nomenclature. As noted in the thematic sections mentioned later, individual chapter authors characterize, reflect on, historicize, and problematize these in different ways. These introductory remarks do not aim to resolve the authors' various viewpoints into a unified statement; rather, they are intended to help readers anticipate and contextualize each of the themes.

DEVELOPMENT

Whether characterizing development in negative, positive, or ambivalent terms, the authors' perspectives align around development as embedded in local, national, regional, and international structures (e.g., laws, policies, funding architectures, organization, programming) and processes (e.g., money flows, social networking, prestige). Both influencing and influenced by power as it is exercised in socio-cultural, public, and/or governmental affairs, development work entails (among other effects) political implications.

Statistics compiled by the World Bank indicate that deaf people are significantly economically disadvantaged in both developed and developing economies (Mont, 2007). Even in the United States, which, by comparison, fares better economically, more than 80% of people with disabilities do not participate in the formal labor force, and a disproportionate number suffer from the state's inability to provide adequate, appropriate, and accessible education.⁴ Worldwide, only about 20% of deaf people are believed to attend school; moreover, given that data-collection methods have not been well defined for research carried out for countries that perform at a lower economic level, these numbers may actually be understated (Haualand & Allen, 2009).

Such statistics provide only a mere indication of deaf people's living conditions in the sub-Sahara. Moreover, the language of international development and aid may obscure a clear representation of deaf people's livelihoods and social activities by emphasizing certain modalities of participation, self-determination, and equality, namely, as attributes and activities of *individuals*. Yet participation, self-determination, and equality are not well defined in practice. Neither are they value free. Reflecting the perspectives of global elite development personnel, they leave little room for locally distinct epistemologies or models of development created outside of the world's major capitalist delivery systems (Hecht & Simone, 1994; Juma, 2011; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Mittelman, 2000).

Participation, self-determination, and equality are each contested terms not just for Africa but wherever they advocate social and political-economic restructuring. What does it mean to be a true participant in addressing the concerns directly affecting one's own life and those of local, national, or regional citizens? What does ensuring self-determining participation require of governing bodies? And how is equality conceptualized? In section III of this volume, Alem Hailu's chapter substantially addresses such questions, putting them and relevant international and governmental mechanisms into historical and political philosophical perspective. Arguing forcefully, "a democratic process that is based on rules forcing a division between winners and losers . . . errs by accepting the tenets of democracy in theory but denying them in practice with the tyranny of the majority," Hailu asserts that development-oriented "emphases on centralized structures, dominance of expertise that excludes leaders and members of deaf social groups, and attitudes that fail to view deaf people and their communities as possessing intrinsic human worth and value undermine the goals of empowerment."

The last decade has witnessed a growing debate over the efficacy of development assistance to African countries. Critiques range from maintaining that aid worsens poverty in aid-receiving countries (Moyo, 2009) to asserting that aid is one component of critical coordinated responses designed to strengthen economic security and political infrastructures (Watkins, 2004, 2009). Meanwhile, "saving" Africa continues to proliferate as an acceptable global register through which popular media and international nongovernmental organizational (INGO) mission statements describe, if not conditions in Africa, then how commentators see themselves in relation to such conditions.

There is no question that whatever optimism generated in the immediate post-colonial period—the restructuring of state and civil governance systems, economic infrastructures, education, public health services, conflict mediation, and a host of other activities—conditions in many sub-Saharan African locations have not turned in the direction that many had hoped. Unrealized hope is reported in the commentaries of country and locality members—some of whom have, Maathai analogized, "boarded the wrong bus," which is "heading in the wrong direction or traveling on the wrong path, while allowing others (often their leaders) to lead them further from their desired destination" (2009, p. 6).

Maathai's Green Belt Movement demonstrates the power of people turning to those seated next to them on the bus and, by engaging in conversation, developing more appropriate and sustainable approaches to address local concerns. Juma's (2011) *The New Harvest: Agricultural Innovation in Africa* provides another trenchant meditation on African sustainable innovation from within groups' own specific circumstances—in Juma's case, agricultural technologies—to promising result. Maathai, Juma, and others (e.g., Olopade, 2014) illuminate what high-level aid debates often conceal: a central concern for the creativity people amass in relation to their lived environments and an affirmation of diversely modern ways of manifesting such creativity. A number of significant examples are given in this volume, including Lutalo-Kiingi and De Clerck's description of the Ugandan deaf

community's innovative outreach to Cameroon in the form of assistance with documenting Extreme North Cameroon Sign Language. Lord and Stein discuss another example, one that involves transnational, cross-disability organizing realizing the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 34 African countries and related projects through a variety of partnerships holding language and citizenship concerns at their center.

While these examples can be said to circulate among globalized audiences, the work carried out by deaf people living in sub-Saharan Africa sometimes takes less visible forms. That is, in certain circumstances, deaf people may organize by engaging in what Scott terms *infrapolitics*—that is, “the strategic form that subjects must assume under conditions of great peril . . . [by which] all political action takes forms that are designed to obscure their intentions or to take cover behind an apparent meaning” (2005, pp. 71–72). Their apparent social invisibility does not preclude their social salience; moreover, the precarious positioning of such projects may even facilitate forms of political association unanticipated by political elites, also extending their social reach. In this regard, the exclusion of variously positioned forms of difference by political elites may benefit groups in their effort to transcend difference in order to improve conditions for all members of a locale or society.

Whereas some deaf-led social groups may choose social discretion for certain activities, the chapters in this volume clearly demonstrate that sub-Saharan deaf people often attempt to effect social change but find their efforts ignored by local, national, and/or transnational elites. 'Gbenga Aina's chapter, for example, details how, despite being the driving force behind HIV/AIDS outreach initiatives in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, deaf people were erased from all reportage of the U.S.-based President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Many chapters note the central role played by associations of deaf people in signed language-related advocacy and research initiatives, as well as education, employment, and poverty-reduction activities, with extended discussion of the Kenyan National Association of the Deaf (KNAD; see Julie Hochgesang); the Ugandan National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) and the Cameroonian National Association of the Deaf (CANAD) (see Lutalo-Kiingi & De Clerck); the Ghana National Association of the Deaf (GNAD; see Annelies Kusters); and the Eritrean Association of the Deaf (EriNAD; see Rezenet Tsegay Moges). Penna does not focus on any specific national association of deaf people but rather discusses strategies that would be equally applicable to all of them.

Focusing attention on African deaf women's experiences, Euphrasia Mbewe's chapter argues that national associations of deaf people often marginalize women's participation and limit their opportunities for practicing leadership skills; Mbewe closes her chapter with practical recommendations for promoting women's leadership through access to education, implementation of international treaties, and participation in deaf-led associations. Focusing on family inclusion, Sian Tesni and colleagues report on the positive impacts on self-determination when deaf people are embraced by their families and their community. Connecting this focus to a discussion of organizational structure and management, Penna makes a culturally

responsive and outcome-oriented argument for institutionalizing deaf people's "path to power" in organizations.

DEPOLITICIZATION

One of the prominent ways that development has been characterized in anthropological circles is as "anti-politics" (Ferguson, 1994). This is because development leaders often argue that development projects are neutral approaches toward conditions as certain clearly identifiable problems. By contrast, those taking a critical view of development (Escobar, 1992; Hodgson, 2002; Jackson, 2005) show that the very act of characterizing circumstances as certain kinds of "problems" evidences bias. Categorizing something as a problem or an asset therefore has political implications, whether it happens in development, academic research, community organizing circles, or everyday spaces.

"Medicalization" (of deafness) is one powerful example of a categorizing mechanism that is quite familiar to readers of world deaf histories, sign language studies, and anthropological and sociolinguistic accounts of deaf groups. As a form of antipolitics diverting serious attention and vast amounts of money away from signed language-based education, arts and literature, livelihood production, society building, and so forth, critiques of medicalization have generated alternative perspectives presenting deaf groups as social, cultural, and linguistic minorities.

The representation of deaf people in sub-Saharan Africa provides another example of antipolitics. Over the last two decades, persons using, researching, and engaging in social organizing connected to SSSL have emerged as powerful constituencies. The following list names just a few of these and their activities:

- In 1991 the Kenyan National Association of the Deaf founded the Kenyan Sign Language Research Project (KSLRP). Hosted by the University of Nairobi, the KSLRP teaches KSL and interpreter training for Kenya's aspiring interpreters (Akach, 1991; Okombo, Mweri, & Akaranga, 2009).
- In 1995 journalist Nigel Crawhall interviewed deaf activists Wilma Newhoudt-Druchen and Kobus Kellerman for *Bua!* (a publication of the postapartheid National Language Project).⁵ The feature article, "Sign of the Times: Deaf Rights in South Africa," addressed deaf participation in the writing of the interim constitution, sign language as a natural, minority language versus disability as an organizing tactic for securing rights, and "deaf community-building alliances with other human rights groups" (Crawhall, 1995, 6).
- In 1996 Alex Ndeezi became the first deaf person appointed to the Ugandan parliament. Three years later, Wilma Newhoudt-Druchen became the first deaf person appointed to the South African parliament, into which she then integrated the use of South African sign language interpreters.
- From the mid-1990s to the present, the labors of many signed language recognition and rights movements have been rewarded with official language status:

Kenya (2010), Uganda (1995), South Africa (the 1997 constitution makes generic reference to “sign language”), and Zimbabwe (2013). Signed languages in Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia all enjoy formal, though not official, recognition; that is, signed languages may be included in educational programming, for example, although they are not recognized by the government as national languages (Haualand & Allen, 2009).

- In 2009 WOCAL-6 (the sixth meeting of the World Congress of African Linguistics) included its first all-day session on African sign languages. In 2012 WOCAL-7 also featured an all-day session on African sign languages, this time including explicit focus on “social, cultural, and political contexts” and “Cameroon Sign Language and the Cameroon Deaf community” (<http://wocal7.erinad.org/>).
- In 2011 the World Federation of the Deaf chose Durban, South Africa, for the 16th meeting of its World Congress. Organized and hosted by local deaf leaders under the guidance of the Deaf Federation of South Africa, the World Congress was attended by thousands from around the world.

Despite the breadth of these SSSL-related activities, readers are likely most familiar with images of deaf children in need living in sub-Saharan African countries. Often depicted alone or surrounded by relief or development organization workers, such children are assumed to be illiterate, medically compromised, helpless, hopeless, extremely isolated, and unable to connect with other human beings or to learn. World Health Organization findings for sub-Saharan Africa bolster such depiction, describing “disabling hearing loss” in approximately 6.8 million children and 30 million adults (prevalence aggregated at 17 million males, 13 million females) (World Health Organization, 2001, pp. 8–9). Such depiction of deaf children in the sub-Sahara is clearly pathologizing⁶ and depoliticizing.⁷

As all of the chapters in this volume show, far from being the “way things are,” such images and head counts decontextualize individual deaf children from their families and communities, lumping them together into aggregates whose very grouping, as noted earlier, is determined by a perspective on deafness as a problem and deaf people as all the same (e.g., no differentiation for language usage, access to education and social interaction). Annelies Kusters provides an example of this in her chapter, which discusses one such campaign in Adamarobe, Ghana. She reports that the deaf community there has no access to language and showcases the negative influence this has had on its development.

By contrast, the key factor in assessing deaf children’s quality of life is the quality of their linguistic interaction and communication with parents, family, or clan, as well as productive participation and leadership in their community, tribe, village, or society.

Whereas many countries have implemented laws related to “disability” and/or ratified documents such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, access to natural signed languages continues to elude serious

consideration in policy making and programming. Where alternative perspectives presented in signed languages are unaccompanied by spoken or written translation, few persons outside the immediate language-usage communities possess the linguistic competence to appreciate their significance. Thus, in many locations (not just in the sub-Saharan) there is often a disconnect between deaf citizens' socially engaged, intellectual labor and its uptake by power elites in decision-making roles. The circumstances that perpetuate deaf children's isolation from or marginalization within their families, communities, and tribes can be understood as one product of this disconnect (see the chapter by Tesni et al. in this volume). Julie Hochgesang's chapter addresses another important lack of connection: the circumstances facilitating deaf people's acquisition of knowledge yet without their meaningful participation. Applying the sign language communities' terms of reference (Harris, Holmes, & Mertens, 2009) to her own Peace Corps fieldwork, Hochgesang shows how well-intended efforts can limit relevance to deaf communities by failing to (1) include the participation of deaf research consultants, (2) adhere to accepted standards of linguistic documentation, and (3) produce materials in languages (e.g., Kenyan Sign Language) accessible to all deaf community members. By contrast, Lutalo-Kiingi and De Clerck's description of their work in Uganda and Cameroon suggests ways to impart knowledge with sensitivity and the full participation and cooperation of the deaf communities involved.

As this discussion of the political nature of development-related work and the potential for depoliticizing effects demonstrates, each of the chapter authors contributes in a different way to the repoliticization of SSSL-related concerns in particular locations. The chapter by Janet Lord and Michael Stein provides a far-ranging and rigorously detailed look at legal and advocacy-based mobilizations by deaf people and/or persons with disabilities in the sub-Saharan, drawing important insights from relationships between language use, recognition, and civil, political, and legal rights.

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

Focusing on living signed languages (i.e., those used by people embedded in contemporary social, political, and economic contexts), the essays in this volume describe the effects of ideologies related to signed languages and deaf people in sub-Saharan African locales. Theorizing on "language ideology" has expanded in the past three decades. One of the earliest definitions of the term states that it encompasses "beliefs about language articulated by users as rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein, 1979, 193). Such expressions of power, rationalization, and justification for and/or against signed languages point toward living engagements with real circumstances and struggle over how these should or might be lived.

For sub-Saharan Africa and other global locations, language ideology is reflected in projects related to language policy and planning (LPP). One example is Lippi-Green's helpful description of language ideology in LPP as a "bias toward

an abstract, idealized homogenous spoken language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class (Tollefson, 2008, 6; original, 1997, 64). The emergent literature on SSSL and LPP comprises key works discussing circumstances in Botswana (Lekoko & Mukhopadhyay, 2008); Namibia (Bjarnason, Stefansdottir, & Beukes, 2012); Nigeria (Schmaling, 2001); and South Africa (Heap, 2006; McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011; Reagan, Penn, & Ogilvy, 2006; see also Reagan, 2010, and Branson & Miller, 2008).

To help us understand these circumstances, especially how language ideologies are institutionalized as truth, Blommaert argues for ethnographic examination of people's actual language practices: "If language is used by real people and not by abstract social categories, then these real people must have names, faces, ages, occupations, and so forth" (1999, 7). This volume's chapter authors do this in various ways—according to their particular disciplines and research interests—addressing issues centrally concerned with relationships between language and power, including how social policy comes to support certain languages, language usage groups, and language-related aims; how language policy and planning influence institutional and program design; and how language organizing effects social change (including research agendas and write-up).

Moges (chapter 3), in particular, takes language ideology as a central concern, showing how the "multiplicity of ideologies" she found in Eritrea actively worked to construct mechanisms of missionization among Eritrean d/Deaf communities. Demonstrating "a strong historical connection between religious missionization and Deaf education," Moges emphasizes the importance of ethnolinguistic documentation in helping us to understand "patterns of missionization, particularly for controversial sites," and for "limit[ing] erroneous generalization and assumption, such as assumptions that American Sign Language (ASL) is the only mission-related sign language affecting Africa."

Two of the more prominent forms of language ideology referenced in the various chapters are language naming and language invention. The chapters by Annelies Kusters, Sam Lutalo-Kiingi and Goedele De Clerck, and Rezenet Tsegay Moges describe the local impacts of schools built by Andrew J. Foster, an African American deaf educator who advocated the use of American Sign Language as the language of education in both Francophone- and Anglophone-dominant locations in sub-Saharan Africa. Questions about the existence of local signed languages pre-dating the introduction of American Sign Language belie the ideological nature of naming one linguistic-tradition "language" (in this case, ASL) while other linguistic traditions are labeled "not-language" (i.e., local undocumented signed languages). Such processes are sometimes referred to as "invention . . . which foregrounds the historicity of the social conditions in which African vernaculars were created" (Makoni, quoted in Pennycook, 2002, 15; see also Makoni & Meinhof, 2004, and Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). We might ask whether a similar process is active in the creation of SSSL languages (including uses of ASL) and examine the forces now active in promoting certain SSSL-related projects and suppressing others.

FORMS OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND NOMENCLATURE

Readers familiar with both the recent and the historical civil rights struggles of deaf signed language users in North America—which accounts for the bulk of documentation on deaf language communities worldwide—will take notice of the ways the chapter authors frame signed language usage, deaf epistemologies, and citizenship interests vis-à-vis both other deaf people and notions of disability. In the North American context, “deaf, not disabled” is a meaningful discourse as well as a privileged one. In sub-Saharan African country locations, cultural and linguistic framings of deaf experience and signed language usage are also meaningful. However, in the organizing work carried out by deaf citizen-activists such discourses often co-occur with discourses of disabilities. In these contexts it is unremarkable for signers to move back and forth between medical and linguistic-cultural models of self-description without contradiction. Throughout the volume readers will become attuned to seeing descriptions from this different center and to considering the implications for theory and social-change activities.

Readers will also recognize (or become accustomed to encountering) descriptions from a “different center” in the ways the authors of these essays variously represent and define the term “deaf.” Some authors follow a convention of uppercase “Deaf” to indicate the cultural and linguistic status of deaf experience, reserving lowercase “deaf” to reference audiological status only. Others use “Deaf” to mark the continuum of deaf experiences and language as a cultural-ethnic category, with no reference to lowercase “deaf.” Others use “Deaf/deaf” to indicate the universe of possibility that includes both identifications, according to the person or group; similarly, one author uses “deaf/Deaf” for this same purpose.

Having seen each of these forms of representation in particular historical traditions of local usage and national, regional, and transnational affiliation, as editors we have opted to retain the respective ways authors deploy the terms “Deaf,” “deaf,” and/or other expressions. Another rationale for retaining particular traditions of marking deaf epistemologies is to invite critical reflection on the ways that “Deaf” and “deaf” are used and to consider the significance of such usage for the various circumstances under consideration.⁸ As you read, we encourage you to think about the particular way the authors are defining, shaping, or invoking the term.

As for our own use of lowercase “deaf” both here and in the introduction to the second section of the book (unless referring to a specific organization in which the capitalized form makes up part of the title), this was a difficult decision for us to make, and we changed our minds several times. Ultimately, we determined to leave “deaf” unmarked—a decision significantly informed by the following experience. In April 2012 we cochaired a conference at Gallaudet University, *African Lessons on Language and Citizenship: Local Action and Transnational Partnerships*, during which we had an opportunity to interact with more than 300 participants, many of whom hailed from sub-Saharan African countries. We came into contact with a variety of perspectives on deaf self-identification practices that did not cor-

respond to those we were most accustomed to in the United States. Seeing similar patterns reflected in the various volume chapters, we decided that the use of lowercase “deaf” would best promote neutrality toward all of the naming practices we encountered at the conference, in the chapters, and in larger deaf debates on representation. We expect and welcome reader responses to this decision.

Finally, the chapter authors use different framing devices to classify countries and regions relative to global economic standing, including First World and Third World; developed and developing; lower- and higher-economically performing; and resource poor and resource rich. Believing that each of these framing devices is motivated from particular disciplinary vantage points, linguistic traditions, and/or personal preference and that such framings reflect specific interpretations of economic and other conditions, we decided that these frames should be allowed to stand as the author intended (rather than altering them by privileging a common term).

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This volume consists of three main sections. Section I, *Sub-Saharan Signed Languages and Perspectives*, contains three chapters, with introductory remarks by Sam Lutalo-Kiingi and Goedele De Clerck; Section II, *Politics and Difference*, contains three chapters, with introductory remarks by the volume’s coeditors; and Section III, *Citizenship*, contains four chapters, with introductory remarks by William L. Leap. As editors we have had to decide how to organize the placement of chapters; however, in all three sections readers will note a great deal of overlap in focus and argument. We see this as a strength of the volume overall—that chapter authors are working with all of the volume’s three main themes to productively illuminate areas of their own choosing.

By way of brief description of the inclusive chapters, Section I focuses on particular deaf communities and languages, describing and examining the circumstances surrounding the emergence of research initiatives on signed languages in Kenya, Uganda, and Cameroon, as well as signed language standardization efforts pursued by religious missions in Eritrea. In chapter 1 Julie Hochgesang examines the ethical implications of signed language research on deaf communities, using her own field experience in Kenya as a sample case. In chapter 2 Sam Lutalo-Kiingi and Goedele De Clerck examine challenges to full inclusion of deaf citizens encountered in the course of documenting, researching, and preserving signed languages and propose strategies for countering these forces. Rezenet Tsegay Moges (chapter 3) examines how the Eritrean deaf community responded to foreign missionaries’ attempts to “standardize” their language and make it more similar to the majority spoken language.

The three chapters in Section II examine intersections between deaf subject groups and those assigned to other categories of difference. In chapter 4 ‘Gbenga Aina describes how aid monies allocated by the United States to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS actually compromised deaf communities in a number of sub-Saharan

countries, complicated by linguistic separation between and cultural differences among the people in these locations. In chapter 5, Euphrasia Mbewe reports on a group that is doubly marginalized by both deaf and hearing social hierarchies: deaf women. Describing the multiple limits imposed on deaf women in African countries, Mbewe emphasizes the important role that both international and African treaties play in the African women's movement. In the final chapter of this section, Sian Tesni, Karen Heinicke Motsch, Joseph Morrissey, and Rose Kwamboka use empirical data and direct practice as a foundation for advocacy and practical strategies to increase deaf participation in family and community life.

In Section III, the four chapters focus on local deaf community organizing and participation in broader social-change movements. In chapter 7 Alem Hailu proposes several strategies that deaf communities can utilize to transform their societies from within, including both well-proven tactics and new ideas in the context of human development goals. With Hailu's strategies still in mind, the chapter by Annelies Kusters provides an ethnographic case study that reflects on the strategies employed by Adamaroban deaf people. Kusters powerfully demonstrates how social structures—including the role of the deaf church, access to education, and the impact of American Sign Language—interact to create patterns of hope and expectation differently tied to INGO development projects and farming as a deaf profession. Noting that the majority of deaf people in sub-Saharan Africa live in rural locations, David Penna (chapter 8) looks at deaf peoples' organizing efforts and considers how nonurban deaf groups can more fully mobilize social change. The volume closes with a wide-sweeping yet detailed chapter by Janet E. Lord and Michael Ashley Stein, which examines the impact of the CRPD on deaf communities in Africa, as well as communities' ability to lobby their governments to advance local group-specific interests based on innovations included in the convention.

CONCLUSION

The first volume of its kind, this collection of essays connects scholarly and citizen-activist insights developed in relation to sub-Saharan African people, signed languages, and sociopolitical perspectives. Introducing original ethnographic cases and treatments, these essays contribute to efforts to better understand the forces limiting human social participation and to devise more advantageous practical approaches to addressing these conditions. The analyses and activist viewpoints herein do an inestimable justice by offering indispensable critiques of current governance structures and processes and by envisioning possible social, political, and linguistic worlds.

We conclude with quotes from two sub-Saharan activist-scholars whose words best weave together our outlook on citizenship, politics, and difference and reflect key points on language and participation in this volume. First, from Bruno Druchen, national director of DeafSA:

We spoke to [the South African] Parliament presenting the case that our sign language is a human right as well as a language . . . and we never spoke alone; we always had individuals from other provinces, women, youth, and those of different ethnicities and groups speak with us. Speaking together, not alone, is evidence that there are partnerships within the Deaf community. Having others with us makes more of an impact on the Parliament as they can see we are a collective group with a voice.⁹

Addressing the circumstances of language marginalization specifically, Nigerian linguist Ayo Bamgbose (2014) argues as follows:

If indigenous languages are not used, we are marginalising a greater proportion of our people; 80 to 90 per cent will be excluded from what is going on. . . . We need to emphasise a language which people are already good in communicating, to reach them and by reaching them, they can participate. We are talking of participatory democracy. It can only flourish if as many people as possible actually participate.¹⁰

Taken together, these two quotes remind us that many of the circumstances that SSSL users encounter are shared by indigenous spoken language users and others to whom forms of difference are attributed. It is in this context that Bruno Druchen's call to join together on each other's behalf powerfully meets Bamgbose's insistence on participatory democracy: Establishing a collective intention, yet expressed through individual differences, needs, and interests, has the potential to facilitate new forms of participation.

Our hope, which we think of more as an intention, is that this book will spark more conversations about new forms of participation, particularly those involving signed language users, in the social, political, and economic life of sub-Saharan Africa's diverse citizen groups. As a result, new partnerships can be built across areas of concern to people living in and outside the sub-Sahara.

NOTES

1. An example of signed language erasure is UNESCO's 2010 *Why and How Africa Should Invest in African Languages and Multilingual Education: An Evidence- and Practice-Based Policy Brief* (Ouane & Glanz), which makes no mention of signed languages despite its recognition and advocacy of multilingual education.

2. There has been some criticism of the WFD's research methodology, statistics cited, and conclusions. Hualand and Allen (2009) also acknowledge the shortcomings of their report, including "lack of reliability," "lack of inherent consistency (of some of the data)," and the probable reduction in validity and reliability considering the "vast geographical, cultural, social and linguistic varieties of the countries participating" in the survey (11–12). Given that the generation of statistics on any population can be difficult and may be compounded by the challenges we noted earlier, which are particularly true of Africa (for which statistics are also notoriously unreliable), *Deaf People and Human Rights* is currently the most

comprehensive source of primary data about deaf communities worldwide. Moreover, its coverage of African countries makes it a valuable resource for establishing a beginning point for further research.

3. Paraphrasing Hall, the very notion of the West functions in four ways: as a conceptual tool for classifying societies (“constituting difference”); as a verbal and visual language and a system of representation linking terms such as “Western,” “developed,” “industrialized” (and their counterfactuals, “non-Western,” “underdeveloped,” “nonindustrial”), thereby “representing difference”; as a standard or model for comparison (“explaining difference”); and finally, as a set of criteria for evaluating and ranking differences between societies (1992, 186). In summary, Hall argues, the concept of the West “produces a certain kind of knowledge about a subject and certain attitudes toward it. In short, it functions as an *ideology* (ibid.; Hall’s italics).

4. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2013 only 17.6% of persons with disability were employed, compared with 64.0% for persons not reporting a disability. Note, however, that these numbers are not disaggregated according to types of disability; the statistics on deaf people are extrapolated from these.

5. We thank William L. Leap for sharing this source with us.

6. Numerous ethnographic case studies describe circumstances of differential treatment of deaf populations, theorizing them in terms of uses of power and control: “audism” (Humphries, 1977); “oppression” (Lane, 1992); “linguistic imperialism” (Branson & Miller, 2007); and “disablement” (Branson & Miller, 2002).

7. For a critical development examination of African contexts from an anthropological perspective, see Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Ferguson, 1994; and Hodgson, 2002; for a political science perspective, see Matthews, 2004; with regard to economics, see Moyo, 2009; and pertaining to critical journalism, see Olopade, 2014.

8. See McIlroy and Storbeck (2011), for an account of “Deaf” identification among students attending mainstream or special schools in South Africa.

9. Bruno Druchen, African Lessons on Language and Citizenship Conference presentation, April 19, 2012.

10. *Punch* (Nigeria). Interview with Professor Ayo Bamgbose, March 30, 2014. <http://www.punchng.com/feature/octogenarian/i-cant-do-without-my-laptop-prof-bamgbose/>

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