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Euromodernity's Undertone: On Reconceptualizing Political Speech

Derefe Kimarley Chevannes, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2019

Abstract

This dissertation contends speech is indispensable to politics. It begins with Aristotle, whose conception of political speech grounds our modern understanding. I argue the Aristotelian position is colonizing insofar as it essentializes speech as sound. The consequence is that speech becomes phonocentric, privileging a particular mode of communication. This raises the issue of Deaf subjects who engage politics in non-phonocentric ways. That is, their speech is seen in what I contend is a visual vernacular. Subsequently, I turn to the issue of race. If Deaf subjects raise questions about what it means to speak, Black subjects, who speak audibly and are still unheard, raise a correspondent question: What does it mean to be heard? Within Euromodernity, I contend political speech becomes essentialized and racialized. Here, particular human beings (whites) are deemed as deserving of being heard, while others (Blacks) are silenced and thus, rendered speechless.

In response to these conditions, I argue Black and Deaf subjects do speak and their speech challenges existing hegemonic, colonized forms. Black and Deaf political speech allow for the creation of Black and Deaf lifeworlds, an articulation of their own ways of existing in the social world. The result is a project actualizing freedom. Ultimately, I posit a creolizing of political speech, a mixing of Deaf and Black existential articulations, such that what engenders is a reconceptualizing of political speech towards a meeting of wills, ideas, and ways of being, grounded in generality. Under such a project, political lives and futures for the colonized emerge.

Euromodernity's Undertone: On Reconceptualizing Political Speech

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2019

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Euromodernity's Undertone: On Reconceptualizing Political Speech

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Introduction

No leader can successfully lead this race of ours without giving an interpretation of the awakened spirit of the New Negro, who does not seek industrial opportunity alone, but a political voice.

— **Marcus Garvey (1922)**

Because they think they are white, however vociferous they may be and however multitudinous, they are as speechless as Lot's wife—looking backward, changed into a pillar of salt.

— **James Baldwin (1984)**

We should try ourselves to forget that they are deaf. We should teach them to forget that they are deaf. We should speak to them naturally...

— **Alexander Graham Bell (1884)**

This critical study explores why speech is essential to doing politics. It does so by revisiting classic discussions of political speech in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Steve Biko, Frantz Fanon, among others to illuminate what it means to speak politically and what are the requirements for being heard. Specifically, I ask, if one's communication cannot be recognized as speech, can one be a political subject or is one reduced to an object of other people's decision-making and action? After all, in order to have a role in a polity one must participate in debates over what should be shared values, norms, and priorities. On one plane, my aim in undertaking this line of questioning is to determine whether there are losses in understanding and to political life through reducing speech to audibility or to what can be heard in a phonocentric sense. I intend to explore this through a

focused study of deaf people—who do not engage in audible speech and are often therefore thought to be non-speaking.

Once considered speechless subjects, the auditory often think of the deaf also as non-political or people who must be spoken for. Drawing on the studies of language, speech, communication, and politics undertaken within deaf communities, I advance a reconceptualization of political speech beyond narrower conceptions of the spoken word. Having critically considered the nature of speech, I then turn to what it means to be heard. I do this through a study of language, speech, and politics in black communities in the Caribbean and the United States which, though mainly capable of speaking in a conventional sense, and in this sense not defined by what is considered a physical disability, have historically been unheard. I conducted my research of existing work on the speech and audibility of black and deaf communities through a series of open-ended interviews with members of the deaf, black, and deaf black communities in Hartford and Bloomfield, Connecticut (the former is a central location in the history of U.S. deaf politics while the latter is home to one of the largest expatriate Jamaican communities in the world) and Kingston, Jamaica.

Speech Beyond Audibility

In Old English, the etymology of the word *speak* leads to *sprecan/specan* meaning “to speak, to utter words; to make a speech.” However, other etymological archeology unveils that *specan* was not the primary word for speak, but rather it was, *maþelian* from *mæþel* meaning “assembly, council,” which denotes, “to meet.” That is to say, in the original Greek formulation, to speak was more than an individual-focused activity of utterance (*specan*). It was a meeting (*maþelian*). And

so, to speak was to meet. This association between speaking and meeting continued in other civilizations. Similar to the Greek, “the [Akan] phrase *bo dwa* means to cause a crowd to assemble for a formal speech event” (Yankah 1995: 52). In other words, for the Akan, speech is fundamentally relational in its orientation: “Opportunities for speaking abound in Akan society...[t]he label *mpanin kasa* marks a style of speaking...[t]his mode of speaking typically situates the speaker within the public domain (*dwamu*) or formal assembly, where socio-political issues are debated before a consensus is reached” (Yankah 1995: 53). One historical meaning of speech then does not center the sounds exchanged by those who participate in phonocentric language. Instead it describes the realization of intersubjective spaces in which people are seen by virtue of being heard. All speech is accessible and all forms of speech are understood since when this is not the case, speech, so understood, is absent.

There are many potential political implications: a dialogic process of speaking *with*, at least in the moment when speech occurs, includes meaningful belonging. This would also imply that if we conjoin “political” and “speech,” political speech is only in evidence under conditions that allow for a meeting of people exchanging ideas, engaging in consensus, dissensus, disputes, and broadly, contestations—if not constructions: rhetorical, actional or otherwise—about their inhabited socio-political world and the lives they actualize within it. Political subjects, it would follow, are agential people at least in so far as they participate directly in such public meeting. These definitions suggest that engaging in political speech involves positioning one’s self in and assuming a role in the constitution of a political world. But, critically, what does this result in for Deaf subjects and black subjects?

Scholars of Deaf communities describe their members as residing on the periphery of political speech because their voices are seen rather than heard. The form of their communication

renders their expression not only inaudible but also unheard. While the majority of black people do engage in phonetic speech, when they are *seen* as speakers, their illicit appearance tends to eclipse the content of what they are saying. While their voices could be heard, they are not listened to. In both cases, the meeting described in the etymologies of speech does not occur. I re-examine in this study classic discussions of political speech through investigating how black and deaf communities have articulated the relationship between expression and political life. More specifically, doing so returns us to the original understanding of speech as a form of meeting that is eminently relational and intersubjective. This more expansive view has consequences for who can function as human subjects and for the nature of political community.

Defective Political Subjects

Lewis Gordon observes that the ancient Greeks believed that since political life is necessary for the construction of the *polis*¹ to reject the political life—a public domain—and resign oneself to the private sphere is to be an *idiōtēs* (a private person), which is the source of the word *idiot*. Gordon adds that the linguistic archeology of *idiōtēs* extends to the ancient Egyptian term *idi*, meaning deaf. Therefore, to be anti-/apolitical or deliberately to avoid partaking in the construction of public life was to be an idiot, which was akin to someone who did not hear, to be deaf.² Strikingly, being unable to hear does not necessarily make one either anti-political or an idiot, since one could reach to the public sphere without the faculty of hearing, yet being an idiot is explained through recourse to deafness. This reality raises substantive questions: Does this still

¹ See Aristotle's *Politics*; *On Rhetoric*, Plato's *The Republic*; *Apology*.

² See Lewis Gordon's, "Thoughts on Afropessimism," *Contemporary Political Theory*.

entail that political speech, as understood through the hegemonic history of ideas that gives us avowed legitimate constructions of what it means to be a human being, fundamentally excludes deaf people? Is the implication that deaf people cannot engage in political speech or is there expanded ground for a different line of argument: that Deafness in the ancient worlds of Greece and Egypt was thought better to describe people who could participate but opted not to than those who engaged in non-phonetic modes of expression and exchange? If this is the case, what are we to make of people who did not hear in the conventional sense but remained politically involved and engaged? Or, when they tried to enter, did they instead encounter a world of *idiots* or people unable to grasp the political speech they engaged? Indeed, what seems to be a fecund avenue of inquiry is one that identifies missing links and reveals porous lines of reasoning. What results from these questions is addressing the political lacunae, which begins by correcting the epistemological prism through which Western political theory understands questions of Deaf subjectivity and the meaning of the political.

Sign language notwithstanding, the deaf subject, in more recent history, is one constructed as both a non-hearing *and* non-speaking subject. “The older terms for [the deaf] were deaf-mute and Silent...Mute or Silent people are those who, for the most part, do not speak” (Lane 2008: 284). A further exploration into the etymology of “mute” reveals the Old French, *muet*, meaning “dumb,” the Latin, *mutus*, meaning “silent, speechless, dumb.” In other words, associated meanings indicate that the presumed inability to hear sound that marks the deaf person extends to their supposed inability to speak. Absent speech, they are silent subjects and therefore non-political subjects. In other words, even if the original etymologies framed people who opted out of political engagement as the deaf, the conflation of those who do not hear phonocentric sound with

those who are mute or silent emerged with a particular conception of the human subject, and of politics, fashioned in and through audism. Hauser *et al* (2010: 490) note:

Audism begins with a specific theory of humanness. For example, bodies that hear normally are the prototypical human bodies. In audism, the body is a starting point for social classification. The perception that there is a difference based on the body (i.e., the perceived imperfection of deaf bodies) is a concept common to audism, racism, and sexism. This perception leads to the assumption that deaf bodies are unwanted, inferior, and subject to repair. To the extent that deaf people do not hear and do not speak, they are seen as less intelligent, less capable, and less human.

Audism plays a central role in the creation of the hegemonic conception of the deaf subject as a defective version of human being, an idea with which deaf people have had inevitably to contend.

Hilde Haualand acknowledges that language makes human beings human and allows them to connect to each other (2008: 111). At the same time, she cautions that people often confuse speech with language. She writes, “Assertions of the ‘natural’ status of speech thus provokes several questions. Why is the audible perceived as the natural form of communication?” She maintains, “Speech has an attribute that is inherently a part of it—namely sound—that makes it different from sign language” (*Ibid*). She then erects this syllogism: if language is human and speech is audibility, and language is speech, then deaf people do not speak and therefore are not human.

Paddy Ladd extends this analysis through exploring the disfiguring of deaf speech as part and parcel of larger colonial processes. He writes, “most people conceive colonialism as formed around economic power visited upon cultures less able to defend themselves, [however,] there is undeniably a case to be made of the concept of linguistic colonialism” (2003). He describes linguistic colonialism as consisting in the requirement that all languages, including sign language, construct their word order following the rules of spoken English. The aim, of course, is to make a language not designed for the deaf but one that is accessible for hearing people to use. The result is that “signing became a matter of tagging signed items onto speech or English-mouthing” (2003: 178). For the deaf to speak, even in their own tongue, they had to do so *hearingly* or in ways that echoed and emulated one historically specific version of speaking and of speech. This suggests a larger question: Has our conception of speech moved from a description of when human meeting in fact occurs to a narrow and particular model of how this has been achieved in one place and time? Are we mistaking speech itself for one peculiar instantiation of it?

Borrowing directly from Frantz Fanon, Ladd recounts the way that audist conceptions of the human person and his or her speech were institutionalized in educational policies regarding the deaf. Specifically, over the course of two centuries of Deaf education, which employed and engaged Deaf educators, Deaf communities and their sign languages were replaced “with an exclusively Hearing-led system promoting the use of speech, lip-reading and hearing aids to remove the ‘need for’ Deaf communities to exist” (Ladd, 2003: xviii). The elimination of funding and popular support for deaf institutions, particularly schools, was the oralist *modus vivendi*. It framed the erasure of a deaf state of being as progress. Ladd continues, “Hearing people have long sought measures that would reduce the number of Deaf people, ultimately eliminating this form of human variation and with it eliminating the Deaf world,” so much so that chairman U.S. National

Institutes of Health planning group concedes, “I am dedicated to curing deafness” (Lane, 2008: 286). Curing deafness, which assumes that the condition is a form of pathology, is proposed through the erasure of this form of “defectiveness” from the human genus. Such a proposal in effect presupposes nothing would be lost in the elimination of deaf people. If so, it would also entail the assumption that deaf people have nothing to say and, broadly situated, are incapable of political speech.

This oralist posture to “fix” through erasure and eventual eradication rested upon continued juridical conceptions of deaf identity as illicit. Hauser *et al* (2010) have observed that deaf people often sought and seek deaf partners for the expressed reason of continuing deaf life and deaf tradition, as well as preferring to occupy a deaf world. However, such choices have come under scrutiny with legislators in England expressing the view “that deliberately attempting to create a deaf child is unethical and should be illegal” (Lane, 2008: 286). In so arguing, they, of course, have international precedent as “the twentieth century witnessed movements in the United States and Germany, for example, to sterilize Deaf people by law and to encourage them to seek voluntary sterilization or abstain from childbearing” (*ibid*).

In exploring the consequences for black life of persistent anti-black racism, Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK, hereafter) outlined the concept of “nobodyness.” He wrote: “For years the Negro has been taught that he is nobody, that his color is a sign of biological depravity, that his being has been stamped with an indelible imprint of inferiority, that his whole history has been soiled with the filth of worthlessness” (King, 2010: 39). Such a (black) nobody certainly could not speak politically and, of course, unable to speak and be heard, anything could be ascribed to him—as what he says is not equal to what is said about him. In this instance, that nobodyness is worthlessness and an absolute lack of standing. A clear parallel can be applied in a deaf context

in which those who “hear” become the standard form of what it is to be somebody. Absent this, deaf political speech becomes an impossibility with the consequence that *only* the hearing speak.

When “Deaf Mutes” Speak

But the deaf do and have engaged in speech that is political. One example is the concept of *deaf gain*. Orienting a humanistic deaf epistemology, deaf gain begins as a counter to the position of *hearing* “loss,” suggesting that the world of the deaf offers important contributions to humanity (Bauman and Murray, 2009). Specifically, deaf gain describes the uniquely “intersubjective” quality of deaf life, suggesting that there is a qualitatively different and positive form of deep engagement marked by “a generous way of being-in-the-world in which deaf individuals hold each other in a visual embrace of well-being and safety” (Bauman and Murray, 2004: xxvi). Deafhood, which defines “the existential state of Deaf ‘being-in-the-world’ ... is not seen as a finite state but as a process by which Deaf individuals come to actualize their Deaf identity, positing that those individuals construct that identity around several differently ordered sets of priorities and principles” (Ladd, 2003: xviii).

This account of the ways that Deaf communication encourages particularly rich forms of intersubjective encounter harkens back to understanding speech as a meeting. To grasp how and its implications, however, we cannot cede speech or speaking to audibility and to the hegemonic nodes of the hearing world. I contend that we can develop the language and concepts necessary to do this through exploration of the nature of the relationality evident within deaf communities and insisting that this is its own form of speaking community. Sign language is a language and one that Deaf people speak. At the same time, as suggested by Bauman and Murray, the need to hold the person with whom one communicates in “a visual embrace” should not only be understood in

compensatory terms. As such, not being able to rely solely on one's ears—that is, expanding sensory communication beyond an aural standard—is important to the achievement of actual meeting.

Indeed, Hauland describes the sense of transnational belonging created for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing by being able to “meet other people with whom one can communicate freely” (2008: 119). She emphasizes the “embodied experience” that emergences when “the communicative basis for constructing communities is put in the foreground” (*ibid*). The speech evident here is not auditory in any conventional sense, however. It must be recognized as marked by human, embodied meeting. What is more, when such meeting constitutes communities and identities, setting in motion ways of constructing modes and norms of a shared deaf existence, surely such exchanges are political? What would follow if this “deaf public voice” consisting “in very large part, of deaf people doing the talking (theorists, artists, and lay people)” (Bechter, 2008: 72) was listened to? After all, the deaf world, as imagined and experienced by deaf people, is one in which speech and its political form are vital.

At the same time, I must emphasize that, as is true of all political communities, there is contestation and dissent internal to the Deaf. Deafhood, as I have described it, is not without its critics. There are deaf people who understand their deafness primarily in terms of disability and who, if asked, would wish to spare their children or other people's children of this condition. In addition, there are writers, like Annelies Kusters and Maartje De Meulder, who avow deafness but charge its activists as caught in forms of essentialism akin to the early waves of feminism. They suggest that many advocates of deafhood biologize the condition of being deaf and treat interpretations of this experience as singular, as if there were one way of being a deaf person. For instance, they suggest that children of deaf adults or people with only slight hearing loss might be

excluded by the idea that to be deaf *is* to use sign language (Kusters and Meulder, 2013: 432-433). This is all to say, political speech cannot guarantee unanimity. It is precisely this: working with those barbs of contention—a deliberative doing; listening to and engaging with dissent.

Political Speech Against Speechlessness: A Turn Toward Blackness

One would assume that majority “hearing” black communities would not face the dilemmas we have been describing with regard to the Deaf. However, the repeated reflections on the nature of speech in historical black political thought suggests otherwise. Consider Martinican revolutionary psychiatrist and political theorist Frantz Fanon’s diagnosis: “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (1967: 8). Fanon writes fully aware of the questioning of African-descended subjects as those able to shoulder the weight of historicity. He is, for instance, familiar with Hegel’s assessment that: “Africa ... need not be mentioned again. For it is an unhistorical continent, with no movement or development of its own” (2011: 91). Guyanese political historian, Walter Rodney raises the question of cause and effect when writing that “to be colonized is to be removed from history” (1983: 255). He continues: “The negative impact of colonialism in political terms was quite dramatic. Overnight, African political states lost their power, independence and meaning” (*ibid*). The implications, drawing on Fanon, would be that African people and by extension, the African diaspora, who are now known as black people could make sounds but neither be the source of their own full-fledged language nor proper custodians of the tongues of others. Without language, presumably one does not speak.

It is from this vantage point that we can understand South African anti-apartheid revolutionary Steve Biko's "Frank Talk."³ More than Biko's *nom de plume*, it was, too, a signature of his ontological orientation and epistemic anchor. When Aristotle discussed the importance of rhetoric being a truth-finding enterprise, as when Fanon maintained that truth undoes colonialism, Biko followed in a similar vein—he valorized truth, for it had enormous political purchase. "This is the first truth, bitter as it may seem," which he identifies as blacks having "become a shell, a shadow of man...he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the 'inevitable position'" (Biko, 2002: 28-29). Biko's theory of Black consciousness aims at undoing that falsehood through truthful black speech that the content, form, and implications of which are all political. He writes, "Black Consciousness seeks to talk to the black man in a language that is his own" (1987: 32). For Biko to speak politically is to turn away from voicelessness and in so doing, to challenge prevailing discursive boundaries which are also political boundaries. As Lewis Gordon (2008: 87) writes:

It is not possible for people within the city [the *polis*] to live without disagreement, however, which means that opposition, short of war (between states), is needed. The shift to the discursive, recognized in ancient times through to the present as "speech," initiated or produced new forms of relations, identities, and ways of life that became known as politics. The question asked by...Biko...is the role of politics in the context of political formation. In other words, what should one do when the place of discursive opposition has been barred to some people?

³ It should be noted here that "Frank" is from the Old Latin *francus*, which means "freedom." Freedom Talk, as it were, explicated the thematic anchoring of Biko's activism and orientation toward political life. In other words, there cannot be freedom without truth. Frank Talk was, by all appearance, a political project on voicing the conditions—materially, ontologically and epistemologically—of Blacks.

In Gordon's formulation, what creates political relations is the commitment to resolve internal disputes through speech, language, and other forms of semiological communicative practices rather than through warfare (see Gordon 2018). By implication, to be outside of the domain of speech is also to lack political standing or political relations. In addition, it means that forms of opposition carry great risk, as they become the potential prelude to conflict and force. However, Biko is clear: he can call for and nurture Black consciousness, which "seeks to infuse the black community [with] a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life" (2002: 49); however, this does not assure a hearing with the political relations and norms that follow. Black consciousness is political speech against political speechlessness, but for whom is it audible?

If definitions of speech carry with them accounts of who can do politics, they also relatedly indicate who is a *who*. Joining the accounts of philosophical anthropology in our earlier discussion of audism to the one of colonialism here, the answer seems to be that only an idealized form of whiteness, as a power regime, "speaks" in our social world. However, we can then ask, if the only default communicative practice centers audible speech and it excludes Deaf people, can it be considered political speech proper? Its non-relationality to the Deaf world manifests when such a speech is audibly exchanged, for its audibility cannot engage Deaf people. Apartheid, as understood in the writings of Biko, is fundamentally against this grain of politics because of its anti-human and anti-discursive commitments. In Gordon's words, "Why was the response to [Biko], as the embodiment of speech, the brutal assertion of the state?" (Gordon, 2002: 88). Gordon claims Biko's assassination was, in the vernacular, an effort to shut him up, that is, to muzzle Black speech, understood in this context as a critique of the racist state; for these reasons, "the apartheid state was not only a war on people of color, it was also a war on politics" (*ibid*). Scholarly work

on the expression of Deaf and Black⁴ people suggests a push for the cessation of this war on politics and a repoliticization of depoliticized politics through fundamental challenges to existing discursive limits.

Methodological Considerations

To reconsider and potentially reconceptualize the nature of political speech, we must employ some of the radical principles of phenomenology. It is crucial to do so because for us really to grasp the meaning of speech and politics, neither can be treated as an absolute or unquestioned notion or one inflexible to change based on evidential demands. absolute) account. Once in place, a natural attitude toward these concepts would entrap us *a priori* notions of their legitimacy. “The natural attitude” is the phenomenological term for taking for granted the world as given. Doing so would thus involve treating one historically contingent expression of received ideas about speech as intractable and above critical examination. It would be deemed true without evaluation. For our purposes, we are likely to do a disservice to politics, speech, and political speech if we presuppose their bounds and possibilities. This is what Lane means when she writes: “I propose, therefore, to suspend common sense on this issue long enough to explore the concepts of deaf and disability” (2008: 277). In phenomenological language, the commonsensical understanding of deafness as disability needs suspension.

The phenomenologist neither foretells the questions nor the answers, but instead engages in an enterprise in which he questions the very questions themselves. According to Edmund Husserl, for instance, evidence, in its appearance, facilitates other appearances (Husserl, 1960:

⁴ Throughout this project, I will refer to “b/Blackness” in two distinct, separate ways. The first, “Black,” refers to the people as humanized political agents, while “black,” indicating its adjectival use, as in a black door, refers the mere racial designation of being black.

section 24). This insight is evident in Africana phenomenology, which Paget Henry describes as “clarifying the systemic error producing foundations of the European humanities and social sciences that have had to legitimate and make appear as correct this [the construction of ‘negroes’ and ‘niggers’] racist reduction of African humanity” (Henry, 2016: 31). This is to say, Africana phenomenology is uniquely situated to consider what happens to the relationship of speaking to speech, language and politics in racial contexts, where “the African has ceased to be a Yoruba or Akan and has become a ‘black,’ or a ‘nigger’” (32). Has this history rendered the previously speaking black person a black mute, producing “boys” and “girls” who need to speak up but instead collapse into silence under the weight of their masters’ voice? Africana phenomenology thus offers avenues to reflect on systemic racialized results.

The fruits of these phenomenological engagements inform the interviews that I conducted with black, deaf, and black deaf participants and informed how I weave together their own accounts of the meaning of speech and politics and how they engage in political speech. The format of interviewing I utilized ranged from email correspondences to face-to-face interviews. Interviewing embraces an organic, bottom-up approach to the study of speech and politics. This is important because “interviewing is often the best-suited method for establishing the importance of agency or ideational factors such as culture, norms, ethics, perception, learning and cognition” (Rathbun, 2008: 609). It is an effective method for illuminating how participants negotiate centripetal forces that are made manifest on political actors within a social world. In this research context, those forces are often the hegemonic norms of hearingness and whiteness. Rubin and Rubin (1995) also emphasize the indispensability of listening, if the researcher is to understand the subjective experiences of participants. Listening, I contend, is a key attribute of speaking, as I understand it, since it is part of what enables speech to amount to a meeting. Of course, in this

context, where sign language is a primary medium, it also metaphorical in that it also means reading what the participants signed.

Finally, I analyze existing scholarship in Deaf and Africana traditions that investigates or comments on the nature of speech and politics. Yanow (2003) contends that interpretivism is the general methodological framework on which sits phenomenology and the study of the *Lebenswelt* (“lifeworld,” the world of embedded social and political meaning). This general interpretivist methodological formula then concretizes the ground for a critical investigation of discursive norms that shape the hearing and muting of peripheral voices, thereby narrowing and calcifying the nature of political speech.

Assessing Significance and Contribution

Socrates, in *The Apology*, warned that a failure to listen leads to an undoing of the very pillars of politics. He states, “Do not make disturbances, men of Athens, but abide by what I begged of you, not to make disturbances at the things I say, but to listen.” He continues, “For know well that if you kill me, since I am the sort of man that I say I am, you will not harm me more than yourselves” (29c–30c). It appears that what constitutes politics, behind the curtains of history, is intimately tethered to the act of hearing. But what happens when “hearing” people will not listen either because they refuse to recognize some forms of language as speech or because they have decided, in *a priori* fashion, that the content is unwelcome? Can the unheard be political and act politically? If the unheard become a majority, can those who “speak” and “listen” be said to comply with the requirements of either? What are the political implications?

Fanon decreed, “We cannot go resolutely forward unless we first realize our alienation” (2004: 163). This Fanonian forwardness is a coming to terms with the ontology of our given selves

in their actual condition. Similarly, Anna Julia Cooper points to the import of an “unacknowledged factor,” in her case, what it is to be “confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both” (1988: 134). Addressing “alienation” requires finding “unacknowledged factors,” even as they sit in earshot. In the case of the deaf, we have yet to consider fully what their speech and its marginalization means for our understanding of the political domain and the conception of subjects within it. Similarly, while commented on frequently in historical black texts, muteness remains primarily an unacknowledged factor in the predicament of black would-be speech. In the former case, it would appear that to be heard is to be seen, as the visual language of the deaf is treated as something less than speaking. Since it cannot be heard in an audible sense, deaf subjects become both silent and invisible in the wider auditory world. However, as it relates to black subjects, the opposite seems to be the case: to be heard is to be seen, for the voice has become the eyes of politics. In the wider, predominantly non-black society’s refusal to hear black people as saying something legitimate, they are also rendered mute and unseen⁵. A question remains: is it seeing that the speaker is black that makes anti-black people close their ears, even as they claim that it is what is said that determines their response?

I bring my research on deafness and blackness into conversation in an effort to explore sites of their meaningful convergence and points where they significantly diverge. Considering them together proved especially helpful for considering the conception of the human being at the core of working notions of politics as well as those of speech. Working at their intersection also benefited my discussions of speech, disability, hearing, deafness, and politics—and together, the nature of the political actor as (s)he navigates these terrains.

⁵ It should be clear that I am not referring, in the case of Black majority countries, such as Jamaica or Liberia, wherein Blacks govern, as instantiating forms of imposed Black speechlessness. In such societies, what manifests is black anti-blackness. In Jamaica’s case, colorism complicates the racialization of political speech not explored in this project.

Summary

I begin by returning to an etymological account of speech and then survey existing arguments and assumptions about what is thought to constitute speech and political speech, drawing on the classic discussions of Socrates and Aristotle. I offer criticisms of these existing positions and introduce how political subjects were designated via the ability to engage in political speech and what it has meant to be speechless subjects, identifying, in the process, a philosophical anthropology or conception of the human being that has historically defined the polity.

I then examine the extent to which deaf subjects are, and can be, political subjects given the historical and ongoing centrality of speech to politics and prevailing hearing-centered definitions of speech. I demonstrate, through a genealogy of audism, that as Deaf communities cannot hear in the way that the non-Deaf do, they have been rendered pathologically deaf, by which I mean defective and in need of erasure. Under this analysis, the deaf became mute and supposedly could not articulate an agential voice. I engage scholars of Deaf history and identity, including Paddy Ladd, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Hilde Hauland to determine how deaf people have responded to an imposing colonial order about who is the “deaf-mute,” as well as assessing deaf discourses pertaining to the “authentic” deaf subject.

Next, I turn to black political speech in the Euro-modern world that is foundationally anti-black, with the expectation that the relationship of black people to political speech will be illuminated by the resources of the previous chapter. Invoking ideas from Steve Biko, Anna Julia Cooper, Frantz Fanon, Lewis R. Gordon, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I explore the nexus between political speech and race to consider how what is considered illicit speech (that is, black speech) is muted and what would be required to make it audible. With non-deaf black subjects, the challenge is not a physical ability to hear but a willingness of others to

listen to content that is expected to be, and often is, unwelcome and regularly, emphatically silenced. This analysis is followed by an account of speech, political speech, and political subjects through an existential phenomenological exploration and analysis of twenty interviews conducted with black, deaf, and black deaf subjects in Kingston, Jamaica and Hartford and Bloomfield, Connecticut.

I conclude through arguing that deaf and black ideas about these core concepts explode existing parameters in ways that are generative for the non-Deaf and non-black as well. If political subjects are created and also denied, where the denial is based on producing muteness, overcoming these dehumanizing designations requires reconceptualizing and reconstituting speech itself and thus, formulating its political currents—that is, political speech.

Part I
The Speaking Deaf

Chapter 1

The “Deaf Problem”

The colonization of deafness and people who are deaf curiously persists in the shifting economies of identity.

—Owen Wrigley (1996)

“Voice” has a dual meaning, most obviously as the modality of expression in spoken language, but also as *being heard*.

—Padden and Humphries (2005)

The deaf problem is decidedly a hearing problem. But the deaf question is one for both deaf and hearing. The former is a problematization of deafness by the power nodes of audism. The latter is an existential question that impacts the terrain of sociality itself. The very basis of social relations hinges on their expressive character. One’s imposed muteness—a denial of speech to make sense of one’s political future—is an assured condemnation to political atrophy. If, as this project attests, Euromodernity’s undertone demands the activation of certain *a priori* claims about speech, namely *who* is licensed to speak and, correspondingly, *who* gets heard under such regimes of licensing, then it behooves us to examine, on a literal level, those deemed “deaf.” This chapter makes several interrogations: what happens when we naturalize one’s hearing status as having a distinct valence that hierarchizes personhood and, thus, denies contributions to a shared political imaginary? Moreover, to what extent do the deaf community inform and enrich our considerations of political

speech, by broadening and contesting its parameters? In a word, what is it “the deaf-mute” have to say?

I begin with raising the question of speech as a *sui generis* political enterprise. From there, I provide a historiographical outline of debates surrounding the question of who is deaf, and once determined, examine ways in which deafness is bounded in a liminal space of sub-human personhood. Subsequently, I offer subversive discourses that dislodge the audist account of deaf subjectivity, opening the question of deafness as voiced by the deaf community. In so doing, I offer in this chapter avenues for generative discussions, through a series of metacritiques, about what it means to build a liberatory deaf life-world. The result is to bring into conversation the intersection of black and deaf identity, as the black deaf contests Anglo-deaf conceptions of speech. Finally, I examine contributions to speech that arise as a result of the creolization of deaf and hearing speech and, thus, inaugurate a reconceptualization of political speech.

On the Natures of Speech

The denial of speech via the rendering of subjects speechless becomes a political assault on the personhood of those muted. But equally victimized, we will see, is the body politic, as a silencing of one is a silencing of all. No doubt, speech subsumes itself under the larger umbrella of communication. One can communicate through cries, the sort that Anna Julia Cooper references in the opening pages of *A Voice from the South* (1988: i):

One muffled strain in the Silent South, a jarring chord and a vague and uncomprehended cadenza has been and still is the Negro. And of that muffled chord, the one mute and voiceless note has been the sadly expectant Black woman,

*An infant crying in the night,
An infant crying for the light;
And with no language—but a cry*

The cry, for Cooper, speaks to the yearning of the black woman to have words, yet even short of that, she still has a say but is only left with a cry. A cry that validates the humanity that has been denied. Here, the Black woman communicates with what she has been given—though she longs for a language of her own—the struggles to give voice to her muteness and in so doing, undoes the voiceless that has come to totalize and consume her sense of self. Speech, then, is not merely a cry. Take for example, Frederick Douglass' famous fight with the slave breaker, Reverend Covey. In telling this tale, Douglass noted that while Covey and he were locked in a battle of strength, one that the former could not win, Covey decided to enlist Caroline, one of his female slaves to aid him in subduing the rebelling Douglass (2003: 179):

As soon as she [Caroline] came into the yard, Covey attempted to rally her to his aid. Strangely—and, I may add, fortunately—Caroline was in no humor to take a hand in any such sport. We were all in open rebellion, that morning.

In this instance, Covey communicated his instructions yet he did not engage in political speech proper. He attempted to silence Douglass through physical domination. Speech, when it is wedded to the political, creates a union of humanistic expression. Speech partakes in the affairs of the polity. But for it to be political, it must animate the political concerns that lay manifest in the social world. This is to say communication can be apolitical, but speech vivified by politics is decidedly not. Speech, as it follows, when it wrestles with power, becomes intrinsically and uniquely a political affair.

For this reason, political speech is governed by an ethic of Rousseauian generality. In contouring and cementing the foundations of generality, Rousseau writes, “[The general will] is always right and always tends to the public good” (2006: 172). In other areas, he deems the general will as “the common good” (2006: 122). He describes this generality as belonging to a social fabric, one he dubs “the social tie” (123), which binds the people and their interests together in a unifying center. Yet, he warns that this social fabric could be rend by the sharp, slicing impulses of private wills. At this moment, private wills subdue the general will, which displaces the latter. This moment implicates political speech, “when the meanest interest impudently flaunts the sacred name of the public good, then *the general will is silenced*; everyone, animated by secret motives, *ceases to speak as a citizen* any more than as if the state had never existed” (ibid, *emphasis mine*).

Therefore, when one is silenced by private racial interests in the case of blacks, or silenced by private hearing interests in that of the Deaf, the generality of speech then becomes immiserated. What results, then, if communication becomes, as a matter of course, merely the project of issuing hegemonic commands and coordinating obedience to those commands?

To speak as a citizen is to have a generalized grammar, it is to account for the agential expressions of the self-and-other. Failures in this regard amounts to no more than the muddled din that reverberates within Euromodernity’s undertone. In other words, too often, to *be*, we are told *what* to be, by inflecting another’s existential grammar. It is the unctuous rejoinder of Mammy’s “*yes Ma’am*,” to her white employer. In the Deaf world, it is deaf deference to hearing occupation in deaf schools of thought. And, sometimes, these two worlds collide, as white deaf slave masters or mistresses demanded a visual submissive nod from the enslaved in lieu of, “*yes Sir*.” Here, the grammar of white deafness supervenes over and above hearing blackness.

An immediate consequence, as Rousseau suggests, is the dissolution of the polity, as “if the state had never existed” (2006: 228). Yet, Rousseau reminds us that even a silenced generality is far removed from a dissipated one: “Does it follow from this that the general will is annihilated or corrupted? No, that is always unchanging, incorruptible and pure, but it is subordinated to other wills which prevail over it” (2006: 124). And so, while norms of operating in the world may render black and deaf subjects speechless, they, nevertheless, are not without speech.

Discourses on Deafness

In what follows, I outline the various discourses on deafness to contour the differentiated dimensions of deaf historiography, all from the standpoint of subject formation.

(a) Theological Origins: Primordial Deafness

The term “logos” (*lógos*) is of Greek origin, meaning “word.” Among the pre-Socratics, Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus ostensibly first utilized the word to indicate the unifying principle of cosmic intelligibility and metaphysics. The word was later imbricated with more stated rational sentiments, as the Stoics adopted it. Logos, then, became reason; and so, to be rational became its seminal character. Heraclitus referred to *lógos* as sublimated as a form of the mind of God. Others, such as the Jewish Philo of Alexandria, used with prolixity the logos as a critical element of his thought. But, perhaps strikingly, in a departure away from philosophy and toward theology—or perhaps, philosophical theology—the Word became beautified as God. Judeo-Christian theology announces the Word as akin to—nay, is—the godhead. The writer of the Gospel of John prophesized, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...the Word became flesh.”

And so we have it, in the word lies the Word. The word becomes salvific. It anoints and it saves. In the same fashion the word became flesh. It is, in the transition to Euromodernity, also transmogrified as a Euro-logos, meaning the Word becomes the word of the metropole, the occidental word; the Word became reified as racialized whiteness. But, here, too, the Word becomes audiological and reified as Hearing, “the subhuman status of mutes was part of the Mosaic code, and it was reinforced by the biblical exaltation of the voice and ear as the one and true way in which man and God could communicate (‘In the beginning was the Word’)” (Sacks, 2000:13). In Christian and Jewish theology, this amounted to the written Gospels and the written Torah, respectively. Therefore, to be deaf was to be wordless and forsaken. To be outside of relations with God was to be deemed non-human, or something less thereof. As a corollary, deafness signified social death—damnation. Politics, and the rational impulse that underwrote it, were only phantom possibilities, ones forever outside the signing hands of the deaf.

Jonathan Rée catalogued the words of the world’s first voice-doctor, Johann Conrad Amman in 1690, who noted “even God...had to make use of his voice in order to create the world, and Christ too was obliged to use vocal means when performing his miracles. Since the voice was the embodiment of divine power, Amman said, ‘creatures formed in God’s image out, of necessity, to be able to speak, and in this respect resemble their Creator’” (1999: 89). Mutism was, as a matter of course, immanently entrapping, for if God spoke to create, the man who could not speak could not create. Speech became the *sine qua non* of divine creation. Political projects, then, fashioned from the imagination of minds, the argument goes, had to be voiced. The telos of deafness steered in the direction of the existential graveyard. It was social death.

As such, this rendering of a deified word meant true political possibilities were necessarily denied because politics is functionally a human enterprise. Divine co-optation only meant a

backdoor to hierarchization as the “Godhead” needs to be super-ordained by something/someone else (hearingness). Lewis Gordon identifies just this and locates this moment as an example of the theodicean grammar, which he defines as “efforts to expurgate the human being from human phenomena, from human relations” (2012: 6). Gordon’s analysis of theodicean grammar is reified in the specificities of the *lógos*, and so this homicide of humanism takes place in the square of politics—wherein deaf people are made to be an ontological carcass: a life deadened by the apolitical. To prevent this, oralism was imposed, not to broaden the epistemological parameters of speech itself, but to further restrict and constrict—to calcify speech as necessarily phonocentric. “The oralists” frame of reference may be seen to be ultimately a religious one: in this view, conversion of the Deaf is not only desirable but, as speech was God-given, that which separated man from beast, it is a sin to permit the deaf to remain silent” (Wrigley, 1996: 226).

Euromodernity’s undertone, then, understood speech as having a theological telos, one that assured keepers of the vault of reason. The deaf could not access reason because they were wordless, speechless. Politics was denied them, as idiots (*idiōtēs*) had nothing to say. Deemed to be outside of relations with man and God, the deaf had to be “saved.” In a word, hearingness became the Word. A new cosmic order of theodicean grammar now punctuates deaf existence. To be deaf was to be sinful, by the virtue of the lack of auditory speech (Wrigley 1996) or to be sub-human (Sacks 2000); in this sense, deafness became desecration. Hearingness could make whole the punctured ears—it could save and consecrate.

(b) The Medical Model: Scientific Salvation?

“For speech was the source of civilization; and, as Immanuel Kant put it at about the same time, the dumb could never attain the faculty of Reason itself, but only, at best, a mere ‘analogy of Reason’” (Rée, 1999: 93). Rée begins a portrait of the pathologizing of deafness through the

telescope of a historical account. Deafness was thought so problematic that it orbited outside the gravitational pull of the human world. Alexander Graham Bell offered in response an apocalyptic jeremiad of deaf posterity noting, in part, that sign language acquisition leads to the supposed perilous formation of a deaf social world, “the practice of the sign language hinders the acquisition of the English language. It makes deaf-mutes associate together in adult life, and avoid the society of hearing people. It thus causes the intermarriage of deaf-mutes and the propagation of their physical defect” (1884: 58). This leads to the emergence of “a deaf race in our midst” (1884: 66). To remedy this defect, Bell invented audiological instruments so as to eliminate such abnormality. For this reason, Bell espoused oralism, a system of imposed oral speech on Deaf people by marginalizing commitments to indigenous deaf communicative practices—that is, sign language.

There was also the metastization of anti-deaf ethics through a transnational survey of global economies of deafness: “The twentieth century witnessed movements in the United States and Germany, for example, to sterilize Deaf people by law and to encourage them to seek voluntary sterilization or abstain from childbearing” (Lane, 2008: 286). In contemporary times, vestiges of such an approach to audiological deafness persist with incredible virulence. The Chairman of a U.S. National Institute of Health planning group, Dr. Charles Berlin, noted in *New York Times* interview: “I am dedicated to curing deafness” (Barringer, 1993).

This “curing” of deafness and the pathologizing that attends it spell, in no uncertain terms, the defectiveness of what emanates from deaf precincts. Inherent in the medical model is a deaf aporia. It becomes aporetic because to define such a state is “to be at a loss.” The deaf subject is herself at a loss, albeit a *hearing loss*, which is treated by the hearing as if it must translate into a speech, reasoning, and civilizational loss. And so, the deaf must audiotically speak to be *wholly* human, but the deaf cannot speak in that sense. The word “must” here functions as an ontological

direction—an existential demand: *to be* yet simultaneously *cannot be*. Deaf speech acquires incoherence; it is not fully what it needs to be nor can it assume hearing expression. Ostensibly, the idea of deaf political speech is a negation of itself. Indeed, the Deaf, according to this logic, merely gesture but never speak. For in the Aristotelian arithmetic, the calculation is this: to do politics, one must embody reason. This reason then allows for the materializing of politics, as reason becomes communicable. Its communicability concretizes the ground on which the commitments, ethics, and values of the collective are expressed and, subsequently, shared. Dumbness, embodied in deaf people—hence “the deaf mute”⁶—becomes an ontological cancer; it atrophies the political nucleus of deaf lifeworlds. The promise of hearingness, not necessarily as an audiological beingness but instead as an ontological elevation, is both illusory and elusive. Its medical prognosis is often an elixir of falsities.

“Blindness separates you from things, but deafness separates you from people.” This oft-cited quote, according to Teresa Blankmeyer Burke (2014: 11), has been attributed to both Immanuel Kant and Helen Keller. Yet, whatever we make of its provenance, we are yet confronted with the enormity of its message. Alfred Schultz (1976: 30) observed, “My experience of a fellow-man in the We-relations stands in a multiple context of meaning: it is experience of a human being, it is experience of a typical actor on the social scene, it is experience of this particular fellow-man, and it is experience of this particular fellow-man in this particular situation, Here and Now.” Such an experience of the other constitutes the mechanics of the social world and our constructed, lived social reality. This “we-relation,” is a crucial rubric in the social barometer. Our we-relation is the site from which we are connected to the social world. The intersubjective reality grounds our humanity. Therefore, deafness, according to the cited logic, rends the fabric of social relations

⁶ In other spaces, such as Jamaica, deafness is often equated to dumbness. The Deaf person is viewed as “the dumb.”

between the deaf and the hearing. Specifically, deafness is the cause, and deafness, too, becomes the effect. This sociology of deafness becomes one of non-relational fissures; this dislocation identifies its malady. In this orientation, the deaf is *mute*, for one cannot speak outside the directed consciousness of human relations. The medical model so diagnoses this affliction of self. Keller notably allied with Bell, perhaps unwittingly, to parade the cause for audible deaf speech; she was given succor from Bell in relation to her elocution: that is, she, despite her dual condition of being blind and deaf, could speak “properly” enough with the aided specialized training of Bell. She stood, informally, as a paragon of an assimilated deaf person to the world of the hearing, to the land of audible discourse (see Rée, 1999: 223-4).

The cartography of deafness in the world is indeed vast. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are 380 million people who have “disabling hearing loss,” loosely considered deaf; this is 5% of the world’s population (2016). Yet this category, indeed, an identity, of being deaf is an ongoing, formative one. In short, having “disabling hearing loss” (from complete deafness, to the in-between spaces: partial deafness, hard-of-hearing, etc.) does not make one deaf *per se*, or rather Deaf (with the capital “D” signifying cultural deafness—or deaf gain—not medicalized pathologizing or hearing loss). “The Deaf world has its own examples [of factions]. We have traditionalists who are invariably referred to as the Big D. These are folks...who are from Deaf families and attended Deaf schools..., membership within this group requires not only ASL skills, but shared values, beliefs and experiences” (Dunn, 2008: 243-244). Dunn continues, “members of this group tend to have a strong sense of identity as Deaf members of society and so not consider themselves disabled but rather refer to themselves as a cultural-linguistic minority” (*ibid*). And so, to the culturally Deaf, “disabling hearing loss” is not Deafness proper.

This distinction between audiological deafness and cultural Deafness begins to map the terrain of d/Deaf identity, broadly conceived. The argument follows thus: audiological deafness is a discursive formation of deaf subjectivity through the imposition of hearing norms and ways of being. At the core of this construction lies *loss*, *defectiveness*, and *pathology* superimposed over the body. In such a formulation, correction ensues. Deafness—the capital D appellation—begins when the ink of Deaf epistemology writes the narrative of the Deaf world. Understandably, those who have written, Deaf and otherwise, to reproduce this discursive practice, and its discursive end of subject (re)formation, have been so committed in a larger effort to center Deaf epistemological accounts.

Toward this end, others within this community define disability as “norms of technologies of normalization,” based on the demands of a particular era (Lane, 2008: 278). Lane observes that very short people become “disabled” when “very short people cannot readily reach keyboards, objects on standard countertops, parts of machinery, and so on” (*ibid*). Similarly, very tall people become “disabled” when they cannot fit into airplanes, or cars to drive. A capitalist economic orientation, Lane posits, influences these technological requirements, especially as they pertain to commerce and industry. For these reasons, “today’s disability may be tomorrow’s normal variation and vice versa” and thus, deafness as disability is culturally constructed, one that reifies biases of the dominant (hearing) culture. In the final analysis, Lane contends, “Deaf people reject the suggestion that they have an impairment or a disability” (2008: 285).

What, then, is *disabling* deafness? Brenda Jo Brueggemann offers this analysis: “in the commonplace book of ‘deafness’ things are not always clearly or singularly defined, designated, determined as ‘just,’ or ‘pure,’ or ‘only’ deafness. And however much some deaf people may want to resist being labeled as ‘disabled,’ the fact remains that they are often labelled as such” (2008:

179). Brueggemann cautions that such a distancing between deaf and disability may unwittingly cause “further violence to those others with whom ‘authorities’ have placed us (deaf people) in categorical similarity” (*ibid*). Brueggemann leaves us with this question: “who—or what—are deaf people so afraid of when they resist placement in the commonplace of ‘disability’” (*ibid*)? In effect, she interrogates undertones of both essentialism and the postulate of an authentic deaf personhood by posing: what if those lines between deaf and Deaf—biological and cultural—are not mapped, policed and footnoted? Lane deconstructs disability and Brueggemann problematizes that deconstruction.

Rebecca Sanchez follows in the critical footsteps of Brueggemann by insisting Lane’s *de facto* social model of disability sees it as “largely a question of [social] design. An individual with a mobility impairment, for example, only becomes disabled when confronted with a set of stairs. If we lived in a world that was designed to accommodate a wider range of physical and mental abilities rather than one that restricted access, the theory goes, disability would all but vanish” (2015: 6). Sanchez objects to this rationalization on the premise that it has a malodorous scent of ideal theorizing, meaning it is abstracted and far removed from lived experience and thus, Sanchez laments, “Following the logic of the social model to its conclusion, one is left with the rather unsettling notion that there is no physical difference at all” (2015: 7). The social model fails to account for grim lived experience and such a failure induces violence on such people: “If an individual’s vision is measured at 20/600, no amount of accommodation is going to make her able to read a book in standard print, and to deny this does violence to the lived reality of her body, suggesting that her experiences are not valid or significant” (Sanchez, 2015: 7). She claims that Disability Studies interrogates norms that cohere around what it means to be disabled; likewise Deaf Studies problematizes prevailing linguistic practices. Disability studies applied within Deaf

Studies then asks not why d/Deaf people are not disabled but, instead, whether d/Deafness is disability—what, in other words, does it mean to be so *diagnosed*? The former question seeks alienation from disability discourse; the latter problematizes the logics of alienation.

Following in the same theoretical vein, Lennard Davis, though he believes deafness is not a form of disability, cautions that “Many Deaf people have said, ‘I’m not disabled like a crippled person or a mentally retarded person.’ But the problem with that refutation is that it uses ableist conceptions”; that is, such refutations rest on the assumption that disability is itself necessarily human brokenness and perpetuates social stigmatization (Davis, 2008: 323). As Davis observes, deaf people argue that there is nothing disabling about not hearing. That refutation need not rest on ableist rhetoric. Rather than seeing themselves as “flawed”—deaf bodies marred by the “scar” of hearing loss—instead they see themselves as occupying a different social space, one wherein the eyes become the ears, as the ocularcentric and phonocentric couple, giving birth to a new sense of self. And, therefore, deafness does not denote an inability to hear, but to hear differently. It is precisely this understanding Oliver Sacks had in mind when he wrote his book *Seeing Voices*. In it, Sacks quotes a deaf person who notes: “My deafness was made more difficult to perceive because from the very first my eyes had unconsciously begun to translate motion into sound...Once and for all I understood that when I could not see I could not hear” (Sacks, 2000: 5-6).

It is precisely this visual voice that allows us to interrogate speech: For the Deaf, seeing is a type of hearing (and for the blind, hearing a type of seeing). In the end, speech must account for these emerging modalities; it must shed its dead skin of phonocentrism—the valorization of sound—and instead be supplanted by a relational account where the visual voice speaks in embodied registers, as “Sign [language] for the deaf is a unique adaptation to another sensory

mode; but it is also, and equally, an embodiment of their personal and cultural identity.... Deafness as such is not the affliction; affliction enters with the breakdown of communication and language” (Sacks, 2000: 94, 97). When this embodied relation is enacted, the question of disability would become less about human capacity, as it would be about human positionality and communicative existence. On the latter score, politics becomes animated as a way of broaching insidious forms of hierarchization that not only define the human subject but also index the defective Other as disabled. It is here that deafness could speak, voiced with a strong political inflection.

(c) Defining Deafness: Toward A Socio-Cultural Schema

What does it mean to be deaf? In colloquial speech, people often ask, “Are you deaf?” to indicate a staunch unwillingness to listen. Similarly, for a well-intentioned exhortation to be wantonly ignored, people complain that such advice “falls on deaf ears.” To be both “deaf and dumb” is to be unable to speak and hear—a rendering of powerlessness. This idiomatic listing is hardly exhaustive. Though the point seems to be clear: to be deaf is not complimentary in the least. We signify this through the literal grammar of speech itself, but also by the metaphorical grammar of a political statement. To be heard is generative of social relations, knowledge discourses and political action. But, for one to be heard one must speak. The former must precede the latter. In this sense, ways of speaking, of determining what qualifies as speech, become lines of critical inquiry. That is to say, what happens when the *who* overdetermines the communicative mode; when the *who* eclipses the *what* and militate against it? For the *who* could determine and diminish the speech.

Political speech brings with it the power for positioning one’s self within a political world. To do so, to “position,” there must be a disruption—an interposition—a way into the dialogic formula. To interpose is to insert, to intervene, to place oneself between. If an unwillingness to

hear entails hierarchized relations (to position oneself above another), then the interposition, to insert one's social position into a political discourse, manifests the possibilities of speech, one that is non-hierarchical and consequently, an open site for socio-political relations. For these reasons, speech then is also an act of interposition, of intervening. What makes it political is that its contents contend with the material realities of lived experiences.

This brings us back to the question of deafness: if deafness represents an inability to hear, there can be no discourse among the deaf. Unless, of course, the modes of hearing begin to augment, for the problem is not that deaf people cannot hear, but rather that the hearing ostensibly do not listen. On this score, Frank Bechter argued that is vital to disrupt the din of hegemonic hearingness, as such a voice “would express what deaf signers value. It would not contort itself to fit the value schemes of [hearing] others, but rather, as a voice to be reckoned with, it would discover, claim and convey that which is intrinsic to deaf value schemes” (2008: 72). This reckoning of the Deaf public voice is an introduction of Deaf consciousness—a realization of the self as seen through Deaf eyes: “deaf consciousness [allows] for achieving a deeper and broader understanding of deaf peoples ‘being-in-the-world’” (Ladd and Lane, 2013: 578).⁷ This public voice—with a deep politicized tenor—equips deaf peoples with knowledge of lived experiences, “we learn about the nature of the world in which we live, the political world, a world we all need to learn about” (Bechter, 2008: 67).

The staunch refusal to listen, as a pathological condition, labels not deaf people, but instead, the hegemonic hearing. Imagine, for a moment, a hearing person yelling at a Deaf person

⁷ Ladd and Lane make a conscious effort to inflect Steve Biko's designation of Black Consciousness in order to demonstrate the constitution of deaf politicality, “In th[e] process of reconstruction through redefinition, colonized and other minority groups have sought labels for those visions. ‘Black consciousness’ is one such term...the term ‘Deafhood’ can be utilized in just this way” (2013, 572).

when informed of their deafness. The pathology is the ethical and political refusal, not the embodied condition of lacking hearing capacities. Correspondingly, with its medicalization, deafness, as deaf people often say, is not in itself pathogenic. That is, hearing loss can instead be deaf gain. Pathology identifies a valorization of one's elevated position by a refusal to be in relation through listening; it describes a speaking down to and therefore is outside the parameters of relationality. Audism, functionally, represents ways in which the hearing can be pathological while Deaf people become, in a word, healthily hearing. Audism, derives from the Latin root, "*audire*" meaning "to hear." Its more seminal etymological root, "*au*" means "to perceive." Therefore, audism, as a classificatory system of adequate humanness, understands and defines through that understanding, the human being as one who perceives—who knows—through hearing. *Audism*, takes a reductive turn by collapsing the human condition to a certain genus of human being, the hearing (audible) being and so, eliminates the deaf subject as being someone else. In so doing, audism allows for the normative centering of the audible, of the auditory. Such a classification implicates politics.

Hearingness as Coloniality?

Like racism is to black people, or sexism is to women, audism is to deaf people. In a reductive fashion, audism restricts humanness to the capacity to hear. This hearing-oriented understanding of the human condition renders phonocentric speech central to politics. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, argued that "it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal" (1253a2-3). "Political" because man⁸ is capable of social relations with himself, others, and the state. It is through this interaction that political association becomes possible and

⁸ I intentionally refer to the gendered term "man" here to highlight that in the Aristotelian formula, women could not engage in politics because while they could hear and reason, no one would listen and so, it was as though they were mute.

governance is thus constituted. But, unlike other animals—creatures of the wild nature—man is capable of speech (not merely sound): “For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech” (*Politics* 1253a1-18). It is speech that allows us to communicate ethical imperatives that underwrite the very precepts of law and justice. At this juncture, politics becomes speech; the political animal is instantiated as the speaking animal. Therefore, those without speech were akin to animals, sound-making but not speech-creating subjects and as such, *sans* politics. They were, in a word, wordless.

The question of deafness is not without racial logics. Nor, is deafness reduced to an exclusive Anglo-formation or one that is entirely delimited by the English language. For instance, in Spanish: “El es sordo” translates as “He is deaf”. The Spanish “*sordo*” originates from the Latin “*sordidus*” meaning “dirty, filthy, foul, vile, mean, base”; from *sordere* “be dirty, be shabby,” related to *sordes* “dirt, filth,” from PIE **swrd-e-*, from root **swordo-* “black, dirty” (source also of Old English *swært* “black”). Note that in Latin, the same sentence is “*Qui surdus est.*” Moreover, in Kiswahili—known also as Swahili, a Bantu language mapping a vast swath of terrain, including Kenya, Tanzania, Kenya, *et al*—it is: “*Yeye ni kiziwi.*” Compare: “*Anasikiliza*” (“He listens”). And: “*Yeye ni bubu*” (“He is mute”). This is to say, Euromodernity introduces a particular decadent racial logic to deafness, and broadly, it also confers onto deafness itself, a conception of defective, soiled humanity. This etymological mapping illustrates that in other languages, not rooted in the Latin, with its the early Romance and Germanic linguistic variants, deafness was not conceived in and through the logics of deformity or baseness. Critically, too, this also verifies that even prior to formal racialization, there was an already extant symbolic interpretation in the economy of hearing and race.

On these grounds, for hearing blacks, though they speak audibly, they are not recognized in most Euromodern societies as “political animals” but rather animals, with voice but without speech, in classic Aristotelian fashion. White Deaf, though human, are not seen as political because they lack speech and are thus similarly stunted by animality. This is what H-Dirksen L. Bauman meant when he observed, “Historically, we humans have identified ourselves as the speaking animal; if one cannot speak, then he or she is akin to human in body but to animal in mind. In this orientation, we see ourselves as becoming human through speech” (2004: 242). Audism, then, makes a political purchase of this naturalism. Phonocentrism positions auditory speech over and above all other modes of language (Bauman 2004). But, language itself, its etymological construction, is a product of phonocentric origins, for the word derives from the Latin, *langue*, meaning “tongue.” If to be human is to speak—to leverage one’s tongue—in auditory ways, politics appears for the deaf community as only chimera—a fiction, unreal and ultimately, unattainable. Under this paradigmatic view, deaf political projects geared toward agential direction (to create worlds of, and for, themselves, though not exclusively⁹), what Ladd & Lane (2013) names “Deaf-World,” become an uninhabited world—lost to the deaf political imagination.

This axial audist turn affects three spheres of deaf political reality. Audism, according to Baum (2004), has individual, institutional, and metaphysical dimensions. On the first score, audist attitudes are exhibited through individualized relations with Deaf people (e.g., bullying, discrimination, *etc.*). The individual is cannibalized often by the eating away of a sense of self manifested through deaf personhood. The individual becomes both the object and subject of an audist atrophy—self-decay through hearing-imposed normativity. The deaf political horizon, at

⁹A CODA, meaning Child of Deaf Adult, could be either Deaf or hearing. Hearing CODAs are often viewed as being a part of Deaf worlds, if they know and embrace Deaf culture, including, for some, fluency in sign language, despite the fact that they are, functionally speaking, hearing.

the level of subjectivity, becomes mute, for the deaf subject is pushed outside of equal relations (with herself and others) and therefore made speechless, incapable of articulating a political voice. This axial turn continues its motion, but wheeled at a different angle: the institution. Institutional audism designates the structural conditioning of audism through social and political practices of the hearing world; it is “the corporate institution for dealing with deaf people...[It] is the hearing way of dominating, restructuring, and exercising authority over the deaf community” (Lane, 1992: 43). At issue here is the institutional production of nonbelonging and invisibility of Deaf subjects. At this institutional or systemic level, colonial tropes are in play. Ladd and Lane (2013: 572) discuss that colonialism is a useful epistemic lens under which we could assess the trauma of devastation that such a system wreaked upon deaf personhood:

colonialism was not only the most appropriate term to use for deconstructing that oppression and identifying its systemic nature, but that it was also a term with generative power in helping us understand the effects of colonialist systems on Deaf cultures themselves—in both their acquiescence and reaction against those systems. These systems take several forms, but that most significant is in education, specifically in the Oralist system, which has held global hegemonic power...

The oralist practice pre-established the normative ways in which speech could occur. The syllogism was clear, though flawed: orality is speech and speech is orality. In this formula, cause became effect and effect became cause. Sign language, the voice of the deaf, was partially displaced and in some quarters, entirely prohibited. Sacks argued that oralism resulted in the abject deterioration in educational opportunities for deaf communities (2000: 25). This corroding of deaf people’s social infrastructure meant that as their social worlds were deliberately closed they were also politically muzzled, which straightjacketed deaf resistance. For agency only becomes

generative the extent to which it articulates a self-and-other oriented actualization. It is the making of history through a series of actional *becomings*. Yet, the oralist pedagogy was but one sublimation of colonialist manacles; others existed and persisted.

With the advent of technological innovation, scientific enlightenment provided new means and modes of silencing. The medical model soon diagnosed deafness as pathology. Lewis Gordon describes this as a movement from theo-naturalism (nature as ordained by God) to “scientific naturalism” (nature understood through laws of its own). The latter lacked the “purpose” of which Aristotle wrote, which occasioned, in the Euromodern world, a crisis of knowledge catalyzed by what he calls “struggles with and against reality” (2012: 7). Under such a circumstance, some scientists and philosophers attempt to make science its own foundation, which created the paradox of science having to reach beyond science to ground itself. The demand, however, for that grounding to be scientific begged the question of whether it *must be so*. In effect, then, Gordon argued, such aspiration has an epistemological colonial *a priori* of attempting to subordinate reality to the normative expectations of science as conceived in the Euromodern era. This, he contends, is an ongoing scientific misstep, “the problem of science exceeding its scope,” as its basic impulse is naturalizing human phenomena under the dictates of proffered scientific models. In the case of deafness, that involves entrapping the essence of deafness as pathology (unnatural), contrasting it against the wholly asymmetrical hearing subject. This is what Wrigley (1996: 80) means when he asserts, “[The] medical model has remained the dominant framework by which the hearing world knows the deaf individual as ‘defective,’ a body less than complete.” Natural deafness, deafness as it naturally appears in the social world, one distinguished by Deaf culture as an ontological reality, a way of being that understands Deaf subjectivity fully in human terms. Its fractured image, unnatural deafness, a pathological iteration, sees itself as *almost* fully human: defective. This

unnaturalness is a consequence of audism—hearing normativity that sediments the phono at the core of humanism.

Audism as a form of colonial discourse is, as a manner of speaking, a needle and thread fixture sewn upon deaf lips. Yet deaf decolonial cries attempt to halt the churning wheels of oppression; they are voices against voicelessness. Decoloniality represents innumerable possibilities for erecting deaf political projects. Sign language is one such articulation because it is “a visually linguistic modality, a way of being that valorizes radically different linguistic channels or modalities, overtly threaten crucial anchors of language and social meaning” (1996: 85). It is this re-articulation of speech that lends itself to a political formation. This visual voice challenges the very fixed epistemes of knowledge centers. It is a re-situating of the modes of reason itself. In such a scenario, reconceptualizing speech necessarily begets a liberating of once conquered spaces of being.

Take, for example, the protest that occurred at Gallaudet University in 1988, the world’s only deaf tertiary institution. Though its existence extends beyond 120 years, all its presidents and majority of the school’s board were hearing, despite the overwhelming deaf population. Hearing regimentation over deaf lives was the norm and Gallaudet’s leadership at the time epitomized this actuality. As a consequence, the deaf fought to have a say in their own education. In response to this protest, the chairman of the board then, who herself was non-deaf, remonstrated, “the deaf are not yet ready to function in the hearing world” (cited in Sacks 2000:100). This audist attitude was rank with paternalism. It sought to position hearingness as hegemonic and deafness as requiring instruction. This audist gatekeeping of opportunities instantiates the colonial posture of divide and conquer. It signaled the policing of deaf political zones. By demanding a new way of being, of living, and of social meaning, the deaf spoke in very strident tones, ones that required a relational

collectivity, a unity of purpose and a resolve of deaf consciousness. It is this crux of relational metaphysics that Deaf-Worlds were visually voiced.

Finally, Baum saw the axis of audism spin in a final direction, one he named “metaphysical audism” (2004), which he observes “by metaphysical audism then, I mean simply ‘the orientation that links human identity and being with language defined as speech’” (2004: 242). What Baum intends to problematize is personhood defined singularly by auditory speech. The metaphysics identified becomes the essence, that essence is auditory speech. But, as Gordon (2012) illuminates, the essence cannot be an inward necessity (though in Aristotelian fashion it started as such), nor for that matter is it an outward one; it is, instead, a socially-produced matrix of meaning thematized over a specific period of time.

Brenda Brueggemann offers this reflection, that is, thinking of deafness as occupying a “hyphenated between space” (2008: 187):

I come, I suppose, thinking between—thinking in another kind of between space between think-deaf and think-hearing: think-eye. For the deaf space is a visual space, an “eye” space—and also too, an I-space. We still have a lot to learn from each “I” and from each “eye.” Perspective (the “eye”) really matters; the personal (the “I”) experience really matters as well.

The potential problem here is that the sense of definitiveness, locked-into-ness or calcification in one or another state of being, while knowingly occupying multiple spheres of life and situating varying degrees of deafness (as an hard-of-hearing person), is not fully resolved by occupying a “hyphenated between space,” as such a space is *still* located somewhere. Nevertheless, this apparent existential phenomenological assertion, reflexive thinking or situated beingness from the

vantage point of the human subject, is exactly what Brueggemann announces: it is “to learn from each ‘I’ and from each ‘eye’”—this is an intersubjective orientation toward a pregnant political project. “This little between space can be, in fact, rather expansive. It is a space of potent possibilities, contained and yet kaleidoscopic in its perspectives” (*ibid*). Decoloniality then turn on a relational axis that disrupts and displaces an audist enterprise. Audism “oralizes” deaf speech, which imposes speechlessness upon them; as such, deaf decolonization signals a disruptive turn: sign language destabilizes a phonocentric episteme. Sign language notwithstanding, deaf ethnicity, as a cultural refutation against hearingness, functions as a dual assault on audist ontological registers—that the only world the deaf should prepare themselves to occupy is a hearing one, as deaf worlds, social worlds of particularized political expressions, are themselves fables, only imaginable and never realizable.

Deaf ethnicity centers this political calculus, one that understands relations as generative, “It leads to the seeking out of Deaf epistemologies and ontologies. It...allows Deaf communities to articulate their many commonalities and differences” (Ladd and Lane, 2013: 574). The political project is re-orienting speech from a position of superordination (god-related) to simply horizontal belonging (human-related). Deaf epistemologies, as it were, stand as political speech because they are expressly signposting deaf agential direction. It is a coming to terms with the deaf state-of-being, one that is materially responsive. This, potentially, is a faltering of the Euromodern undertone and progresses toward a movement to (deaf) transmodernity. On this, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007: 262) adds, “The transition from modernity to transmodernity lies first and foremost in the political and epistemic intervention” but that transformation necessitates a political voice unto which such a revolution is thought possible. A revolution of norms and a

valuing of values, leading to a reconfiguration of the political. Audism in the transmodern realm would instantiate abnormality rather than the normality it now occupies.

In this section, we have examined the question of the “Deaf problem,” that is, the problematization of Deafness, ways it has become a “problem” for the hearing world, so much so that deafness is diagnosed as pathology, both in its medical and socio-political dimensions. This then raises the problem of audism, and interrogates if audiology, in its historical or modern formulations, functions as a form of scientific audism. Certainly, the explored theological formula, where the spoken word becomes constituted within the human being, opens the door for the possibility of the “saving” of deafness from itself—indeed, it amounts to a rescuing by hearingness. These issues then situate another political problem, one of the potential colonization of deafness, of its ways of being. The thrust, in part, to deaf ethnicity begins by making a claim to Deaf epistemological practices. In what follows, I raise questions about the colonization of deafness both as an external and internal phenomenon.

Chapter 2

On the Coloniality of Deafness

Since the work of Anibal Quijano in the later twentieth century, the brand of Southern thought now known as decolonial theory has gained eminence. Its proponents argue that colonialism also produced a coloniality, which they regard as a mode of being or ongoing systemic practice of colonial relations. While decolonization could lead to the formal independence of a country or a people, it does not necessarily entail the elimination of coloniality. To eliminate or transform that requires a different kind of thought and practice, which they call *decoloniality*. I examine in this chapter Deaf decolonial theory and some of the criticisms it raises. This will set the stage for our examining one of the quintessential elements of Euromodern colonialism—namely, its production and philosophical anthropology of racism.

Colonial Decoloniality? A Partial Refutation

By any measure, the question of deaf/hearing, colonized/colonizer is hardly a settled one. In response to Baum (2004) and others who intimate a direct binary opposition between deafness and colonialism, Myers and Fernandes (2010) contend that the reverse is true. This pitting, as they see it, of deaf people against hearing exemplifies a foray into the politics of division, “relegating Deaf people to the status of a colonized minority and hearing people to a colonizing one...reflects an impoverished definition of what Deaf people can be...Audism is quite a force without casting it in the dynamic of colonialism” (2010: 42). They continue that such categorizations of colonizer and colonized entrap deaf people within the very categories they attempt to resist. This, they voice, is the wrinkled contradiction that inheres in the colonial narrative. Such a narrative establishes the

Manichean duality it wishes to dismantle—this binarism of hearing against deaf is in fact a theoretical excess. No doubt, they argue, audism exists and discrimination is evident, but to proffer a colonial explanation is a futile exercise in ahistorical theorizing. Such a project, risks in the end, opportunities for unity and so they interrogate, “How does a story of colonialism leave room for mutual respect between ASL users and English users, or even among different deaf people, deaf people of color, and White deaf, for instance? Ostensibly, the intent of using both phonocentrism and colonialism is recognizing sign as equal to speech; however, does denigration of English as the oppressor language encourage such equality?” (Myers and Fernandes, 2010: 41).

Myers and Fernandes’ point of objection must be given further critical examination. Ultimately, their claim is that the “colonialism” argument fails to account for communication between the deaf and the hearing. Though not expressed in explicit terms, Myers and Fernandes offer a critique of a form of essentialism that lies beneath claims of coloniality. One could argue that Myers and Fernandes are not necessarily arguing there exists harmony in Deaf and hearing relations; rather, they simply argue that disharmony is not identical with decoloniality because coloniality is a misdiagnosis of the situation. Such misdiagnosis might mean the proposed solution, decoloniality, is nostrum, one deeply inadequate at the task at hand.

Yet, could Myers and Fernandes (2010) valorize an *a priori* “mutual respect” between deaf and hearing in their critique of what they dub the “story of colonialism”? It is not inconceivable to imagine that the experiences of Deaf communities, or the systematic oralist pedagogy, evinces evidence that colonial relations between speech and hearing identity imposes upon deaf people the appellation “defective” and consequently, forecloses horizons of possibilities. That has been the position of some Deaf scholars, namely Paddy Ladd (2003; 2013). This is not to say, however, that all deaf/hearing relations must be understood within a colonial frame. Admittedly, deaf

subjugation can and does exist in societies without colonialism. To dismiss wholly, without a critical examination, the possibility of colonized relations could result in an oppressive end: the continued subjugation of deafness for the satisfaction of having a gold-plated social politesse. Espousing mutual respect, not entirely without legitimacy or salience, could occasion uncritical attitudes it hopes to establish. Facile denunciations appear to ground and fuel an orientation toward the field faced by those who speak in Euromodernity's undertone. For mutual respect and unity is begotten through humanized, intersubjective relations, not before. It is exactly this natural attitude of supposed harmony (or disharmony, for that matter) between deaf and hearing that must undergo a phenomenological suspension and be demonstrably evidential and subsequently, made accountable, in ethical terms, to that evidence. A phenomenological account allows for that discovery without assuming an end-result. This *a posteriori*, the litany of evidence cited above, illustrates clear linkages between colonial power nodes that co-constitute the relationship between deaf and hearing.

It is truly a mischaracterization to suggest that exposing emerging impulses of (hearing) coloniality is "reactive" and not instead, "proactive"; that it is divisive and not unifying (Myers and Fernandes, 2010: 30; 41-42). Torres-Maldonado offers this insightful take: "[decoloniality] opposes the paradigm of war which has driven modernity for more than five hundred years, with a radical shift in the social and political agent, the attitude of the knower, and the position in regards to whatever threatens the preservation of being" (2007: 262). Identifying colonial power markers is not an act of finality. Rather, the pendulum of liberation swings in the direction of decoloniality, that is an intended proactivity in reconstituting new terms, values and norms under which humanized social relations manifest, such that political speech, in its decolonial formula, leads to liberatory world-creation. Deaf preservation of being can only be possible to the extent that the

deaf speaks—in this sense, the Aristotelian formula is correct; it only errs when it reduces speech to orality, or as I have theorized, to a phonocentric philosophical anthropology. Tiptoeing around delicate hearing sensibilities is the problem, seldom the solution. Deaf epistemology is political discourse against dehumanization. For as a discursive practice, deafness constitutes itself (being-in-the-world); it re-imagines its horizons at the same time it announces them. Its discursivity is concomitantly constitutive as it is descriptive.

Overall, a universal appeal to “mutual respect” and the negotiation of desired terms of relations invariably raises questions of political legitimacy. Jane Anna Gordon announces that “the basis of whiteness is a subordinated black life-world, the denial of its reality as a legitimate alternative point of view for consciousness” (2006: 4). The white world rests on, at first sight, black people caricatured by white eyes. But a second move, a second sight is stymied, i.e., the white does not see the black through the eyes of the black other. Must not the hearing, then, hear the world through deaf eyes? Mustn’t the hearing legitimize a deaf life-world? This blindness via a lack of self-reflexive seeing allows Gordon to conclude, “Efforts to forge political identities out of contexts of illegitimacy may be mythic” (2006: 15). The question so becomes: who stands to benefit from formal relations of mutual respect? The ill-gotten gains reaped by political illegitimacy (of voices) only result in deaf ontological causalities.

Due to a disaffection with the colonial “story,” some scholars take a poststructural turn, that is, broadly understood, a critique of structuralism and a movement toward deconstructive theory. These critics contend the problem is not colonialism as such, but the very category of deafness itself. Lennard Davis reasons that the category of deafness, like all other social identities, “is that usually being part of an ethnic group defines one in a totalizing way” (2008: 321). In effect, Davis contends that deafness collapses into essentialism, or admittedly, the problematic strategic

essentialism endorsed by Ladd and Lane (2013: 574). Similar to other poststructuralists, whether Judith Butler on gender and its performativity, Davis asserts that sketching the lines of deafness too rigidly, a seemingly inevitable entrapment, offers purists considerations that exclude (other forms of deaf people) and as such, diminish opportunities for coalition-building. While those concerns are certainly real and pressing, deaf eliminativism, however, through “post-deafness,” needn’t be the bleached cure-all. As discussed above, deafness, on a phenomenological axis, could turn on deaf lived experiences—the situatedness of deaf lives within a social world. Post-deafness, a turn toward self-negation, or essentialism in another form, cannot lend itself to ensuring political speech, when we are uncertain whom is it that needs to speak and why.

Colonial Decoloniality? A Partial Defense

The discussion above is not to suggest that Deafhood as theorized by Ladd (2013) and Metaphysical Audism espoused by Baum (2004) are without fundamental problems. Rather it only intimates that a critical attitude to “the story of colonialism” raises potential challenges to the narrative of coloniality, as it views such problematization of norms of hearingness as inadequate or at worse, inaccurate. That notwithstanding, decolonial relations, or if preferred, human relations between systems of normative hearing domain and Deaf communities can only emerge when the former is dismantled; it cannot precede it. That said, Ladd’s discussion of Deafhood leaves much to be desired. In defining Deafhood, Ladd argues, “Deafhood...contained possibilities for envisioning a larger sense of what Deaf could mean, one that could move beyond the confines of post-colonial Deaf discourses.” He continues, “The term ‘Deafhood’ can therefore be utilized as a shorthand for the process of discovering those potentialities, which leads to the question—what does it mean to be ‘Deaf’?” (2013: 573-4).

This raises the question of essentialism, specifically: who can be deaf? Is ASL acquisition necessary? What about CODAs, those who are hearing but born and raised in deaf families; are they licensed to invoke Deafhood? Is Deafhood only accessible to the cultural Deaf and not the audiological deaf? Moreover, in other spaces, Ladd defines what that Deaf potential means, “Deafhood comes from maintaining a clear focus on the seed itself,” where “the seed” refers ostensibly to bodied deaf essence (2003: 407). Kusters and De Meulder (2013: 432) inveighs against this formulation, “Deafhood is a certain ontological experience that relates to being biologically deaf. Such a focus on a ‘core’ or a ‘seed’ has maintained in feminist essentialism.” They continue, “the suggested direction in which to move onward from this seed—the ‘deaf becoming’—is the ‘actualization’ of the deaf biological state, by the use of sign language and socialization with other deaf people.” (*ibid*). This, of course, calcifies the “Deaf line,” that is, its essentialist core demarcates caverns of openness and closure, allowing for intra-d/Deaf separatism and exclusions by demanding allegiance to *the* Deaf Way.

Inherent in these queries is the ethic of Deaf performativity, a definite consequence of essentialist discourse. Furthermore, it raises questions of how one must experience deafness. In responding to these question, Ladd et al asserts, “We must, however, ensure that the Deafhood concept is not reduced to essentialism, i.e., to assuming that minority group characteristics are fixed traits held in common by all members” yet, in the same breath, borrowing from Spivak (1997), espouses the conceits of strategic essentialism and maintains that the essentialist core within Deafhood is “at the least strategically viable for the foreseeable future” (2003: 217), because it is “necessary for groups to identify certain commonalities in their experiences and in their cultures in order to construct a larger, idealized selfhood, which then empowers them toward a re-envisioning of their societies” (*Ibid*: 574). Here, Ladd places the essence, however strategically,

inward through the signification of deaf commonalities. This reifies not only the question of Deaf ethnicity, but also Deaf authenticity. It forecloses the possibilities of those so defined as Deaf, as its facticity predetermines the scope of deaf possibilities. Put plainly, the deaf subject is delimited and stunted by an immanent closure of self. Here, the Deaf is not *becoming*, as such, it becomes, indicated by an existential period. To suggest Deafhood is to deny other modalities of being d/Deaf.

This is not to say the pursuit of Deafhood, in its yearning for a decolonial and emancipatory end, is itself a problematic project in the ways suggested by Myers and Fernandes (2009). Rather, that Deafhood, in order for it to voice a Deaf life-world, should orient its focus on a relational metaphysics and not the strategic metaphysics of substance that his theory assumes. As Lewis Gordon explains, it is not the appeal to essence that itself is problematic: “The appeal to essence...needn’t collapse into the foreclosed ascription of *essentialism*.” Using the methodological anchor of phenomenology, Gordon suspends the ontological claim. “‘Essence,’ from this perspective offers no appeal to an isolated substance; it appeals, instead, to a relationship” (Gordon, 2012: 3). As I have outlined in the preceding chapter, any consideration of speech must center its relational impulse. The geo-political etymology of speech across Euro and Afro domains, from the Greek *mápelian* from *mápel* meaning “assembly, council,” denoting “to meet” to the Akan *dwamu*, an intersubjective gathering dedicated to meeting to discuss relational politics. In a phenomenological turn, speech as orality, or more significantly, the speech as embodying phonocentrism, undergoes suspension. Through intentionality, that is, via its political articulation—for politics is a *doing*—speech becomes the relation crux from which a community, in this case, a deaf one, begins to build the edifice of deaf-life worlds, by suspending *ex ante*

considerations of deafness. This relational dimension allows for a multi-modal approach, divorcing deaf lived experience from a uni-modal, essentialist account.

Fashioning Deaf Worlds Against Audist Accounts

In 1930 Albert Ballin, in his autobiographical account, *The Deaf Mute Howls*, noted that he lost his hearing at the tender age of three due to the scarlet fever. As he explored his inhabited social milieu as a deaf person living in a decidedly hearing world, he came to recognize the fragilities of deaf existence: that deaf personhood will be silenced, not by their inability to speak in conventional ways, but by the conventions of audism that decreed the deaf person was, in fact, outside the very bounds of the polity. “Until today he has been a much misunderstood human being, something quite different from the rest of mankind. Even now he is shunned and isolated as a useless member of society, a pariah” (Ballin, 1998: 1). The linguistic anthropology indicates that “isolate” is a French derivative, *isolé*. The French, similarly, is taken from the Latin, *insulates*, meaning “made into an island.” Therefore, to be deaf was to be insular—separate and outside the community of relations. Therefore, the project of the audism was to demarcate this “isolated” and “shunned” community. Not only was the deaf person outside the proper bounds of politics, as established within the *polis*, she was, similarly, deemed to be *something* else—one without function. The audist accoutrements of power formulated the deaf subject as an anthropological excess. Yet, the deaf saw herself as being responsible for her own sense of self and accounting for her own situatedness and so, she, in the language of Ballin, “howls.” On this, he writes, “Long, loud and cantankerous is the howl raised by the deaf-mute! It has to be if he wishes to be heard and listened to” (ibid). This desire to partake in the succulent fruits of politics meant a howling, a violent resistance against norms of audism. It is this “cantankerous” din of resistance that registers deaf defiance against the strictures of social separatism.

Audism is the political belief that the deaf cannot speak; oralism is the social practice of trying to make the deaf “speak” an audist language. For this reason, Ballin recounts oralist practices of imposing hearing identity upon deaf people was a paradoxical attempt to make use of “the useless.” Therefore, oralism functioned as one of many appendages of the machinery of audist coloniality: “Oralists in their efforts to suppress the use of signs practically bind the arms of the child, thereby gagging it, so it may not *express itself naturally*. But even these methods cannot abolish the use of the sign language” (Ballin, 1998: 26, *emphasis mine*). Deaf speech, seen through the visibility of sign language, is endemic to deaf spaces and as such, its visual voice cannot be blindly gagged. Deaf speech is immanent within the deaf self. For these reasons, during the Deaf President Now protest at Gallaudet University that demanded a deaf president for the first time in the institution’s over a hundred years existence. Elizabeth Zinser, a hearing candidate selected to be the next president, shortly into her tenure, had to tender her letter of resignation after mounting, unmitigated protests by deaf students. Their demand, eponymously, was their protest: Deaf President Now. As such, the rank symbolism of audist coloniality embodied Zinser’s candidacy and then, short-lived presidency. Joseph Shapiro, quoted a deaf student who expressed to a reporter, “We want to be free from hearing oppression. We don’t want to live off the hearing world, we want to live as independent people” (Shapiro, 1993: 80). In her resignation, Zinser issued this response, ““In the minds of some, I have become an obstacle to the future of the university. And because I care very, very deeply about Gallaudet’s future, I am removing the obstacle.”” In the end, she insisted, the ““best choice [for president] was a hearing candidate”” (*Ibid*: 83-84). Epistemic colonialism insists that the vanguards of knowledge are themselves, concurrently, the protectorates of the territory of self. The hearing world attempts to fashion deaf politicality: there cannot be a deaf subject without the paternal hearing self—establishing a relation of predation and

conquest. Under this epistemic rubric, the “best choice” for deaf agency will always be a hearing agent. Hence, Zinser’s statement that the deaf are ill-equipped to manage their own political affairs, reconstituting in them, pariahs of the political order.

Parents of a deaf student at Gallaudet announced, “The era of hearing people deciding what is ‘best’ for deaf people has come to an end.”¹⁰ This statement, along with the Deaf President Now protest, was precisely the *howling* that Ballin presciently heralded. Deaf political speech demands its hearing; any attempts to bind its expression would not result in capitulation of political zones—as accepting the state of statelessness, but rather a liberatory movement in re-claiming deaf lifeworlds as legitimate, alternate existential expressions.

Multi-Modality as Inflecting Deaf Political Speech

Brenda Jo Brueggemann posits: “This think-between space between ‘deaf’ and ‘Deaf’ is a rock and a hard place for Deaf Studies. I wonder what happens if we squeeze (more) in there? What if we don’t ‘draw the line’ on, around, through or under where someone is (and isn’t) ‘culturally deaf’ or not?” Brueggemann ends by asking a question that stands as its own answer: “Can we create a new geometry, a new space for ‘deaf’ (and thus ‘Deaf’ as well) to be in...?” (2008: 180). It is for the reasons admonished by Brueggemann that others have sought to destabilize normative conceptions of d/D designations by refusing to discursively reproduce them. Kusters and De Meulder (2013: 437) explain:

We are reluctant, however, to adopt the politicized and divisive capital “D” with regard to deaf *individuals*. In our eyes, ‘deaf’ with a small ‘d’ does not merely point at an audiological pathology in opposition to “Deaf,” as is often argued, but should

¹⁰ Gallaudet University, “Notable Quotes,” Accessed: Dec. 03. 2017. <http://www.gallaudet.edu/about/history-and-traditions/deaf-president-now/profiles-and-viewpoints/notable-quotes>

instead be understood as a biological condition to which being a signing person is complementary.

Toward these ends, Annelies Kusters (2017) examines the multi-modal approach to deaf and hearing communication in India. She contends that there is a vast use of different semiotic resources such as gestures, head nods, posture, and dress. Kusters, in a conclusory note, acknowledged: “interlocutors thus orient towards the ongoing interaction and negotiate the constraints and possibilities imposed not only by different modalities but also by different sensorial access to these modalities” (2017: 300). Others (Norris 2011; Friedner 2017) have followed suit in claiming multi-modality as doing precisely what Brueggemann suggests: an expansive imaginary of a deaf-centric being-in-the-world.

In the end, I have posited that to broaden the scope of multi-modality is to anchor epistemological and ontological claims, wherein multi-modal connotes varied ways of embodying deafness that are not internally opposed to each other. That is, the deaf line, as the Du Boisian color line realized with racial parameters, does not sever or delimit horizons of deaf potentiality, but rather allows for deaf agential direction. That is, the Deaf not only speak broadly, in articulating their own political calculus, but engage in political speech among each other. Political speech spins on the axis of relations, and in so doing accents a Rousseauian generality. The general will, of course, while not beholden to private interests, is nevertheless sensitive to the demand of its body politic, “As soon as the multitude is thus united in one body, it is impossible to harm one of the members without attacking the body...” (Rousseau, 2002: 165). Therefore, intra-deaf disenfranchisement by delegating ontological lines on which others should live mutes political speech but cannot undo it, as political speech is borne from the unalterable impulse of generality. In order to animate the intersectional concerns that attend deaf existence, I will now turn to the

question of race—that is, the experience of the Black Deaf, which subsequently racializes deafness, situating it within the remit of Euromodernity.

Part II
The Speechless Black

Chapter 3

Color Deafness

The multi-modal understanding discussed near the end of Part I may, in equal measure, be applied to racial sensibilities. The deaf community, of course, is hardly monolithic. It, too, is fractured by a racial schism. Gallaudet University, the nation's, and the world's, premiere deaf tertiary institution invested in systemic discrimination along with the entire White, hearing community, by refusing to open its doors to Black deaf students until 1952. Furthermore, the U.S. National Deaf Association denied membership to the Black Deaf from 1925 to 1964 (Ladd 2013; McCaskill, Lucas, Bayley and Hill 2011). Anti-deaf animus *and* anti-black racism assailed black deaf communities, who were supposedly too deaf to be political actors and too black to be rational agents. It is for this reason a discussion of color blindness must ensue. The color-blind rhetoric, also known as racial nominalism, says we do not see color—nor should we. We judge only on merit not on melanin. Such color-blind tropes litter the contemporary political square. Lady Justice towers above institutions of justice; she is blindfolded so as to not see partiality but to render invisible considerations of race and creed, wealth or penury. Yet, this blind-folded justice could not stop the stampede of enslavement, Jim Crow, and black penalization. When the problem is black illicit appearance, we may look to color-blindness. But, our concern here is who is heard and, relatedly, who gets to speak by virtue of being heard. Black voicelessness within the deaf community ineluctably lends our ear to the issue of color-deafness. By color-deafness, I mean a marked refusal to hear racial tones, or specifically black (or non-white) voices. Instead, there is a retreat to a larger, ephemeral vocabulary of a faux-universalism concerning the impartial treatment given to all forms of human speech. Under this regime, color-deafness is decidedly pathogenic.

What binds color-blind and color-deafness together is an ethic of erasure: of visibility or of audibility. Color-deafness animates questions about that which goes unacknowledged, or rather, as the case may be, unheard. W.E.B Du Bois' discussion of double consciousness, seeing the world through the twoness of self, illuminates the condition of the subjugated subject. The black subject sees himself through his own eyes, and again, through the eyes of his white other. Yet, the question of the Black Deaf advances a similar move to a distinct type of double consciousness, for she "hears," that is, she "experiences" the world doubly, as she is aware of the hegemonic "tone," which is a decidedly phonocentric one, but another tone, one beneath it, the "*undertone*," which characterizes a distinct way of "hearing" the world as Black *and* Deaf, that is, it is a way of experiencing white deafness. This, I dub audio double consciousness. Color-deafness illuminates the condition of audio double consciousness because it uncovers the undertone of "hearing" the world as Afro-Deaf. By "hearing" I am suggesting an imposed way of speaking and by extension, of being, one that is other-imposed, where, within the subject-object relation, the subject becomes objectified, her agency thwarted, her voice muted. The Afro-Deaf becomes objectified along lines of Deafness and Blackness.

There have been a few select discussions of color-deafness within the academic mainstream, but the concept remains largely undertheorized. One notable example is Max Shulman (2016) who examined theatrical black voices on the radio during the 1940s, an era of deep-seated anti-black animus in American history that saw the disenfranchisement of black industry. In order for black voices to appear on radio airwaves, transmitted into largely white homes, those voices had to be filtered through color-deaf ears. In a word, to be heard, the black voice had to sound white: "the actors would be accepted as black artists as long as they did not attempt to make their blackness a factor in their performances" (Shulman, 2016: 463). The reality,

however, is that wherever there are black folks, there will always follow black voices. As in hearing communities, so too does this ring true in deaf ones. In commenting on the historical discrimination that inflicted black deaf communities because of Jim Crow policies of the early twentieth century, Padden and Humphries (2005: 47) acknowledged, “Racializing deafness...within an already small population of children, was to institute a crippling legacy of economic and social inquiry” upon the black deaf.

All spheres of black deaf life, from social to legal, were scarred by the blade of anti-black animus, including Gallaudet University, which segregated their black and white deaf students (Padden and Humphries, 2005: 47). While both black and white deaf shared a common deaf identity, their disparate racial treatment meant disparate histories. There is, for instance, structural variations between black ASL and mainstream (or White) ASL such as: lexical disparities, differentiated use of body language and spatiality, among others (Lucas, Bayley, McCaskill and Hill 2015). For these reasons, Myers and Fernandes (2010: 23) purport that ASL is racialized and potentially hegemonic:

We assume ASL is the language of White people...The language and culture of White Deaf Americans have been the standard against which deaf Americans of color...are measured. Deaf people of color...who become accepted as members of Deaf culture have to demonstrate ability to use the standard or universal White Deaf ASL.

The existence of black ASL is an articulation of agential direction for the Afro-deaf community. Other scholars such as Padd and Lane (2013) point to intra-deaf racial oppression that leads to the multi-layered stigmatization of being a minority within a minority. This, they posit, is a result of the colonial apparatus operating internally. Ultimately, this racial divide and the

linguistic co-optation that result mean that for the black deaf, that in order to be heard, they must speak in a white register: ASL. Black ASL is seen as sub-standard and lacks integration into the larger ASL linguistic model. In this model, color-deafness, within the deaf community, works thus: To have a visual voice, we pay no attention to *who* says what, instead we insist upon an exclusive linguistic standard. Yet, when that standard is racialized as white, its default register is *whitely* inflected; correspondingly, what results is color-deafness—to be deaf, as it were, to the black voice, irrespective of its linguistic instantiation. Here, speech is colored by black and white considerations. This, no doubt, summons questions as to whom gets to speak and political volume that attends such speech. At this juncture, could the white deaf community create conditions that lead to a racialized permutation of audism—afro-audism?

Such possibilities are hardly exaggerated. Because audism relies on phono-philosophical anthropology, “phono” within deaf communities would not signal auditory speech in the ways that it would in the hearing world. Instead, it occupies a differentiated theoretical ground. The prefix “phono” is derived from the Greek *phōnē*, meaning voice (or broadly, sound). For the hearing, it is an auditory sounding, but in deaf worlds, it indicates a racial sounding—a visual (*whiten*) voice. On this latter ground, phono is transmuted as an Anglo-racial sounding and thus, occasioning Afro-audism: the imposition of white deaf speech upon black deaf subjects. This implicates politics and speech. In the former case, black deaf subjects are rendered apolitical because of a cessation of the humanistic meeting of self and other—or in Jane Anna Gordon’s thought (2006), not visually voicing one’s self through the speaking eyes of another (second sight). Finally, in the latter, speech becomes mimicry (a process of sounding-like); it relegates speaking *with* to being spoken *for*.

Embodied Moments: Toward Creolizing Speech

Black American Sign Language (BASL) is sometimes viewed by some segments of the deaf population to be an unholy mixture of American Sign Language (ASL), black deaf cultural linguistic tropes, and black spoken/hearing vernacular. The reality of BASL is that it accounts for the intersubjective relations that exist among black, deaf, and white worlds of socio-political meanings, for while ASL is indigenously deaf, it is also racialized as white. The black deaf subject thus occupies at least two identities: deafness and blackness. Black political speech, in the main, is perhaps fundamentally hearing. Deaf political speech, broadly understood, is conceivably white. Thus, audism structures the core of black political speech, such that black political speech is not constitutionally anti-audist. The extent, then, to which a deaf black subject may speak—that is, her reflective expressions—mandates interaction with both worlds: one of black hearingness and deaf whiteness. To decipher this reality, what emanates for black deaf people is a creolizing political speech, which bears the signature of black oral vernacular and ASL. At this juncture, Jane Gordon reminds us, “groups located differently together try to forge more viable collectivities that necessitate contesting existing symbols in ways that produce newer ones. In other words, creolization is progressive not when we are deliberately rejecting being straitjacketed by any and all existing practices” (Gordon, 2014:71). BASL represents instances of this transgression of both black hearing and white deaf normative practices, predicated on a coherent linguistic turn.

But beyond the literal linguistic mode through which speech itself is creolized, creolizing political speech gestures toward similar epistemological sensibilities: what does it mean that deaf speech and hearing speech contend in the same space? Perhaps, the evidence lies with CODAs—hearing Children of Deaf Adults—who must fall within that in-between speech Deaf (culturally) but not deaf (audiologically). Lennard Davis, who occupies such a space, notes this intricacy: “the hearing world assumes [deafness is silence]. But this is an audist assumption because deafness is

not at all silent—deaf people experience life filled with speech. But what they speak is sign language.” He concludes, “the language of the deaf mediates between speech and silence...Sign language, is not a feint but a bodily presence. The materiality of the sign is there is the sense that it is made by using the body’s gestural repertoire...[s]ign language is composed not of graphic traces but of movement of the body through space” (Davis, 1995: 893-4). On this basis, creolizing speech means then the locus of speech occupies its embodied direction. Wherein, there is a movement from merely bodily gestures as seen in ASL and sonic modulations as heard in audible speech, toward something new: to embodied expressions. Speech, it follows, as embodied expression, puts into conversation the relational account needed to *hear* one’s embodied movements. In other words, speech becomes a meeting of ideas expressed through an embodied register. This embodied register allows for a seeing of speech in ways that its conventional audible register renders it invisible and hearing of speech in which its sometimes visual register renders it inaudible. At this pregnant moment, the emphasis isn’t merely *hearing* the black, but also seeing him by the virtue of him being heard. That is, he is fully heard when he is both seen and heard. As his Afro-voice visualizes his existence as much as it announces it.

This embodied dimension to speech itself brings into clear focus an intersubjective account, where there is movement along the subject-object paradigm. In this account, the object or the other is not fatally calcified as alterity. It negotiates social spaces, where it suspends imposed categories; it allows for the anonymity of the self. Anonymity, broadly understood, refers to the role or communicative practice emerging from typicality. In other words, communication is possible because the typical is possible. For an act to be typical, it should be repeatable (Maurice Natanson, 1970). Others could participate, engage, and join a discourse of continued shared meaning. Sign Language exists because others can learn the signs, which means there must be sufficient typicality

and thus anonymity for the meaning to emerge free of who signifies it. Thus, where there is anonymity of the self, it should not matter whether the signer is white, brown, or black. The critique, however, is that racism makes the racialized signer matter to the point of closing off the typicality of the communicative act. In other words, it blocks black signification from anonymity and thus prevents its infused social meaning. This then allows for Black political speech to be ignored or, as I have suggested, rejected by rendering the subject speechless.

An embodied register opens the field of communicative acts, where the anonymity of the self becomes possible, allowing for meaning generation. Ultimately, such embodied expressions center humanistic relations, as it assures participation and dialogue about pressing socio-political issues. An embodied register is politically inflected. There is a maturity of ideas that manifests when a space is shared, contested, and negotiated. It is here that speech itself becomes a product of creolization—where it becomes wholly humanistic in its expressions. In cementing this humanistic ground, politics becomes animated and political speech manifests.

Chapter 4

Black Ineffability

After the valuation, then came the division. I have no language to express the high excitement and deep anxiety which were felt among us poor slaves during this time. Our fate for life was now to be decided. We had no more voice in that decision than the brutes among whom we were ranked. A single word from the white men was enough—against all our wishes, prayers, and entreaties—to sunder forever the dearest friends, dearest kindred, and strongest ties known to human beings.

—**Frederick Douglass (1845)**

The World is amazed at the desire of the New Negro, for with his strong voice he is demanding a place in the affairs of the world.

—**Marcus Garvey (1922)**

Every dialect is a way of thinking...And the fact that the newly returned Negro adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation.

—**Frantz Fanon (1952)**

Now has come the time when we as blacks must articulate what we want, and put it across to the white man, and from a position of strength begin to say ---"Gentlemen, this is what we want."

—**Steve Bantu Biko (1979)**

How may audibly speaking subjects be rendered speechless? If, as we saw in the preceding chapters, the question of speech was understood as a narrowing or collapsing of modalities, that reduce speech to a *particular* form, say, “sound” (at the expense of other forms) and, hence, the production and imposition of “speechless” Deaf subjects, what, then, accounts for audible subjects, whose speech comports within the normative epistemic frames, but who are nonetheless rendered similarly speechless? In other words, if the problem of speechlessness is merely diagnosable as a conscription of multi-modal avenues of speech (ocularcentric vs phonocentric), then it seems that Deaf personhood represents the only casualty in the denial of political speech. Yet, the genealogy of oppression proves otherwise.

Euromodernity inaugurates hierarchized racial relations among human beings. Such a racialization meant some, greater kinds of people would have a presumed legitimacy over other, lesser kinds of people. Euromodernity set into motion, the racialization of human history. Historical epochs and processes such as slavery, colonization, Jim Crow, among others, became edicts and edifices that centered the Euromodern teleology. Euromodernity saw itself as the end, or even, the completion, of an unfolding history; it signaled a maturation of the genealogical fruit, one fully grown and ripened. All that have been thought, philosophized and theorized occurred under the imprimatur of the West. The Age of Enlightenment, understood as the Age of Reason, meant knowledge and progress were distinctly European and Euro-American affairs. This result, ineluctably, was the elision of other human beings and non-Euromodern modes of reason. In essence, what occasioned was a quarantining of truth itself.

Such elisions materialized processes and realities of erasure. Put simply, non-European peoples did not belong. This idea and ideal concretized the ground for introducing a form of relations that was, in a sense, non-relational. This led to a rupture in sociality, wherein human

relations were dichotomized according to the schema of belonging and non-belonging. The quest to verify this postulate became the *raison d'etre* of the human sciences. Scientific racism saw itself as validating methodologies of racial empiricism. This meant racialized biological anthropology (blacks were unevolved or slower evolving apes) and craniometry (the measuring of the cranium to confirm that cranial capacity was isomorphic with rational capacity, and that Negroid peoples had a lesser of both in relation to Europeans) were pseudo-scientific proclamations in service to Euromodern hegemony.

Yet, in order to give a veneer of legitimacy to the illegitimate—indeed, paradoxically, it became a form of legitimized illegitimacy—the attempt to eliminate non-European, or broadly, non-white peoples settled as its pledged *modus operandi*. This disavowal of intersubjective human relations would result in the diminished influence on the political, by Black people. In a word, it intended the denial, or an attempt to deny, Black subjects relating to political modes of being. Politics, as a form of doing, demands both a connection to the past and future. It signifies contesting, negotiating and altering pre-given terms of human living. In this sense, a political project is inescapably future-oriented. Euromodernity sought to deny Black claims to a political future, claims wherein Black worlds *could* appear, and as such, such attempts at denial enacted a *telos* of racial elimination. One was to be erased from the past by limiting non-white contributions to human history, for the project of whiteness, so it was presumed, singularly made exclusive claims to historical continuity. This is precisely why Lewis Gordon argued, “Fanon, for instance, understood that a movement from the imposed identity of the black required a form of historical agency in which the Black would emerge as a possible positive lived reality of the future, which could characterize as Afro-modern” (2018: 336). I submit, political speech, in its Afrocentric form, becomes a historical agent. To render Black political speech unheard is to erase the Black

subject as a legitimate political actor and therefore, negate her humanity. Black political speech challenges Euromodernity and its insistence of a relations of non-relations.

Having introduced the avowals of Euromodernity and explicating its unintelligibility in the political world, in what follows, I contend the question of race, specifically, Blackness, is similarly implicated through processes of denial, silencing and dehumanization in ways that mirror Deaf displacement. I argue that Blackness becomes a fungible criterion, alongside Deafness, in the denial of political speech. Surely, this is not to say Black subjects do not engage in *petite* political speech—for they do, particularly among themselves. Rather, I contend Black political speech, *writ large*, is denied in the public constitution of the political, evidenced by historical processes of Black subjugation: slavery, colonization, Apartheid, Jim Crow, neo-colonization, among others. *Petite* political speech does not see itself as a lesser form of political speech, one diminutive in quality and essence—nay. Instead, it names a more limited register in and through its socio-political expression. I have argued political speech must be reconceptualized, through decolonial means and ends, (re)directed by a liberatory *telos*. Its liberation lies within its reciprocal relationality, and therefore, expressible via a shared communicability.

No doubt the history of anti-black racism is one that defines a project of silencing. Such silencing takes places through forms of oppressive violence. Oppressive violence is constituted along two distinct planes: corporeal violence—a physical war on Blacks—and epistemic violence: a waged assault on truth and knowledge itself. I argue that in both ways, Blacks are structured as speechless subjects. In order to render speaking subjects speechless, one viable route is a need to attack the body to physically induce silencing. Conversely, epistemic violence denotes a corrupting alternation of knowledge and a distortion of truth, wherein the category of epistemology is enlisted for hegemonic whiteness. Both anti-black corporeal violence and epistemic violence are by-

products of anti-black racism. They, therefore, do not stand as separate, non-interlaced elements of oppressive violence; on the contrary, corporeal violence and epistemic violence are co-constitutive, one animating and substantiating the other. This interplay of oppressive violence aims to and often successfully delimits the reach of Black political speech and ensures a limited, diminished politicality. Decolonizing political speech undoes this violence epistemologically and corporeally. Indeed, Frederick Douglass risked death through wrestling with and against Covey in order to begin the process of de-brutification. The dialectics of freedom and unfreedom, speech in the face of speechlessness, allow for concrete liberatory ends.

I ultimately elucidate the socio-historical denial of political speech to Black subjects so as to interrogate the imposition of hegemonic whiteness (or, white normativity), as a “legitimate” political standard. Moreover, I place Euromodernity’s undertone within a larger cartographic interplay of anti-black racism and white oppression. From there, I explore the intricate interplay between corporeal violence and epistemic violence in rendering Black subjects speechless through the denial of political speech, *writ large*. The chapter closes with a discussion of the destabilizing effect of Black political speech on this Euro-American linguistic frame and substituting in its place, of a more humanized formula that grounds intersubjective meetings. The effect of doing so engenders political actors who freely fashion for themselves attainable political futures. Black praxis, here, reconceptualizes political speech not as being beholden to a Euro-modern undertone but instead, it takes the form of relational essence, or what I dub, broadly, as a transmodern tone. Thus, this chapter locates Black lifeworlds, via a catalogue of its transformative praxis, as birthing not only political futures for Blacks but more broadly, for human beings. This discursive appraisal of modern political speech centers contingency as essential for shared communicability.

Raising the Spectre of Oppressive Violence and Afro-Speechlessness

It may be said that oppression, in its birth, also incontrovertibly announces its imminent death. It dies, not only because all that exists, *ab initio*, must find an end, but also oppression, in its dialectical struggle, agonally contends itself against its allied opposite: liberation. Perhaps, then, paradoxically, voicelessness gives breath to voice, as do chains give way to their breaking.

The collective struggle of the Black masses, since the inauguration of the Euro-modern age, is itself, and perhaps, originally so, a declaration of itself as that: *struggle*—one against control, brutalization and dehumanization. The histories of slavery, colonialism and an anti-black world order aim to limit and restrict, all under the imprimatur of white hegemony. Oppression, so understood, has a particular *telos*. It directs itself toward closure. Its Latin roots, *opprimere* denotes “action of weighing on someone’s mind or spirits.” Its nominative form, *oppressio*, denotes “a pressing down; violence.” Oppression, under this view, is not merely an act of preventing, a preemptive strike against another or others. It is that, no doubt. But it is also the denial of the self as the self. It is a violent *pressing down* against a natural existential articulation. To oppress a being, a human being, is to tightly and harshly entrap her—to withhold her. In this respect, oppression can also engender conditions of speechlessness. To be rendered speechless is not a designation about one’s absence or lack of the capacity to use words and language but merely a violent withholding of it. It is a turning speech against the speaker by making it perilous to express one’s one of view or eradicating the conditions for being heard. This oppressive violence then does the work of imposing a truncated politicality upon Black subjects. Here, political speech becomes nominal, inchoate and stillborn. Oppressive violence weighs heavily and occlusively against relational, existential articulations of self and other.

The genealogy of Black struggles against oppression must then be a re-articulation of what it means to *appear* as human, as *expressed* by oppressed peoples themselves. Here, we recognize the dialectics of visibility and communicability, invisibility and incommunicability. That is, for blacks to be *seen* as Blacks, they must be *heard*.¹¹ In other words, Black appearance both mandates and succeeds its expressivity. Certainly, one could view the *problematique* of black speechlessness as a Euro-modern undertone that understands Black speech as unintelligible to that particularized, yet real, politically constituted world. This is the view of Sina Kramer: “Constitutive exclusions occur when a system of thought or a political body defines itself by excluding some difference which is intolerable to it. This excluded difference nevertheless remains within the system or body that has excluded it; it continues to do that defining or constituting work from within, but under an epistemological block” (2017: 5). While the unintelligibility of Black speech would allow for Blacks to be “excluded within,” to use Kramer’s language, said unintelligibility raises, at a fundamental level, epistemological questions. But the problem described here also goes well beyond that which is epistemic. “Excluded speech,” so termed, is *also* relational, ethical¹² and therefore, an existential block as it is epistemological. Yet, epistemic violence raises not merely the question of unintelligibility from the position of rationality or more precisely, who may be deemed an intelligible actor; I contend its epistemic implication ramifies relational and existential dimensions of depoliticized speechlessness.

Anna Julia Cooper explores precisely these dimensions when she notes: “One muffled strain in the Silent South, a jarring chord and a vague and uncomprehended cadenza has been and

¹¹ Whereas for Deaf people, to be heard, they must be seen.

¹² The question of politics, denoted in this project as a doing, raises the concept of actionality. Actions, in themselves, are never isolated nor asocial. One’s actions, more often than not, create intersubjective ripples in the sea of sociality. Hence, actions introduce the question of responsibility. To whom and what are we responsible? Ethics, as being duty-bound, suggest a co-responsibility for living in a world that dictate the terms by and under which we are governed. Political speech is ethical because it implicates ways of governance.

still is the Negro. And of that muffled chord, the one mute and voiceless note has been the sadly expectant Black Woman” (1988: i). Here, Cooper identifies two problems: the first, that when Black men speak what results is unintelligibility—their “jarring chords” are dismissed as mindless, desultory social incantations. The Black woman, however, has yet to raise a voice for it to be condemned as unintelligible: “One important witness has not yet been heard from. The summing up of the evidence deposed, and the charge to the jury have been made—but no word from the Black woman” (1988: ii). Yet, in her very discourse, the words of a Black woman, Cooper offers her judgments and makes an existential summon. She does this by asking: what are we worth? In answering this reflexive question, she maintains Blacks must determine our own self-value singularly, as a subject and collectively, as a people. Yet to make that determination, labor must anchor any such efforts. If, as a collective, Blacks want to be heard, they must labor to do so.

Therefore, to be a subject who is heard requires possession of political speech, which explains the indivisible bond between its denial and the conditions necessary for being heard. This is so for what sediments a reconceptualized political speech is its mandate of ethical relations. That is, if speech is reconceptualized as a *relational meeting*, then any such meeting affecting human affairs, wherein power is implicated, invokes the political. Speechlessness, as its non-relational obverse, violently rends and upends this relational meeting. And, it does so through forceful foreclosure. Oppressive violence, either in its corporeal or epistemic signatures, occasions speechlessness, as it envisions Black subjects as ontological impediments to its own solipsistic and insular expression and thus, commits itself to their silencing. Oppressive violence as a form of racialized speechlessness is denoted by its singularity of purpose and stands as an inviolable turn toward the ontological. Anti-black racism, in the domain of political speech, produces oppressive violence, as anti-black racism inaugurates the forceful suspension of relational ethics. It is, in a

turn of phrase, a devaluing of (Black) values. Thus, its ends are anchored in the unbridled perseverance of hegemonic whiteness, such that the Black subject, in only *being*, becomes violative of this white normative ideal.

Oppressive violence militarizes the suspension of humanistic ethics. Lewis Gordon (2007: 128-9) details the nexus between political life and suspended ethics as violence:

We find, then, another dimension of the ethical in relation to the political, for the political construction of egalitarian orders entails, as well, the basis for new ethical relations. In other words, the construction of a standard that enables ethical life requires a transformation of political life as well from the violence on which it was born to the suspension of violence itself. Such a suspension would be no less than the introduction of a public realm, a place in which, and through which, opposition could occur without the structure of the command.

Colonized political speech, ensconced under the auspice of Euromodernity, ineluctably raises the spectre of oppressive violence, as it aims violently to eliminate the Black subject. In this respect, both the *sight* and *site* of Blackness becomes ground zero for ontological assault. Blackness, in its somatic embodiment, signifies a deviation from the white norm—because it is seen, it becomes unheard (the reverse is true in the case of Deafness: because it is unseen, it is unheard). Yet, Blackness is also a site of existential inquiry. It is an ongoing formation of self and so, to engage in decolonized political speech births a flourishing political life where political worlds, of and for Blacks, manifest. Such Afro-worlds materialize when, as Gordon concludes, there is an “introduction of a public realm,” marked by the cessation of oppressive violence, as dissent supplants domination. This public realm ensures the sociology of decolonized political speech, where intersubjectivity becomes the mainstay of social relations. It is in such a state of

affairs that new ethical relations safeguard a relational meeting of wills and minds and where speech, in its political inflection, becomes reconceptualized as a transmodern tone¹³—an articulation of Fanon’s new humanism.

On Rotating Axes: Continuities Between B/black Speech

Petite political speech describes the multiplicitous threads of localized, particularized forms of existential articulations, of *doing* politics. Petite political speech build worlds of differentiations, of racial (Afro) particularity. Black political speech is itself plural in its expression, meaning there are dual ways of sublimating and communicating Black political speech. I contend, “*black*” speech, in its lower, common form, labels the vocabulary of mainstream, stereotypical popular culture. It is the political speech of everyday discourse. By this metric, black speech is quotidian action and as a result, it is often awash in the currents of socio-political vicissitudes; it may sometime be what, in the main, is termed social media activism—hashtag activism, episodic protests, among other forms. Given its more quotidian nature, black speech is occasionally technologized to meet the demands of everyday socio-political life. Contemporary illustrations of this phenomenon are witnessed in the #BlackLivesMatter or BlackTwitter movements, wherein the influence and intervention of technology on the question of speech becomes patent. *black* speech exemplifies politics in its nascent, embryonic stage, its political consciousness is not fully developed, but not fully absent either.

Its converse, “*Black*” speech, in its capitalized form, defines what Black subjects do politically. It is not episodic, punctuated or discontinuous in its registers. Rather, it is rooted in praxis, one that is ongoing in securing new epistemic territory. Black speech, in this respect, is

¹³ I will discuss later the larger implications of political speech’s transcendence, what I have dubbed, “transmodern tone.”

fully politicized and as such, its telos is one of radical transformation; it is the contending and upending of Euromodern hegemony. It tectonically reshapes, or attempts to reshape, the geography of the political world, redrawing new lines along spheres of social, ethical and ontological existence. Black speech, its capitalized form, within the broad domain of political speech, signifies the maturation of politics. The Haitian Revolution stands as a paragon of Black speech, for it radically altered the new world, Black republicanism and freedom for humanity: “[i]ndependence for Haiti was therefore an unfolding process, subject to the contingencies of a world being reshaped and redefined in ways that neither the slaves nor the slave-owners, nor even the French revolutionary governments, could have predicted” (Carolyn Fick, 2009: 177-8). Such radical acts are future-oriented, whose axis rotates in perpetuity. The Haitian Constitution of 1805, its concluding words, read: “We recommend it [the constitution] to our descendants and recommend it to the friends of liberty” (Dubois and Garrigus 2006:196).

Black speech need not be revolutionary in the strict Haitian sense, but it should orient itself toward radical transformation, be it through revolutionism or otherwise. The freedom rides of the Southern Jim Crow era or the 1960s independence and decolonization movements of the Afro-Caribbean are other historical enactments of Black speech. Ultimately, b/Black speech, its twoness, identifies a gap, distancing each zone. What brings both together, what bridges these two halves, is the concomitant interplay between black and Black speech with an orientation to diasporic, transnational and globalist concerns. Historian Thomas O. Ott argued that black political speech in its everyday moments allowed for the actualization of the Haitian Revolution, “it took economic change and public opinion to transform antislavery ideas into active abolition movements...Once ideas, economics, and public opinion laid the foundation of abolition, political action followed” (1973: 20). This everyday black speech meant inflecting the intellectual appeals

against slavery by enlightenment thinkers, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Abbé Raynal, Denis Diderot, among others, whose writings were read by Toussaint Louverture. Put differently, everyday forms of speech in the African diaspora, such as patois, creole and the Harlem jive shifted the linguistic ground around which Black people communicated. Reshaping linguistic frames meant a reorientation to nodes of knowledge and power, but it also was a result of transnational relations and engagements. The political purchase of such interactions, in contemporary terms, could mean the anti-racist movement of #BlackLivesMatter, in conversation with Afro-diasporic appeals, precipitated a radical dethroning and abolition of the (trans)national prison industrial complex that have, for protracted periods, labored toward silencing Black political speech. In this sense, b/Black speech are not epiphenomenal to each other, but rather, should be understood as complimentary, co-constitutive halves of a whole. Therefore, the continuities between b/Black speech hold transformative potential. In what follows, I will now turn to methods to sublimate and quell the revolutionary tenor endemic in Black political speech.

Muzzled Registers: Black Corporeality and Violent Speechlessness

Aristotle's declaration that "man is by nature a political animal," and what constitutes his politicality is observed through speech, "man is the only animal who has the gift of speech" (1253a3; 1253a10). Man's social instinct, says Aristotle, brings them together to form a polity. The nature of speech permits the creation and organization of such a state, thereby allowing for the public administration of justice. Without speech, there can be no politics and *sans* the state, there can be no conception of the just. Black speech, in its *politicized* dimensions, raises not only implications for the formation of the Black self, but also, collectively, Black lifeworlds. Rearticulated, this Aristotelian arithmetic makes pellucidly clear that an incalculable political loss is borne; once speech is denied to man—he no longer is political, and thus fails to be that who he

is: human. When speech is lost, what remains are mere sounds, cries or what Aristotle names “voice”—which he adds belong to all animals. “[V]oice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals” (1253a11-12). This latter conception takes Aristotle further. The subtraction of speech in man leaves a sub-human remainder. The denial of speech devolves one’s humanity, resulting in dehumanization.

Yet there is perhaps no clearer articulation of this stripping of speech than in the work of African-American abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. He, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, explicated the conditions under which the black subject was reduced to an enslaved body, so much so that political speech atrophied and what remained, in bare, skeletal renderings, was mere voice—sound—in classic Aristotelian fashion. Douglass catalogued the corporeal brutality meted out to slaves, a violence that ensured, in no uncertain terms, the mandate of black servitude, “the slave must be brutalized to keep him as a slave...and this can be done only by shutting out the light of education from their minds, and brutalizing their persons. The whip, the chain, the gag, the thumb-screw, the bloodhound, the stocks, and all the other bloody paraphernalia of the slave-system, are indispensably necessary to the relation of master and slave” (Douglass, 2003: 305). This “relation of master and slave” understood the prevailing norm was the master’s—a decidedly white, Euromodern norm. Here, the values of the slavocracy dominated, those values were unyieldingly anti-black. To sustain them, the syntactical orientation of the such a system was corporeal violence, or what Douglass labelled, “brutalizing their persons.” Brutality introduced not only corporeal violence, but also an epistemic. Elsewhere, Douglass (2014: 58) maintained:

I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the

disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute.

Douglass, prior to his arrival at Covey's plantation, saw himself, through having acquired the ability to read, as a political actor, one endowed with agency, limited though it may have been. He cultivated intellect and admittedly, procured an appetite to read. He termed this state of rebellious, resistant agency, "unmanageable" to his captors. Here, Douglass's aspiration articulated a political constitution of self—one defined by its actional thrust to fashion for himself and his fellows, a world of liberty. Yet, Douglass conceded, at this juncture, Covey succeeded in undoing him, "I was broken in body," which doused the "spark" in his eye. Douglass seemingly lost all sense of self, as his devolution proceeded as expected: from man to brute. Brutes, as the Aristotelian model maintains, are without speech and possess merely voice. In this scenario, political speech became party to the treaty of Euromodern rule, as whiteness bereft Blackness of the condition of speech through corporeal violence.

We are left, then, with an ontological problematic: How can Blacks meaningfully engage their given social world when they are viewed as inanimate objects within it—objects incapable of projecting a worldview? In the subject-object relation, blackness is condemned to fixed objectification. In the epigraph that introduces this chapter, Frederick Douglass, as he was set to be auctioned on the slave bloc, discloses: "I have no language to express" the feelings of dread. Yet, complementarily, Douglass also recalled, "We had no more voice in that decision than the brutes among whom we were ranked. A single word from the white men was enough—against all our wishes, prayers, and entreaties" (2014: 46). The brutality of making transactional fungibility out of the lives of other human beings is a tragically violent affair. "Wishes, prayers and entreaties" were censured. The words of the black slave were inessential, holding no existential weight.

Corporeal violence not only prevented speech through somatic closure or bodily denial, but also immaterialized it, where it—the body—no longer possessed social currency as it was subhuman but instead “property.”

On two fronts, corporeal violence brings into sharp contrast the notion of Black ineffability. Ineffability, in Douglass’ narrative, identifies an enslaved Afrocentric standard through which political speech is denied and human beings are thereby rendered speechless. On the first, ineffability, paradoxically, speaks at the level of the internal self. Political speechlessness, Douglass painfully reminds, is itself a speechless phenomenon. Second, in a movement from internal to external, Douglass observes the existential and political weight of a “single word from the white men was enough” in spite of strenuous Black protestations or affective pleas. This “single word from white men” was exactly what Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist Frantz Fanon refers when he noted, “To speak means...above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (2008: 8). Civilization begins, within this sphere of anti-black racism, on the tongue of whiteness. The disavowal of Black political speech is an embrace of a decivilizing project, one absent of politics, for both the Black self and her white other. To be sure, the oppressive speech of “white men” is one concern, but a weightier worry is the radical deprivation that follows therein for Blacks. This white avowal of anti-black racism negates its opposing Black disavowal and protestation because of Euromodern domination. In such a colonized world, where speechlessness become an Afro-normative paradigm, ineffability embodies black praxis. In such a non-relational zone, political speech is denied and what remains are sounds or voice, understood fully as an echoing din from the limitless caverns of entrapment. It is here that man is lost and what roams, the fields of social relations, are propertied “brutes.”

Fanon thunderously raises the question of centrality of truth to the enterprise of liberation. He argues lies scaffold and contour the architecture of the colonial situation. Lies about *who they say we are* (the colonized), particularly in relation to other lies about *who they say they are* (the colonizers). “Truth is what hastens the dislocation of the colonial regime, what fosters the emergence of the nation...In the colonial context there is no truthful behavior” (*Wretched of the Earth* 2004: 14). Truth, of course, must be articulable in praxis, through words or deeds. Truth is inevitably actionable. Truths do not speak for themselves. They must be uttered or given expression. This emergent character of truth corrodes the white vesture of falsity. Such mendacity, a replica of the—white—colonial other must give way to the truthfulness of *being* Black. To engage decolonized political speech is to decenter speechlessness and labor toward social interposition: “As people existing in continuous struggle for truth, we have to examine and question old concepts, values and systems” (Biko, 1987: 92). Black Consciousness, as Steve Bantu Biko defined it, partly became a self-articulation of the ontology of the Black in the face of white corporeal terror. By articulating the racist states’ effort to render Blacks speechless subjects, Biko (2002: 75-76) understood even if truth, cannot be undone, it may be constrained:

[I]n South Africa whiteness has always been associated with police brutality and intimidation, early morning pass raids, general harassment in and out of townships...Thus even young traffic policemen, people generally known for their grace, occasionally find it proper to slap adult black people. It sometimes looks obvious here that the great plan is to keep the black people thoroughly intimidated.

Intimidation, slaps, and brutality actualize the marching orders of white-inflicted corporeal violence. To shut them up, to gag them, to make the conditions for political speech impossible is to advance a racial war against the Black masses—a warfare against Black embodiment. Indeed,

Biko's own assassination by the Apartheid regime was an attempt of silencing and muting Black political speech. In discussing its efficacy, Biko acceded to some degree, "blacks seem to me to have been successfully cowed down by...brutality" (Biko, 2002: 76). Black Consciousness, in response, situates truth at any or all costs, "You are either alive and proud or you are dead...And your method of death can itself be a politicizing thing" (2002: 152). Biko locates political speech as vital—a life source—to the configuration of Black political life. Yet, political speech, for Biko, appears to transcend death; death does not dissolve political speech but could, instead, inflect it *differently*. Corporeal violence in and on political life is itself a contingent and conditional phenomenon. A relational account of speech opens up the possibility for the emergence of radical ethics.

Other theorists, such as Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) and Claudia Jones, meticulously documented the presence of corporeal violence in service of racist and imperial regimes. MLK, in *Where Do We Go from Here*, observed, "It was about three o'clock in the afternoon on a Monday in June 1966...When we heard that [James] Meredith had been shot in the back only a day after he had begun his Freedom March through Mississippi" (2010: 23). In other areas, he referred to Black "people who had been brutalized in Selma" or when they "were leading marchers in the suburbs of Chicago amid a rain of rocks and bottles..." Similarly, Afro-Caribbean activist and journalist, Claudia Jones, catalogued the slew of anti-black violence waged against black corporeality, "We can record many instances of the rise of anti-Negro violence, to a higher pitch today. Only recently from South Carolina came reports of several vicious attacks on Negro citizens exercising their constitutional right to vote" (2011: 38). Michelle Alexander later argued, in *The New Jim Crow*, state violence still terrorizes Black communities within the United States, "Today, ex-offenders live in constant fear of a different form of racial repression—racial profiling, police

brutality, and revocation of parole. One investigative journalist described the situation this way: ‘Overwhelmingly, black people [in Mississippi] are scared of any form of contact with authorities they saw as looking for excuses to reincarcerate them’” (Alexander, 2012: 160). Understood holistically, these narratives, stitched across temporal lines, tell a familiar story: the employment of corporeal violence to induce speechlessness on Blacks. In one sense, corporeal violence stands as physicalist closure, to prevent audible subjects from speaking audibly. Yet, in another, when Black subjects *do* speak, because such speech is considered anti-political, it stands as direct opposition toward white normative political practices and thus, its hearing, or its capacity to be heard, is sanctioned as a political violative act. In such an anti-public realm, the political narrows and possibilities within this world are absent Black participation. Afro-existential registers now become muzzled and speechlessness assumes an oppressively violent character.

On Epistemic Violence: Radical Deprivation & Black Ineffability

What does it mean to speak? What does speech, in and of itself, necessitate for its actualizing¹⁴? Deaf political speech responds ably to these inquiries. It suggests the act of speaking itself has been collapsed into a reductive phonocentric shell: audibility. It deconstructs this model and mode of speech so as to transform its linguistic scaffold to account for an expressible form attuned to a distinctively visual vernacular: the eyes. Sign language, through its open communicability, displaces the hardened episteme of exclusive audibility. Audism, as a result, is disjointed and dislodged from political speech in the main and so, the existential articulations of Deaf people stand not only as sign language but also as a human language.

¹⁴ I use the word “actualizing” instead of, say, “delivery.” Speech, I contend, is not mere oratory performance. It is deeply moored in the motions of lived experience; it is relationally expressive.

Thus, if Deaf subjects help decolonize the *nature* of speech, a movement away from the early Aristotelian paradigm, Black subjects aid in decolonizing what it requires to be heard. This transition from *hearing* to *heard* is certainly an interesting one. In a play of irony, hearing people are worried about not being heard if Deaf people were heard. Yet, such a worry is parochial, at best and solipsistic, at worst. But that hearing worry, so termed, is not shared by hegemony committed to anti-black racism. The unease where Blacks are concerned is about the political commitment of others to *not* hear them at any and all costs. Their Blackness precludes being heard. Or, in a reverse orientation, the increased political volume that Blackness expresses deafens the world's commitment to white superiority. Yet, when Blacks assume a role in such a world, their political voice is rendered speechless, as their voice lands, ironically enough, on "deaf ears." To be sure, Black political speech does not revolve on the axis of white recognition. The political volume of Blackness concerns Afro-centric existence: What does it mean to *be* Black in a world essaying to be anti-black? Blackness, in engaging the political, does so through intentionality. It is about one's situatedness in the world of social relations. Therefore, for the Black subject to speak about her Afrocentricity, she is also speaking about others' situatedness in that same world. And so, while whiteness imagines a singular world where only the white speaks, Blackness in its reciprocal relationality, understands a plural world where Blacks, whites, and others speak with each other. It is this commitment to an interconnected, relational grammar that allows for an increased political volume that the existential articulation of Blackness expresses.

Separately, the Deaf subject is unheard by not being seen as an agent of speech; the Black subject is unheard by being seen. The former identifies audism and the latter racism, but they both embody the arrant failure of intersubjective meetings such that politics ceases to be what it is—it becomes, necessarily, depoliticized. The Black Deaf subject, however, intersects at both points of

intersubjective erosion. Together, the Black Deaf subject struggles against what I dub “ethno-audism.” Ethno-audism classifies a particularized category of Blackness, a Deaf one. Here, the Black Deaf person experiences radical deprivation at two ends: blackness and deafness, both as somatic realities that seek to overdetermine her humanity. Ethno-audism is both a form of racism *and* audism. In the Black Deaf subject, ineffability emerges as radical deprivation grounded in theory of absence. But what happens when ineffability manifests in non-Deaf Black subjectivity? In what follows, I will explore how notions of ineffability and radical deprivation are tied to forms of speechlessness imposed upon Blacks, a general effect of epistemic violence.

The linguistic archeology of ineffable cites the Latin *effabilis* meaning “speakable”; its Latin prefix *in* denoting “not; opposite of.” Blackness, as absence, becomes ineffable, “not-speakable” in relation to its white other. Lewis Gordon, in *Fear of Black Consciousness* (forthcoming), offers this penetrating analysis:

Racist societies promulgate states whose purpose is disempowerment. To lock certain groups into the physicality of their bodies requires rendering impotent the capacities of expression, particularly speech. In effect, such people cease to affect their social world; they become the equivalent of sounds that are not heard. Silent, they become inconsequential.

Here, Gordon provides an exposition of a physicalist closure, a somatic reductionism so much so that what the white other sees, black skin, precludes what he or she hears, black speech. This linkage between physicality and “the capacities of expression” illuminate a central question at the heart of epistemology. What does it require to, as Gordon dubs it, “render” speechlessness? Stated differently, what precedes or explains this “lock[ing] [of] certain groups into the physicality of their bodies”? Elsewhere, Gordon discusses the trappings of what he dubs as epistemic closure

that one's "social role is all one needs for a plethora of other judgments. In effect, to know that role is to know all that there is to know about the individual. In effect, there is no distinction between him and his social role, which makes the individual an essential representative of the entire group" (2000: 68). Epistemic closure acts as a closure of portals of knowledge. That one need not know more, for (s)he knows enough about *them*. In the arena of political speech, there exists an *a priori* judgement about what "they" would say, if, indeed, it is granted "they" have anything of merit to say.

Against this backdrop, I posit a distortion of truth and an attack on knowledge itself—*what* is to know, and *who* is to know—allow for the possibility where "racist societies promulgate states whose purpose is disempowerment." Certainly, as Euromodernity seizes this epistemic terrain then such an act necessitates a white custodian of the episteme, one that gatekeeps and protects the interests of whiteness. It within this anti-black reality that disempowerment and resultantly, speechlessness materializes. Further, epistemic violence, I contend, makes two distinct turns: first, there is an inward turn on itself, where knowledge becomes distorted and transfigured by white mendacity, Euromodern falsity. Second, once this transmutation is completed, its internalization becomes externalized on "certain groups," or more specifically, non-white bodies. Such bodies are collapsed into their phenotype (for Blacks that phenotype is racial, for women it becomes gendered). Through this latter move, whereby epistemology is weaponized and repurposed for racially-oppressive violent ends, Black corporeality is oppositionally aligned as standing antagonistically to epistemology, as its presence, its mere existence, threatens the existing order of knowing. In a word, black existence contradicts the falsity of white superiority.

Yet, in the pursuit of Euromodernity, what might it mean to isolate, quarantine, or eliminate this Afro-embodied contradiction? This, I contend, is the work of anti-politics. As such, because

blackness locates the truth of being Black, one not shrouded in inferiority, it does the work of relocating the tectonic plates of knowledge, utilizing the intellectual resources of Africana philosophy, to shift the center of knowing. Epistemic violence, in its unchallenged state, positions the black subject as being anti-political, because while they speak audibly, the content of their words is considered outside the rational and epistemological parameters of the political and thus, antagonistic to its foundational and orientating normative political principles and practices. Gordon then concludes, “Restricting that rallies forces against the expansion of speech, power, and, by extension, politics. That is why all racist societies eventually become anti-political ones” (forthcoming). As Gordon makes clear, it is not corporeality of Blackness that creates anti-politics, but rather its restricted communicability. Imposed speechlessness, affirms Gordon, makes impotent the political altering of their social world. “Sounds,” notes Gordon, or in the Aristotelian paradigm, “voice,” isolated, disempowers and sub-humanizes. This somaticism, what Gordon calls a “lock” into “the physicality of their bodies,” functions as an existential muzzle, which animalizes human beings, wherein all that remains, short of speech, is a languishing cry, the sort discussed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Anna Julia Cooper¹⁵. Yet, as Gordon confirms, anti-black racism impoverishes political speech in ways that tear relational tendons needed by the body politic for its own maturation and well-being. By denying the fruits of the political, Blacks are forced outside its precincts, and what results is the dying of politics and the costly effect, in human terms, are speechless people due, in part, to epistemic violence.

Earlier, we discussed the importance of truth and its indispensability to liberation. Truth, we observed, couples itself with political speech to allow for its more decolonized grammar.

¹⁵ Both Rousseau and Cooper understood “the cry” to be transcendental and universalizing, respectively. For Rousseau it existed across the species of animality and for Cooper, across the human landscape.

Biko's Black Consciousness theory sediments truth in service to liberated consciousness, where Biko contends the Black subject was formerly "reduced to an obliging shell," or "a shadow of man" (2002: 29). It is here, under the mendacity of white superiority, that the Black subject existed: eclipsed and marred by and in a colonial penumbra—a white shadow, as it were. It is for this same reason that Fanon finds power in truthful discourse, "Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the natives, and ruins the foreigners. In this colonialist context there is no truthful behavior..." (1963: 50). Both Fanon and Biko understood that what we "know" was governed by the falsity of white epistemic violence, *to claim*, and in claiming, purporting to know, but to do so fictitiously and injuriously.

It is precisely these falsities that Claudia Jones observed concerning the Euro-American imperial context. What she would later name the half-logic of the Jim Crowism, as one producing "half-slave and half-free" Blacks (2011: 27). MLK, too, noted that Jim Crow and its advocates were purveyors of "half-truths and whole lies" (2010: 02). Chicana activist and feminist Gloria Anzaldúa also exposed the untruths of whiteness, "The Gringo, locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete political power, struggling Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it." Yet, the question raised by Anzaldúa becomes: What is the source of this fiction and what are its ramifications? To these ends, she answers, "we were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history...under the threat of Anglo terrorism" (Anzaldúa, 2007: 30). Epistemic violence operates, as these theorists indicate, to distort truth and claim that distortion as fact and therefore, knowledge. The effect, as Jones and Anzaldúa respectively suggest, leaves behind a "half" or "separated" being. Fanon and MLK seem to go further, portending a negation of self altogether. Fanon

diagnosed this as alienation, or what he dubs, “the zone of non-being.” MLK branded this non-beingness as nobodyness: “Being a Negro...means being harried by day and haunted by night by a nagging sense of nobodyness” (King, 2010: 127). He continues, “For years the Negro has been taught that he is nobody...that his being has been stamped with an indelible imprint of inferiority” (*Ibid*: 39). In this sense, then, the colonial logic follows that nobodies or nonbeings have, in corporeal terms, *nothing* to say and in epistemic terms, what they say amounts to *nothing*. The former explains an imposed inability to speak, the latter explains the imposed inability to hear. Oppressive violence makes both conditions of dehumanized political speechlessness a grim but no less extant reality.

The budding contradiction manifests, of course, when “nobodies” or “nonbeings” articulate *something*, an existential viewpoint. Feminist discourse offer us a rich portrait of how these falsities are manufactured (and yet contradicted through the truth of self-existence). Mary Wollstonecraft, famed eighteenth-century English feminist, wryly raised a trite obstruction often meted out to women who cared (and dared) to express themselves through reason, “From every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women; but where are they to be found?” (Wollstonecraft, 2004: 12). And so, a woman who utilizes reason plots—furtively, as it goes—to be a man; yet, Mary Astell, on the other hand, asserts, “The World will hardly allow a Woman to say anything well, unless as she borrows it from Men, or is assisted by them” (Astell, 1996: 23). Joanna Russ echoes and corroborates Astell’s sentiments, as she maps the innumerable attempts at suppressing women’s voices, especially in writing. Russ offers, for examination, many compelling samples of what she labels the “denial of agency”: “What to do when a woman has written something? The first line of defense is to deny that she wrote it. Since women cannot write, someone else (a man) must have written it” (Russ, 2005: 20). Denial of female agency, from

another angle, strikes the same masculinist, discordant chord critiqued by Wollstonecraft and Astell, that is: “*The man inside her wrote it*” because, ostensibly, she was utilizing her “masculine wit” (*Ibid*: 22). This attempt at discursive erasure—willful violence against and elimination of modes of political communication—raises issues of access, licensure and inclusion for some and conversely, denial, suppression and exclusion for others. This discursive erasure amounts to a privatization of epistemic terrain: who is allowed to know and who is responsible for knowing. I argue this privatization is begotten through violent means. Violence manifests when speech is suspended. Lewis Gordon comments thus (forthcoming):

The initial logic of citizenship, if we return to the polis, from which politics came, was one of negotiating conflict through communication and, thus, interaction... Citizens do not always work things out, however, and the collapse into violence would mean civil war, where opposing insides and outsides result. Discursive opposition (speech) is then cast to the wayside, and the opposite of citizenship rules.

“Discursive opposition” (political speech) vitiates when conflict is pursued through violence rather than open communicability. Therefore, because violence supplants a relationally communicative *telos*, a further steps results, that is, oppressive violence; it, in a bid to sustain itself either along corporeal or epistemic lines, seeks to perpetually sideline and atomize political speech. Therefore, for speech to publicly appear, it must do so through Euromodern permitted means and ways. Those deemed *persona non grata* (Blacks or women) in the public realm, their presence must be resolved through Occidental (white) or masculine means. This explains Astell’s lamentation regarding Anglo-paternalism and Russ’s and Wollstonecraft’s formulation that it is their immanent manliness that women seek to unleash and nurture. Epistemic violence permits political speech to be particularistically embodied. This issue finds transferability on the question of race.

Fanon argued in *Black Skin, White Masks* that Black natives have labored through a process of dislocation: an existential rupture, a separating from the Black self through an artificial grafting onto his white other. Speech, he acknowledges, is a reliable mode for such socio-diagnosis. In surgically dissecting the insides of the Black subject, Fanon (2008: 8-9) reports:

The problem that we confront...is this: The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language...The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.

Fanon offers a racial take on Russ' *the man inside her* critique. Here, Fanon seems to offer us this racialized formula: *the white inside the black*. This, of course, presents an existential dilemma, a contradiction of logics. For the Black man to believe he can have a word, a say and a sway, he "knows" he must do so whitely, so to speak. Correspondingly, the black views whiteness as the sole door to viable political life. He becomes speechless nevertheless because he is separated from himself—a dislocation and therefore, cannot speak truthfully about his own situatedness. His voice, his speech, is lost in the grammar of hegemonic whiteness. Further, there is another similar yet distinct mode of erasing agency and rendering one speechless. Take, for instance, Fanon's defense of the consummate existence of Afro-Caribbean poet Aimé Césaire, who, in his brilliance, was given plaudits by the white Frenchman, André Breton, for Césaire's unprecedented use of the French language:

[W]hat I am trying to say is that there is no reason why Breton should say of Césaire, "Here is a black man who handles the French language as no white man today can." And, even though Breton may be stating a fact, I do not see why there

should be any paradox, anything to underline, for in truth M. Aimé Césaire is a native of Martinique and a university graduate.

Fanon raises the issue of racial exceptionalism. Breton's words appear laudatory, but in effect, by pointing to a single exceptional case of Black accolade that surpasses its white counterpart, the standard to be surpassed, seemingly, is a definitively white one—what makes it exceptional is that a black did it. In other words, Fanon notes it is only a paradox if we accept the linguistic norm of excellence to be white. Put bluntly, the issue here is simply this: *the black did a white man's job better than a white could*. Russ dubs this a denial of agency, though in its subtler forms. This brings to the fore, the notion of epistemic violence because in an anti-black world there cannot be any conceivable standard save a white one. The episteme, as a result, becomes truncated and privatized. Its more militarized parameters silences through methods of exclusion and thus, renders one politically speechless: unable to *say* or *do* anything beyond that which is Anglo-legitimized. And so, the discursive limit mounts and speechless subjects are socially born.

Part III
Deaf and Black Lifeworlds

Chapter 5

Deaf Lifeworlds and Socio-political Emergence

“In this day and age, we live in a very audio-centric world...Sound is like power, control, social currency...Because ASL doesn't have any sound to it, it automatically holds no social currency.”

—**Deaf Artist, Christine Sun Kim (2015)**

In the epigraph that introduces this chapter, Deaf artist Christine Sun Kim identifies the nexus between sound and social standing. Social standing, or broadly what she dubs as “social currency,” is of crucial import because it dictates the very terms of living. These terms, she notes, allows for the social purchase of an “audio-centric world.” The ramification of which results in the social impoverishment of American Sign Language (ASL) as it lacks the economies of sound, or alternatively, sound (communicative) economies. Therefore, ASL becomes bereft of power. Under an audio-centric regime, it becomes an object of control and valuation. The question of sociality does not void the question of politicality. For the social necessarily invokes the political. The social question, insofar as it opens intersubjective concerns, raises the issue of ASL’s social standing and (de)legitimacy in an audio-centric world, wherein Deaf bodies must contend and navigate. But the political question goes a step further. At its rudiments, it asks what is ASL’s capacity to self-determine—to determine its own internal currency. This self-formative dimension fashions the parameters of political agency and the subjectivation of Deaf personhood. That is, if the Deaf self does not fashion itself, how can it stand in relation to the other? The social, under this view,

activates the political. Absent the Deaf self, *ipso facto*, there cannot be any imaginings of a Deaf future.

Certainly, the discordant reality of an audio-centric world invites considerations about the conditions necessary for one's appearance in it. If what's audible is tied to what's worldly, or of and in the world, then the instantiation of a *particular* human being is inextricably tied therein. This particular then collapses into the *general*. That is, to be *a* form of human being, becomes *the* form of human being. In such a world, to be human is defined as one that audibly hears. The Greek *phono* indicates "sound." One who fully occupies the audio-centric world is thought as phono-centric. Phono-philosophical anthropology then captures the primordial condition under which the human exist only in relation to his capacity to hear sound. Here, the facticity of audible hearing predetermines the condition for humanity. What centers existence is consciousness of the *phono*. Audibility becomes the unacknowledged quintessence of politics. The phono-philosophical anthropological subject stabilizes existence in the audio-centric world. The Deaf subject radically disrupts this coherence—for (s)he offers living in a world without sounds. Audism then functions as a consequence of phono-philosophical anthropology—it marginalizes and subjugates on the condition of hearing ability, or at least, the lack thereof. Audism totalizes the Deaf subject as one existing problematically without the capacity to hear.

The embodied register of speech is of central concern as we navigate the political. For politics, as I have made clear in previous pages, constitutes an *actional doing*, one that imprints on our own sense of situatedness, that is: how we occupy the political world and the consequences that are borne through such an occupation. Politics, in this discussion, is an act of intentional shaping and grounding of lifeworlds. Lifeworld—*Lebenswelt*—allows for epistemological inquiries into life as it is and could be. Lifeworlds are held together by the stabilizing force of

existential movements. Politics, then, is an engagement of, and into, lifeworlds. Politics sediments lifeworlds in such a way that social emergence becomes possible—where, as Husserl argues, lifeworlds permit “everyday practical situational truths” to appear (Husserl, 1970: 132). Politics directs lifeworld toward social emergence, wherein the humanistic impulse becomes the heartbeat of the polity. Action, this *doing*, is necessarily political insofar as it grounds humanistic affairs.

As such, an embodied register of speech necessarily implicates actionality because it is a way of articulating demands and one’s situatedness. The issue of a reconceptualized register begins when lived experience informs and begins to reformulate a once fossilized episteme. Indeed, the concept of reconceptualization begs an epistemological question. The term “concept” etymologically locates its origins in the Latin *conceptum* meaning, “abstract...(a thing) conceived.” Its verb form, its actional grammar, becomes “conceptualize,” where its Latin *conceptus* denotes, “a collecting, gathering, conceiving.” Therefore, to *reconceptualize*—to conceptualize anew—asks the question: what does it mean to gather, to collect, to conceive on different, if not expanded, epistemic terms?

I contend here that such an epistemological expansion necessitates the actional, that is, the political. And through augmenting that which we know, or claim to know, political speech, and the particularized register through which that is articulated, be it Deaf speech or Black speech, becomes reconceptualized. This reconceptualization is enriched through *conceptus*—the gathering of living experience interlaced with our abstract knowing. In this chapter, the praxis of differentiated existential articulations, of Deaf lifeworlds and Black ones, is on full showcase. I do so through a series of in-depth interviews with subjects deemed and identified as hearing Black, Deaf, and Black Deaf located across two geopolitical terrains: Kingston, Jamaica and Hartford, Connecticut. These two sites offer a primary discourse from similarly identified communities that

explains both the commonalities that bind diasporic peoples together, making claim to a central register from which all peoples who share a common racial or Deaf identity, while, concurrently, highlighting ways of situated departure. Ultimately, weaving together our theoretical considerations with voiced lived experience sews a larger fabric of political speech—exploding old, calcified epistemes and ushering new ones ever under the weight of constant contestation, as well as forcing epistemic opening. In what follows, I thematize transcribed interviews and comb through countless hours of interview responses with Deaf and Black subjects in order to excavate my primary data from which I use to build black and Deaf lifeworlds. In other words, the phenomenological signature of Black and Deaf praxis weaves these narratives, offering opportunities for rich political theorizing.

The immediate consequence of re-conceptualizing registers, ineluctably, is that of decolonial politics. What does a re-conceptualized register mean for questions of decolonized registers? What becomes of the phono-philosophical anthropological ideal and its faux universalism? In the end, we are left with the decolonial possibilities that attend political speech as a necessary mode of humanization. This chapter concludes that the question of decoloniality is partly a question of political speech and its emergence. That is, for one to remain a permanent fixture in political life or emerge as such—as Deaf or Black, or conjointly, Black Deaf—she must engage in political speech and correspondingly, be heard. Euroodernity’s undertone is both a question of subdued and falsified claims about the universalization of all voices and also about those sublimated as silenced subjects whose voices are peripheralized as existing outside civilized discourse. Decolonial politics, at once, transmogrifies Euromodernity’s undertone to transmodernity’s tone—deeply political tones—with the latter entailing that the pendulum of political relevance swings in the direction of the colonized and oppressed. This transmodern tone

is relational and re-centers either the Greek *mabelian*, or the Africanist Akan iteration, *dwamu*, which both understand speech as an eminently relational act of embodied meeting. In such a meeting, the given categories of speech—its normalized registers be they gendered, racialized or sexualized—are constantly contested. This new augmented reality necessarily situates decolonial politics as ensuring political speech. It allows for portals for humanistic listening and political articulation.

In my interviews of Afro-Jamaican Deaf subjects, the centrality of the phono-philosophical anthropological construct, the “hearing deaf” archetype, situates itself as often primary care, a nurturing care expressed through everyday acts of familial love: a doting mom, a sympathetic dad, a loyal brother. Yet, the fragility of this “hearing deaf” archetype is such that valuing another human being exists on terms of *hearing* another and of *the hearing* other. Jon,¹⁶ a Deaf male, admits, “I was hearing; until about three [years old], I had hearing loss. My mother really tried to train me to speak. So, I was learning to use my voice and sign at the same time.” For Jon, signing may accompany oral speech but it cannot function on its own. It is always supplemental when in relation to the hearing world. I asked Jon how he communicated with his family and the world, “I used my voice. If they didn’t understand we would write or text. You know, sometimes we slow down our speech to understand each other.” The audible voice always dictates the terms on which Jon could function, so much so that, “When I tried to speak they [family/friends] would make sure to correct me, and make sure my mouth is doing the right thing and that I am speaking correctly.” Jon admits that he enjoys wearing his hearing aid as it’s a useful pedagogical tool that instructs him on proper speech vocalization, “Sometimes with hearing aids, it helps me to improve how I

¹⁶ For the purposes of confidentiality, and in accordance with IRB regulations, I have assigned pseudonyms to each subject in order to conceal their true identity.

speak, improve my vocals.” The vocal voice, for Jon, allows him access not merely to the hearing world, but rather to the world. Jon sees Deaf spaces, however localized, as marginal, too atomized to dictate their own terms of living. He reminisced about lost opportunities, “At Edna Manley School for Dance, I tried to apply there and many persons, they tell me that I can’t [dance]. And that really disappointed me because I want to. I want to dance. I want to go there.” Ultimately, for Jon, societal responses to his Deafness demanded too many existential concessions. He sacrificed too much—or was forced to—concluding, “If I could hear again, if I could no longer be Deaf I would take it.” At that point, our conversation concluded, but in the space between our thick, punctuated silence, Jon quickly inserted, “I just want to add that even if I could hear again I would still support the Deaf community. I would still sign and communicate with them because I grew up in both worlds.”

Indeed, to grow up in both worlds, but to feel the unequal weight of one in relation to the other, reveals that to be seen in the world is to be hearing. Jon’s voluntary shedding of his Deaf skin is hardly voluntary. It represents the calcification of the ideal subject, the generalization of the hearing subject as eminently venerated and the imposition of this idealized type on those deemed non-ideal. Frantz Fanon discussed this very phenomenon in the opening words of *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008: 8):

I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language. That is why I find it necessary to begin with this subject, which should provide us with one of the elements in the colored man’s comprehension of the dimension of *the other*. For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other. The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man.

Embodied phonocentrism ensures the somatology of the Deaf subject is always inflected in and through the physiology of the hearing tongue. Like the black man, the Deaf subject has two dimensions: one with her fellows, the other with her hearing other. What unfolds, however, when one's self collapses and merely become a reflection of the other? That is, the self is never fully the subject, but is reduced to unending objectification of itself. The question, as Fanon argues, is not merely one of two worlds, of a Deaf world and a Hearing world, from which one peers through the ontological distance; rather, he asks, "How can one then be deaf to that voice rolling down the stages of history: 'What matters is not to know the world but to change it'" (*ibid*). To change the world is to contest and upend its taxonomies—taxonomies of hearing differentiations. Such a change, an re-orientation to a new world, and therein, a new human, results in liberation for all involved, not merely Deaf, but also hearing. It is, as Fanon identifies, "a new way of thinking" that ushers in a free human being (2004: 239).

Important to consider, too, is that the question of language, that of speaking to the other, is one saturated in discourses about power: "A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (Fanon, 2008: 9). The extent to which the Deaf subject contends he has a language—sign language—is the extent to which is he not merely in the world, but of it. To *possess the world* is to view one's world as capable of language that stands as itself and by itself.

On the other hand, the normative phonocentric paradigm, which values the hearing subject, understand the political economy of sound as a universal *lingua franca*. Those who cannot exchange that political currency cannot make juridical or political purchases. Perhaps one fleeting political purchase is that of justice claims. Dwayne, a middle-aged Jamaican Deaf man, expressed his frustrations with accessing justice because of his lack of hearing status, "I remember once I

went to the police station, I had an issue [with] my family. I went to the police to try to report an incident. When I arrived, they [the police] insisted on [orally] speaking to me. The police didn't want to listen to me." Dwayne observed that for communication to take place, police officers refused to engaged in any speech not audible. "The attitude [of law enforcement] seemed more like Deafness has nothing to do with them. It was my problem. They don't feel that they should be interacting with deaf people." Dwayne was not alone in his feelings of isolation and alienation. Christopher, a high school student, shared similar sentiments, noting that whenever there are conflicts between the hearing and the Deaf, the hearing man, *a priori*, assumes innocence and criminality brands Deaf bodies, "If there is a fight between a hearing and Deaf person, when the police arrive and they notice a Deaf person was a part of it, they side with [privilege] the hearing person, rather than supporting the Deaf person, they will accuse the Deaf person wrongly." According to Christopher, the presumption of guilt universally accompanies Deafness. Dwayne and Christopher see justice as an elusive political good, meant only for the non-Deaf. Indeed, the logic made manifest in here is this: the hearing person will "make his voice heard" and insist on his point of view while the Deaf man can easily be ignored and not listened to with impunity.

To speak in the language only of phonocentrism and through it, the valence of sound strikes a chord of inevitability, where the sedimentation of what it means to be "human" becomes an ontological reality. Through this ontological haze, the Deaf becomes human through an oralist manifesto. H-Dirksen L. Bauman historicizes the relationship between speech and the rational subject: "Historically, humans have been identified as the speaking animal; those who cannot speak are seen as akin to humans in body but animals in mind, in this orientation, we see ourselves as becoming human through speech" (2004: 242). One interviewee, Glen, was born profoundly Deaf. He expressed that growing up, his mother constantly forced him to speak orally, partly out

of maternal protective instincts: “My mother always wanted to force me to speak. And, I told her: sign language is easier communication for me than trying to speak. I was born Deaf and so that’s normal for me and so I told her she’s wrong to be forcing me to speak.” Glen’s refusal begins to rupture the epistemic line that maps audible speech on the human body. Such a refusal interrogates normative audio-centric life, as sign language stands as a decentering of phonocentrism and foregrounds an intersubjective meeting of wills and minds, in ways that elevates a more relational, humanistic approach to social signification. Deafness’ resignification of the human subject as not only the oral subject, allows for a continuous contestation of the borders of humanness. It is here that political speech manifests—it begins, as it so often does, with refusal. Glen’s insistence in the embodied political speech of the Deaf builds Deaf worlds.

Chapter 6

The Audist Contract

The existential reality of phono-philosophical anthropology, institutionalized as audism, is indeed a curious one. Curious because it invokes such narrow appeals to sound in the construction of the *real* human being. Brenda Brueggemann (1999: 11) formed this syllogism to concretely express the audist *raison d'être*, “Language is human; speech is language; therefore deaf people are inhuman and deafness is a problem.” She claims that this coupling of speech and rational humanity allows for an ontological as well as epistemological crisis that she dubs, the “will to speech.” That is, audibility expresses, in one degree or another, “the content of reason.” She contends that the Enlightenment age and its discourse on rhetoric, valorizes oral speech, which is then sublimated through human performativity as the will to speech: “This will to speech is both oppressor and creator of deafness in its various forms as disability, as pathology” (Brueggemann 1991: 12). Brueggemann’s analysis that “deaf people are inhuman” because of the historically inseparable connection between speech and humanity, begs a larger genealogical question: which kind of speech and communication are tied to defining the political and personhood? An examination of social contract theory may prove useful to this analysis. Social contract theory, at its most basic understanding, seeks to clarify the terms that would make obligations of citizens to the *polis* legitimate or, in its critical mode, it can reveal the terms to which people seemed to have consented through the political behavior that is allowed and treated as normal.

In *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman employed contractarian theory to argue that patriarchal power lead to sexual differences that subjected women as unequal and born to no

natural freedom. She writes, “In the natural condition ‘all men are born free’ and are equal to each other ‘individuals.’ This presupposition of contract doctrine generates a profound problem” (1988: 6). Assessing the Hobbesian contract and its diminution of women, Pateman interrogates: “How can beings who lack the capacities to make contracts nevertheless be supposed always to enter this contract?” (*Ibid*: 6). Ultimately, she concludes, “Modern patriarchy is fraternal in form and the original contract is a fraternal pact” (77). The fraternal pact necessarily subjugates woman. Yet, Pateman contends that women should voice their existence and assert themselves as part of the larger political discourse: “Women must acknowledge the political fiction and speak the language even as the terms of the original pact exclude them from the fraternal conversation” (221). This makes it clear that if there were a hypothetical or stylized historical social contract not everyone implicated was party to determining its content. Women’s political speech, purports Pateman, begins when they reject the original terms of the fraternal contract and voice their own terms and conditions—in this respect, Pateman calls for the individualization of women, to assert their individuality as parties to freedom.

Charles Mills continues and adds to Pateman’s discourse of the sexual contract by making claim to a racial contract, or the domination contract. Mill argues (2007: 110):

There is the historic fact, at least arguably, that the original contract theorists had overt or tacit racial restrictions on who counted as a full “person” with equal rights. Nonwhite ‘savages’ and ‘barbarians’ were generally seen as lesser beings covered by a different set of normative rules, as manifested both in the actually color-coded moral code obtaining and the racist socio-political institutions imposed on nonwhites by Europeans in the modern period.

This notwithstanding, Mills posits such an original contract can be amended, rectified even, toward egalitarian ends and racial inclusion. He writes, “the obvious rejoinder to this criticism (even if its validity is conceded) is that these racial exclusions, deplorable as they were, can be simply eliminated from the theoretical apparatus, and are not a feature of the contemporary contract” (*ibid*). Mills refers to this moral, political and epistemological rescue of the social contract as subversive contractarianism, using the tenuous crutches of non-ideal to situate his discourse. I won’t get into the thick weeds or merits of Mills claims here; rather, I only wish to say that Mills’ aesthetic renovation of the social contract privileges liberal conceits that reinforce the same modes of domination he wishes to escape.

Along similar veins, social contract theorist Stacy Clifford Simplican theorizes about what she dubs, *The Capacity Contract*. Simplican contends that the cognitive subject is given pre-eminence and so, cognitive functions are rendered a preconditional criterion in everyday political life, particularly in discourses pertaining to citizenship and democratic participation. Utilizing both democratic theory and social contract theory, Simplican problematizes the expectation and criterion for cognitive capacity as licensure for citizenship, stating: “I argue that entrenched anxieties about disability are not only aesthetic and existential but also political, as disability reveals the deep discrepancy between the ways we conceptualize the demands of political participation” (Simplican, 2015: 3). She continues, “my anxiety emerges from the discordance between the ways we as democratic citizens idealize cognitive capacity as a trusted democratic resource” (*ibid*). The consequence, she notes, is that those with intellectual disabilities are “deprived of political standing” (*ibid*). Such a deprivation raises questions about one’s humanity and thus, functionally excludes those deemed *defective*. Ultimately, she concludes, “People with intellectual and developmental disability subvert idealized cognitive expectations as well as the

fictive political subject from which they emerge” (*Ibid*). Intellectual disabilities deflate our contemporary and historical conception of the cognitive subject. Simplician views the capacity contract both as possessing the ability to embrace and exclude on the basis of marginalized vulnerability. This argument concludes the capacity contract’s exclusionary tendencies need not totalize its entire capacity but rather parts and pieces of it.

Assuredly, the issue of sex, race, or intellectual disability is not an issue of hearing capacity. No doubt, the Deaf have a long, detailed history of being pathologized as “idiots” because of the general (though not always evident) lack of ability to orally speak. The conflation and collapse of oral speech and cognitive capacity engendered audism. This notwithstanding, Deafness is not emblematic of intellectual disability. And so, I contend that neither the capacity contract, nor the racial or sexual contract before it, explains the Deaf condition, or gives rise to the construction of the phono-philosophical anthropology hearing subject. Put plainly, what explains, even partly, Glen’s mother’s insistence on oral speech? Or Jon’s concession of wanting to wear, as it were, hearing skin? In chapter two, I addressed the Aristotelian arithmetic that sees speech as central to the creation of a polity; that is, speech affords the means of communicability, without which there could be no shared values and norms among subjects. Communicability was here reduced to *only* audibility. And so, ancient Greek philosophy anchors our modern notion of speech. In *Leviathan*, Hobbesian social contract notes, “The general use of speech, is to transfer our mental discourse, into verbal; or the train of our thoughts, into a train of words” (1972: 74). In no uncertain terms, Hobbes assigns vocality to speech: sounds. If speech’s general usage is collapsed into verbality, what of those whose use is non-verbal? Hobbes furnishes no answer. Naming—what he dubs *appellation*—is a central function of the enterprise of speech; he discerns that acuity of thought is

diminished on the “deaf and dumb,” whereas for the hearing subject this faculty is easily discerned and manifested (Hobbes 1972: 75-6):

By this imposition of names, some of larger, some of stricter signification, we turn the reckoning of the consequences of things imagined in the mind into a reckoning of the consequences of appellations. For example, a man that hath no use of speech at all, (such as is born and remains perfectly deaf and dumb), if he set before his eyes a triangle, and by it two right angles (such as are the corners of a square figure), he may by meditation compare and find that the three angles of that triangle are equal to those two right angles that stand by it. But if another triangle be shown him different in shape from the former, he cannot know without a new labour whether the three angles of that also be equal to the same. But he that hath the use of words, when he observes that such equality was consequent, not to the length of the sides, nor to any other particular thing in his triangle; but only to this, that the sides were straight, and the angles three, and that that was all, for which he named it a triangle; will boldly conclude universally that such equality of angles is in all triangles whatsoever, and register his invention in these general terms: Every triangle hath its three angles equal to two right angles. And thus the consequence found in one particular comes to be registered and remembered as a universal rule; and discharges our mental reckoning of time and place, and delivers us from all labour of the mind, saving the first; and makes that which was found true here, and now, to be true in all times and places.

The Deaf subject cannot cogitate universal laws of facts because of what Hobbes perceives to be their inability in naming, their supposed poverty in definitional reasoning. Thus, they are condemned to the abyss of futile repetition—one of cyclical “new labor.” Hobbes’ analysis is given further illumination through his citation, if not endorsement, of Greek logic: “The Greeks have but one word, *logos*, for both speech and reason; not that thought there was no speech without reason, but no reasoning without speech” (1972: 78). Under this rubric, could Deaf people reason *sans* speech? Hobbes seems to say nay. Even in such an eventuality, this dichotomization in the Hobbesian contract between the hearing and the Deaf connotes the limited political standing the latter could command. Beyond reason as a fundamental basis for speech, Hobbes also thought speech could ensure social consent. This social consent was pivotal; as long as it was so preserved, it obviated any precipitous descent into war and strife and functioned as a prophylactic against the dissolution of the state.

Here, the audist contract delimited zones of participation along binary terms: hearing and Deaf. The former had the profit of speech, the latter enmired in the bankruptcy of its absence. The audist contract was a gag on Deaf imagination and a lobotomization of Deaf reason. Under such a regime, Deaf political participation was both a social and existential quagmire. The question of Deaf invisibility became a question of Deaf inaudibility—inasmuch as being Deaf was to be made politically inaudible thus rendering one unheard and therefore, speechless. Political speech, logically, could only be granted to those who fit either the Aristotelian or Hobbesian paradigms. This explains Glen’s mother’s insistence for vocalized speech, for she understood the normative decrees that weighed heavily on her son’s beleaguered existence as a Deaf man.

Ultimately, I have catalogued the various ways in which Deaf political speech is said to be deficient. I do this through offering a political history as to how speech is rigidly defined (speech

as reason, speech as cognitive capacity, speech as social consent and of course, speech as audibility). In all these imposed criteria of what constitutes speech, the Deaf subject becomes a *persona non grata*—unwelcomed within critical arenas of political contestation. This depersonalizing of Deaf speech results in its depoliticization. If, as Hobbes argues, Deaf people are incapable of critical thought or as Aristotle purports, their communicative inaudibility eliminates them from governable consent, then Deaf speech is disqualified from what the Greeks dub the *Agora*—the central public space of Greek political life. This is the space of jurisprudence, of law-making and too, a space of artistic and cosmological resonance and social celebration.

Yet such a disqualification from fecundity of political life becomes the basis on which the phonocentric paradigm is built. For what grounds this ideal is a fractured, unbalanced relational account. That is, political life becomes a possibility the extent to which one becomes a speaking subject—whereby audibility (or phonocentrism) moors personhood. The question of the phonocentric paradigm occasions a particular epistemological commitment to public life and its demands. It mandates that one views the cognitive subject as one who hears and therefore, vocalizes political participation. Resultingly, this phonocentric sensibility dictates the requirements of normative life. In the living of political life, those demands are reified as audist relations between hearing and Deaf lifeworlds. Audism, then, becomes subsumed by, and enslaved to, a phono-philosophical anthropological normativity.

For some Deaf people, the issue of audism is manifested in the realm of science. As discussed in chapter two, the medical model is often viewed with lens of culpability. This model, says Deaf scholars, see deafness as a diagnosis, one with a pathological complex. To be “deaf” was to be defective. One respondent, Dwayne, saw audiology, and its practitioners, as gatekeepers of the hearing world. Dwayne identifies as culturally Deaf—he understands his Deafness not as

pathology but one that is culturally situated. He sees Deafness not as a lack of hearing but of gain, Deaf Gain; it is a community of interlocutors who partake in Deaf cultural mores. “I think they’re trying to cure Deafness. Yeah, I think it’s a negative [thing] because it’s going to destroy our community. We have a Deaf community that’s already there. And audiologists realize that we have sign language. We have our own language. Why would you want to destroy it? Just leave it as it is.” Dwayne sees audiology as evidencing scientific audism, “Audiologists tend to influence parents to teach their Deaf children to learn how to speak but we think that sign language will better their development.” For Dwayne, and other Deaf people who underwrite his particular sentiments, this larger phonocentric paradigm leads to Deaf children being conscripted into rituals of oralism—of forced speech.

Indeed, the phenomenon of a forced speech refers beyond oralism, for it indexes that moment speech is foreclosed and therefore forced on the subject as a disciplinary ritual, in such a way as to silence her. Consider this experience from Marica, a 30-something female Deaf advocate, as she recalls her relationship with audism:

I have experienced audism. It’s interesting. In my childhood home and my current home, I’ve never felt audism, until I go out into the [hearing] community, into the workplace, into the Downtown [marketplace]. I remember when I was growing up [and attending] school. We were all Deaf students and the teachers were hearing. And my teacher was talking with another hearing teacher. And we would be fascinated with that conversation and we could tell, they didn’t want to know. And we are here [watching you], trying to understand why are you talking? I felt kind of insulted. I felt like they are taking advantage of us. They were talking and we

couldn't understand them. They oppressed us; maybe it wasn't intentional.

Communication is accessibility. That's one example of audism.

Marcia explained that the issue was less about what the teacher was saying, but rather that using her voice—"talking"—in a Deaf space functionally collapsed her Deaf world and "audified" it. This "audification" of Deaf spaces lends itself to Deaf erasure. It is this precise sense of invisibility that fostered an existential inaudibility, or what I have dubbed here and elsewhere, a rendering of speechlessness. As it were, Marcia's hands were tied—her horizon of possibilities dwarfed, her scope of vision truncated. Under such conditions, Marcia's educator depoliticized her speech. Her visual vernacular¹⁷ was peripheralized—pushed toward the outward space of irrelevance and denial. Conversely, this raises the question of political speech and the terms essential for its recognition. I argue *Deaf Can* epistemology allows for this turn toward freedom.

¹⁷ This term, Visual Vernacular (VV), in its more recent iteration, comes to represent forms of theatrical ASL/Deaf Poetry through embodied means. I use it here to suggest a remonstrance in the political dramatization of struggle—the struggle to be heard by the virtue of being seen on the existential stage.

Part IV

Toward “Deaf Can” Epistemology

Chapter 7

Nicole's Story

Nicole is an elderly Deaf woman. She became Deaf at nine months old. Nicole explained that she suffered blunt trauma to her ears when she fell as a baby and never recovered her hearing. When asked what problems she faced living as a Deaf woman, she recounts:

We don't get opportunities to advance our education. For example, we want to become teachers and get a teaching degree and they [society] have all kinds of excuses as to why we are not able to it. And, I tried fighting for my dream, but I have been cautioned to be careful about doing so. I have accepted that even though I feel very strongly about it. I don't think it's fair that hearing people have the opportunity to advance their education and become teachers and we're not given that opportunity.

Nicole's admissions echoed Samuel's narrative with striking similarity. Samuel, a 20-something Deaf male, who, in our interview, wore a T-Shirt with the words "Deaf Can" imprinted on its frontside. Naturally, I asked Samuel to explain the significance of his shirt:

My first experience with going to school, I experienced persons saying, 'I can't.' And I said, 'but I can.' So anyway, I went to Kingston and there I saw an idea for a small shop. So, I got together with a team of other Deaf people and we set up the 'Deaf Can' coffee shop and so we managed it. We want to advertise more publicity about Deaf businesses.

Deaf political agency is always truncated under the audist blade. The *telos* of the audist contract is Deaf erasure; its slogan, *I can't*, reifies the political manifesto of phono-philosophical anthropology. Ultimately, *I can't* abbreviate the audist norm: *I can't speak*. For the audist contract delimits possibilities for those who are labelled *deaf*. The audist project depoliticizes Deaf subjects merely because their political speech pierces the mantle of phonocentric normativity. The lived, Deaf experiences of Nicole and Sam, and the presumption of incapacity that accompany them, make clear Euromodernity's undertone.

The paternalism that undergirds our modern and contemporary undertone sees Deaf collective interests as that which need hearing guardianship. During the 1930s, Jamaica criminalized Deaf citizens operating motor vehicles. During this national discussion, a hearing person offered a response in March of 1938 within the pages of the *Daily Gleaner*, Jamaica's oldest newspaper; in it, the author opined thusly:

I should like to say also that I entirely approve of the new rule which lays it down that no man suffering from 'total deafness' shall be allowed a license to drive. In fact I regard it as a piece of effrontery on the part of any totally deaf person to go the Licensing Authority to get a license...I suspect that when any totally deaf person has hitherto applied for a license—of any human being totally deaf in Jamaica has ever done so—I suspect, I say, that he has not been granted one. Nevertheless he now knows that at any rate it is useless for him to make application.

The above discussion makes it clear that an assertion of Deaf rights is conceived as “Deaf effrontery.” For Deaf political actors are, *tout court*, violative of principle of public appearance. Deafness within the constraints of the public imagination—indeed, the public square—must know its place as existing outside its margins. It is a liminal space of alterity, always standing outside normative political life and movements toward its inclusion raises the armed response of hearing balkanization, where the hardening of lines of political separation becomes manifestly enacted. Such an enactment is realized through the juridical instruments that serve as strictures against public engagement and broadly, political speech.

Beginning in the 1980s, Deaf advocacy began on the issue of granting driving licensure. It took seventy-five years before conditional driving licensing was granted, since initially prohibited in 1930. But the instruments required for conditional driving was difficult to procure for the vast majority of Deaf people and so, many were still outlawed on the nation’s roads. 2010 became a banner year, as Deaf licensing was unqualifiedly offered. During this time of Deaf advocacy, moments before victory, *The Gleaner* reported the following:

25-year-old Kamar Groves, who said he learned to drive at 15, spoke of frustrations encountered at the [driving] examination depot. ‘We are human. If you block the deaf from driving, it is more like discrimination for us,’ said Groves, who recently sought information from the Island Traffic Authority (ITA)—the body responsible for issuing licences.

Kamar’s appeal to humanism instantiates Deaf political speech as it demands inclusion and participation in public life. Yet, the protest of “we are human,” an invocation of Deaf capability, evidences this “Deaf Can” epistemology. It is instructive here that the Old English derivative of the word *can* translates to *cunnan*, meaning “know, have power to, be able”. This word

etymological root has broad linguistic connection to the Germanic *Kunnan*, as well as the Old Norse *Kenna*, all respectively denotive of “to be mentally able, to have learned... to know, make known.” Invariably, *Deaf Can* as an epistemological practice marries knowledge with (cap)ability—birthing action. Deaf political speech is rooted in praxis, in the ability to *make known*, to disclose that which has been privatized and silenced. *Deaf Can* is an act of refusal; it is a movement of resistance. It seeks to inform, to change the audist script of incapacity and a denial of its conscription of Deaf masses into cradles of dependency and guardianship. On the other hand, its obverse proves no less revolutionary, as *Deaf Can* is not merely reactive to the constrains of audism but it is equally, if not moreso, proactive. It is political speech in direction of constructing Deaf subjectivity as visually articulated by the Deaf community. In a word, it is the Deaf speaking to herself. At this juncture, political speech is projected interiorly, as an inward turn that occasions internal monologue.

It is apparent too that *Deaf Can* is transnational and correspondingly begets transcultural appeal. It is not just a movement within the Deaf-Caribbean precincts. As I interview both Black and white Deaf subjects in Hartford, Connecticut I found a continuity in thought and similarity of ideas on this account. For example, Jennifer identifies as a white Deaf woman. When asked to explain the *Deaf Can* philosophy, she argued: “Some [hearing] people tell the Deaf they ‘can’t’ but it it’s often good people, who want to help—or what we call ‘save the deaf,’ which is an old term that we use. It means they think that the Deaf person can’t take care of themselves. They can’t write; they are illiterate. They are equivalent to someone with a developmental, intellectual disability.” Indeed, to “save the deaf” from themselves understands deafness both as a threat to its own existence and the existence of others. *Save The Deaf Syndrome* is akin, in many respects, to the *White Savior Syndrome* wherein the black is always in a dependent relation with the white. In

such a scenario, the object-subject relation denigrates, as the black permanently occupies the object-relation. Her subjective standpoint decomposes leaving only the white, active perspective. The *Save the Deaf Syndrome* so too implodes Deaf subjectivity, where its relation to her hearing other is always objectified. It is, as Jennifer acknowledges, executed via the death fang of generosity.

The Happy Slave finds black “joy” in his white enslavement; the Saved Deaf finds “safety” in his hearing guardianship. It is a certain death of self through misconstrued affect. Fabian expands on Jennifer’s insights. Fabian is a young, black Deaf person. When asked to give an account of “Deaf Can,” he catalogues the following:

Deaf people say ‘Deaf Can’ because for many, many years hearing people heavily oppressed Deaf people; they say, ‘You can’t work; you can’t do this; you can’t do that; can’t! can’t! can’t!’ A lot of Deaf people have skills. We have mechanics, sewing, teachers. Lots of skills and I see some Deaf people working for the government. For example, my mom, she works for the government. She is Deaf. She can do it. We have a lot of capabilities. I don’t see what is stopping us. We want to inform people, we can work just like you can. We can do the same jobs you can. We have legs and we have arms, a body. There is only one part—our ear—we just can’t hear. But we can still do all that stuff and that’s why we say we CAN, except hear. One time, I went to a grocery store. I wanted to get a job. A stock clerk job and they said, ‘You are Deaf! And you want to work? How CAN you hear?’ I was shocked! I could write on a paper. I can write. I can read. But that’s the worst one. It’s audism.

What is immediately revelatory about Fabian's account is the connective shift he identifies and locates between *Deaf Can't* paternalism and the violence of an audist ontology. Here, audism suspends Fabian's livelihood, thwarts his survival and negates his personhood. It is a world of destruction; both the externality and internality of decay and dissolution is the audist standard. The only mode of survival in his employer's world is to be that which he is not: hearing. It is Sisyphean in scope—unreachable, perpetually futile. Yet, such are the terms of political articulation. *Deaf Can* epistemology reorients the conditions of political speech. It contests the given categories; it abnormalizes normality (through an insistence upon political speech and its listening). For audism situates itself as a given and consented reality. Its mendacity lies not in its normativity, for it is normative, as a matter of fact. Rather, it readily demonstrates the arrant falsity that audist normativity is a weal—it is a boon to the constitution of Deafness; it “saves” the Deaf. The *Deaf Can* episteme actualizes that which is known and as a result, materialize and leverage political goods via Deaf praxis—Deaf politics proper—to undo the shackled arms of imposed speechlessness. *Deaf Can* voices Deaf freedom.

Chapter 8

“Deafinitely” Decolonial

The question of decolonial politics points to power nodes of coloniality. The Deaf world, as limned by the accounts of Deaf people, resists the imposition of audism. Deaf praxis, in this sense, is one anchored in agonal struggle and disavowal. The Deaf world is not merely a reconstruction of itself, but rather, in its turn toward humanism—an account of the human being such that (s)he is relational, ethical and liberated—it reconstructs the normative ideal for *being* human. Audism lodges itself within the crevices of social and political normative practices. Frantz Fanon understands the process of decolonial to be that which “infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and new humanity” (Fanon, 2004: 02). This *new language* brings to the fore, a new humanity. Sign Language displaces the dominant linguistic frame that understands speech as that which is entirely limited to phonocentrism. For this new language, as Fanon describes, can only resonates and sediments itself within a new human—one who rejects the Manichean divide in favor of a humanistic ethos that treats politics as a domain for equitable participation and freed existential expression. It is in fidelity to this principle that Owen Wrigley comments, “a visually linguistic modality . . . [that] threaten[s][existing] crucial anchors of language and social meaning” (1996: 85). This social meaning disrupts the Manicheanism of oppressor and oppressed or, as the case may be: deaf and hearing and as a result, replaces such fractured sociality with one built by intersubjective practices, creating possibilities for liberated futures.

Marcus, an African American Deaf man in his mid-twenties, explains he was deaf at birth. He, like many Deaf people, was born Deaf. For Marcus, Deafness was not alterity—it was a world foreign only to those who did not share in it. When asked to reflect on his experience with audist

practices, he explained: “One time I went to a grocery store trying to get a job. A stock clerk job. And they [the hearing managers] said: ‘you’re Deaf! And, you want to work? How can you hear if someone wants help?’ I was shocked. I can write on a paper. I can write. I can read. That’s audism.” Marcus’ experience reveals externally-imposed cycles of woundedness and moreover, it exposes the paternalism that often attends the inner-linings of coloniality. Here, Marcus was classically positioned to justify his own existence to partake in economies of self-preservation. He, in other words, had to justify Deafness in a hearing world, while at the time, recognizing that such foreclosure preceded the very justification. Marcus, despite any justification, still could not appear as a Deaf subject in a hearing space. Political speech was denied to Marcus because he could not *hear* it.

Wrigley sets into motion, the situatedness of audist discourses around speech and their atrophying effect on Deaf existence, “We (a dominant unnamed ‘we’ of a hearing normative frame) learn to perceive speech—and its congenital root, hearing—as synonymous with language; we then diligently eradicate contrary evidence and those might bear it” (1996: 74). Colonialism is process of violent elimination. Wrigley gives credence to this outlook as he compares the medicalization of deafness as a precursor to the pathologizing of its culturally formative self, that is: “capital D” Deafness. Yet, critical to this discussion is the centrality of political speech for the Deaf. Sign language occasions the particularization of political speech such that it manifests as uniquely Deaf political speech. I submit, then, that the march toward decolonizing Deaf spaces begins with a linguistic emancipatory modality. This linguistic emancipatory modality is understood not only through the instrument of language in and of itself, but also through its signification and consequently, the expression of Deafness as identity-laden, or what existentialists names *being-in-the-world*. We witness this within Marcus’ discourse about himself, “First of all,

I am very proud to be Deaf. But society sees you, on the outside, you are walking into a place, they see you as black. Now, if I sign, now you're Deaf—not Black! But, if a Deaf community gets together, we are all Deaf—period!” [*Emphasis mine*]. Marcus brings to the fore, this intersection of race (specifically, blackness) and deafness. This ethno-audism that Marcus identifies, evinces the imposition of colonialism at two radical ends: race and hearing status. For Marcus, his Deafness in public spaces supervenes over and above his Blackness. In other words, even if his Blackness were to give him a political voice, his Deafness would nevertheless suspend it. As Marcus' experience makes plain, political speech decolonized is multi-directionally situated, as it accounts not only for a singular colonization (a freed Deafness *or* a freed Blackness) but also one that cauterizes all colonized epistemes.

Sign language *qua* political speech threatens and dissembles normative, hegemonic registers. It reformulates linguistic registers to make valuable political purchases as it concerns appearance and participation in the *polis*. The Deaf person insists on speaking and through that insistence, using sign language, registers political legitimacy. What results necessarily is a Deaf humanism. Marcus' announcement that he is “very proud to be Deaf” remedies what Frantz Fanon dubs existential dislocation. He does not hear himself as a hearing person in deaf body, rather he *sees* himself as Deaf person in a hearing world. This latter understanding begins to shift and forge for himself, a Deaf world where sign language, as political speech, engenders Deaf futures. Political speech reconceptualized, transforms the colonial situation into a decolonial one.

Having examined the question of the imposed colonization of Deafness—that is, the Manicheanism of deaf against hearing, broken against whole, bad against good—I will now shift focus to decolonizing Anglo-Deaf speech in and of itself. Marcus' experience certainly raises the issue of Deaf speech in a hearing world, however, in what follows, Wyatt, a Black Deaf man, raises

the question of (racialized) deaf speech in a Deaf world. Wyatt is 50-something man who originally hails from Nigeria and holds a doctorate in education. He immigrated to the United States in his teenage years and subsequently, enrolled in the nation's most renowned Deaf academy, Gallaudet University. During his time at Gallaudet, and the many years following, Wyatt acutely understands his positionality as both Black and Deaf. In our face-to-face interview, I asked Wyatt how identifies: Black or Deaf first, or alternatively, if he is both Deaf *and* Black foremost. Wyatt responds thusly:

Based on everything I've seen in this country. I cannot say I am Deaf first. Because in the Deaf world, I am not accepted. But within the African Deaf world, I am. In the African Deaf World, I talk, I sign, I am me. They allow me to be who I am. They accepted me. They show me that they are my brothers and sisters, we are a multi-black [Deaf] African world. I get more respect, more welcome, more recognition as a human being. But when I am among Deaf whites, I am relegated to the corner. For instance, at Gallaudet I joined a fraternity. Three of us who are Black joined a white fraternity. I didn't have one [white] friend from the fraternity and you say I am your brother? How can I say I am Deaf first? You asked me to join [the fraternity], I joined. And then, because I am a Black Deaf, you pushed me aside. That's not brotherhood. I cannot say I am Deaf first when I am not accepted in the general white Deaf World.

Wyatt's blistering response situates him and other Blacks in what he considers to be a rigidly white Deaf world. Jennifer, a white 50-something woman, responds markedly different from Wyatt. When asked about Black-white Deaf relations, she observed: "Deaf people don't see Black color. We see people as people. We see Deafness first, not color. I think hearing Blacks help

us, because they see us as minority like themselves. So minorities tend to help each other.” This disjuncture between Wyatt and Jennifer, a disjuncture of positionality, of lived experiences and of sensibilities, perhaps stands as a microcosm of the Black Deaf and white Deaf divide. Jennifer, a white Deaf woman, sees her Deafness as an uncontested unifying force among all Deaf people, without regard to race. Wyatt, contrastingly, understands his Blackness as precluding and refuting this faux universalism that Jennifer (and other white Deaf people) espouses. Wyatt’s critique of this universalizing Deaf world that sees and therefore, “hears” all voices betrays the actuality of Black Deaf praxis. For Wyatt the Deaf world becomes, ironically, deaf (to Black Deaf political speech). Here, Wyatt reveals that political speech must undergo internal decolonization before it can be an agent of external liberation.

Revealingly, Wyatt’s account indicates it is not that he necessarily chooses to be “Black first,” rather, as his response makes clear, it is a “choice” that has been given him. While Jennifer chooses, as an active expression of agency, to be Deaf first, Wyatt is forced to be black and only black. In this sense, his Blackness devolves into blackness, a pathology—a reduction of his ontology into a singular somatic reality. Wyatt, consequently, is rendered speechless within the Deaf world itself. In chapter 2, I identified this malady, loosely, as *color-deafness* (juxtaposed to color-blindness)—to be deaf to cries of racial consciousness. In speaking more about this racialized Deaf divide, Wyatt asserts:

I still believe that Gallaudet is more a white world, to me as a Black Deaf man, than more of a Deaf world. Okay, Gallaudet is the center of Deaf World. I applied to a job at Gallaudet. I didn’t get it. I knew that if I were white, I wouldn’t need to apply; I would have gotten it. How can I say I belong to *your* world when I am not accepted? ...From what I have observed, I would say Black (hearing/Deaf)

community share the same experience of being in a white world. For us, we share our deafness with the white Deaf. But for the Black community, we have nothing in community with the whites. I like whites. I have many white friends. But we need to understand there are many things we don't share. I go to work with whites, but after that we all go home. How many of these Deaf whites ever asked me to join them for a beer? How many? How many of them ever asked to come visit me? How many asks me how my family is doing? But we spend eight hours every day in the same place!

This conception of Deaf worlds as artificial white worlds for Black Deaf people is hardly new. A Deaf world, he says, listens by seeing him as Deaf. Instead, such a world silences by seeing him as black. For this reason, in this whitened Deaf world, the facticity of his deafness ceases to be an ontological reality, or a social identity, rather it manifests as a vexed, if not discounted, marker of shared personhood. Through Wyatt's given censures and basic denials in white Deaf spaces, what remains is a Deaf community that acculturates whiteness. In fact, Wyatt contends the white Deaf world envisions itself as more white than Deaf and for this reason, the Black Deaf stands in greater solidarity with his Black hearing fellows. To be sure, Wyatt's disclosure about Black (Deaf) rejections in a white (Deaf) world raises a basic yet fundamental question: how are socio-economic conditions, particularly, job discrimination, a political question? More to the issue, how is economic materialism, or more pointedly, its strangulation, a denial of political speech? A short rejoinder is as follows. I have discussed earlier in this chapter, the social organically invokes the intersubjective. The social is a world of human relations. Embedded within the social is the political. The political, defined here, is actional—it is a doing. Yet, it is also a directed doing, an actional framing that affects (and possibly, transforms) human relations. Therefore, economic

questions, under this metric, are intrinsically political ones. Economic denials affect the viability of Black or Deaf worlds, their material conditions and broadly, their political futures. This insight, of course, is a clear departure from the Arendtian model that demands a surgical incision dividing the social and political as separately autonomous. It follows, then, that Wyatt's economic life necessarily speaks to his political life. By foreclosing economic expressions, one has stymied its political accent. Ultimately, political speech is denied and what results is a certain speechlessness.

The period of European exploration and conquest of the New World ushers in the modern period. Modernity, by other definitions, is the era of enlightenment, industry and revolution. Modernity raises fundamental questions (and problems) about the value and meaning of the human being. Given the centrality of slavery, the Atlantic slave trade, ethno-genocide, and (neo)colonialism, race has come to define the modern and contemporary imagination. Race was and is the fodder of Euromodernity's appetite. Euromodernity signifies the crisis of morality and poverty of epistemology through, though not limited by, rank racialization. Euromodernity, of course, is not condemned to a historical period. As such, it remains, by any measure, a hegemonic attitude. Euromodernity's undertone, situates political speech as an enterprise of equal accessibility without regard to race, class, or other social identifies. Yet, Euromodernity's undertone is eminently hegemonic. Its racialized speech masquerades as universalism and so, in its mendacity, it denies its apparatus of silencing and speechlessness. And so, its undertone is one of false parity. This project advocates a movement from Euromodernity's undertone, where the political speech of the colonized are suppressed, to a transmodern tone—one that is wholly relational, an embodied meeting of minds and wills, where existential articulations are heard and political futures are birthed and sustained. The transmodern tone tends toward a Rousseauian generality, an actualization of the common good. It becomes decolonial because it transforms the colonial

context and creates, as a consequence, freedom. The imposed speechlessness on Deaf subjects through audist regimes, as explored earlier, is a pre-modern phenomenon, evidenced by early Aristotelian discourse. Yet, the racialization of Black Deaf bodies by white Deaf spaces raises a distinctively modern and contemporary problem. As such, Deaf speech, *in toto*, must be decolonized within—among the Deaf—for political speech to emerge for Black Deaf people not only in hearing precincts but also Deaf ones. This requires, at its core, a relational ethos—a reimagining and a reconceptualizing of what it means to engage in political speech and the humanity expressed therein.

Part V
Political Action

Chapter 9

Depoliticized Political Actors and Euromodernity's Faux Universalism

*The first language of man,
the most universal and most
energetic of all languages, in
short, the only language he
needed, before there was a
necessity of persuading
assembled multitudes, was
the cry of nature.*
— **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**

The epigraph expresses the primordial position of language, as it contours and constructs the socio-political situation of humanness. In it, Rousseau argues that sentiment, the ability to feel and express pity, stands as a universal signifier, one that binds, to the extent it would, the loose appendages of the human constitution. Yet, perhaps most strikingly, what Rousseau posits is that a communicative condition defines a human condition. That, regardless of its affective purchase, as it is the case for Rousseau (and different for other thinkers), to be human is to express a condition of that humanness. An expression of that human condition is never singular but always tending toward the plural, to another—to the other. Inherent in such communicative practices is an intersubjective *telos*. In this project, I have argued that such is the nature of speech. It, akin to (and in many respects, dissimilar from) Rousseau's cry of nature, is a language of expressive political negotiation of one's (pre)given position within the social world. It becomes a contending with our historically-contingent selves. Admittedly, Rousseau's cry of nature was the pre-political speech of the pre-social man. Yet, even in such a state, the cry *could* communicate to another elements of one's experience. Though not a perfect parallel, political speech is an articulation of and about our situatedness in the world of politics. Indeed, political speech, as I have argued, expresses not

merely a rhetorical or linguistic movement, a congealing of speech as merely what is spoken (or written, for that matter). It gestures toward more—an existential movement, one that accounts for a building of a political world and a remaking of socio-political values. Because it is an existential articulation, it means speech is actional as it is discursive. Political speech is communicative negotiation of ethical, social, and political norms. The making and remaking of those norms constitute the principal position for imagining a future world. But who may be regarded as political agents to enact political speech? In what follows, I offer a discussion of the de-politicization of political actors and thus, the generating of the conditions for imposed speechlessness.

Depoliticized Actors

Privatizing political speech represents a disinvestment in the futurity of those denied its fruits. And so, a distinctively political problem arises when political speech becomes closed and hegemonized as it is curtailed, captured, and entrapped within the vernacular of oppressive power. This realization is understood under two rubrics: the first, political speech becomes accessible to an exclusive group and the second, its expression and its modality are narrowed to exclude other legitimate modes. In the first, political speech sheds its generality, it becomes de-generalized. On explicating the essence of general will, Rousseau asserts, “As long as a certain number of men consider themselves to be a single body, they have but one will, which relates to the common security and to the general welfare” (2002: 227). Political speech becomes isolated and quarantined; it is secluded from the common interest of the people—it stands as expressing and privileging the will of a few. Such an isolation validates listening to some people while silencing others. Here, private interests now adjudicate all affairs. In this sense, political speech is denied to some by being unheard. I argued this denial becomes applicable to many groups but my focus here lies primarily with two: Black and Deaf communities. Through this de-generality, of displacing

public interests with private ones, political speech becomes depoliticized. The process of depoliticization occurs along two fronts: manufacturing apolitical subjects, subjects deemed outside the political because they are concretely understood as sub-human and fashioning anti-political subjects, subjects deemed antagonistic to politics proper and therefore dehumanized, devolved as either animality or entity (thingification), or both. In the first category lies Deaf subjects, who, by being denied political speech, are said to be apolitical. This denial is effectuated through pathologization of Deaf bodies. Deafness, in turn, is intended to be scoured and stripped of its politicality and what reputedly results is mere “deafness,” a defective, medicalized reductionism—a deviation from normal hearing bodies. This is evidenced through the valorized hegemonic, phonocentric precepts espoused by the likes of Alexander Graham Bell, Hobbes, Aristotle and others.

Adam Cohen explicates historical pathologization of deafness: “[Alexander Graham] Bell, who was the son of one deaf woman and the husband of another, was studying eugenic solutions to the problem of deafness. In a paper presented to the National Academy of Sciences, ‘Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race,’ he expressed his fear that if the deaf reproduced unchecked they would produce a ‘defective race of human beings’ that would be a ‘great calamity to the world’” (Cohen, 2017: 111). Political defectivity then became the basis for denial. If such subjects were not full-fledged human beings, their capacity to engage in politics became, as it were, handicapped. Indeed, to “engage” politics meant that deaf people had to be hearing and equally, phonocentric. This phonocentrizing of the political precluded those outside the phonopolitical world.

The Black subject is similarly situated. Her category was explained by its supposed defectivity. The black became defective in a white world. Like the deaf subject, the black body

became the center of Western pathologizing. But, unlike the deaf subject, such a pathologizing of the black body, an epidermalizing of black existence, blackness stood, in a surgically defined Manicheanism, as black infirmity to salutary white existence. This infirmity had to be excised as its presence was found cancerous to the Euro body politic. In this sense, blackness was weaponized as antagonistic to the project of politics; black existence was viewed as warfare against Euro-civilization, or more properly, civilization, writ large. Black inclusion, and by extension, black agency stood as socio-political terror. It became excluded from the public—a domain of existence wherein political contestation could occur, changing the nodes of power and recalibrating the engines of political society. It was actively excluded from the public, which required problematizing Black speech by framing it as unintelligible, as departing from the domain of reason itself; but also, it was framed as ahistorical, without historical precedent and therefore of no discernible contemporary value. These traits, understood collectively, framed black political speech as deleterious to the (white) public imagination and consciousness.

Defective—but not physiologically deformed—subjects, black people, had to be curtailed and sometimes, violently removed. “If a man asserts that another man, because of his race, is not good enough to have a job equal to his, or to eat a lunch counter next to him, or to have access to certain hotels, or to attend school with him, or to live next door to him, he is by implication affirming that that man does not deserve to exist. He does not deserve to exist because his existence is corrupt and defective” (MLK, 2010: 74). Surely, if whiteness’ *raison d’etre* avows, as MLK suggests, that Blacks do “not deserve to exist” because of his “defective” color, such a manifesto is one of racial genocide: the elimination of Black people—not merely their curing or salvaging because, they are, in anti-black logic, an incurable lot. Black politics is treated as anti-politics. Black subjects, then, are understood as anti-political.

Political speech, in this anti-black world, is enslaved by a racial logic. Political speech becomes racialized; it transmogrifies as whiteness. Blacks are denied political speech because of their incapacity to engaged a whitened politics as the register of Black speech is irreconcilable with white supremacy. I contend processes of ensuring black speechlessness are rooted in Euromodernity: The Occidental racialization of modern and contemporary existence, particularly on the question of knowledge. Euromoderntiy represents a decadent attitude to intersubjective living, within this, a rank refusal to listen. Therefore, the existence of Black and Deaf communities and their reduction to speechless subjects, subjects denied political speech via its capitulation to an anti-human hegemonic ethos, implicates (and assails) the enterprise of politics. This raises questions about political subjectivity: Who may be legitimately deemed a political actor? And, what political valence emerges from such a category? What's its political purchase, or more simply, why should we care?

I have thus argued that politics dictates the contours of the human. If political subjectivity, one acting as a political agent and appears as such, is fashioned along very particularistic lines (of either the phono or the Euro), then only a phonocentric subject can appear in a phono-political world; likewise, only a Eurocentric subject can appear in a Euro-political world—creating both apolitical and anti-political signifiers. The ultimate implication, then, is a politics that is closed to manifold intersubjective relations. Such a closure amounts to the asphyxiation of political discourse, where humanistic space constricts, tightens even, perpetually narrowing itself to complete dissolution. Politics, in such a scenario, becomes despoiled, stripped of its relationality, and what engenders, consequentially, is a form of de-politics. Depoliticized political actors, both in the case of Black (and white) and Deaf (and hearing) subjects—as the denial of political speech

undoes its enslavers in the end—means the polity, the public space of political engagement, stands in precarity: of a (certain) uncertain existence.

These processes of foreclosure, rituals of denials, and modes of silencing manifest as the colonizing of political speech under and through a particular oppressive epistemological attitude. Indeed, what does it mean to make knowledge subservient to racializing interests, so much so that existential articulations are arrested? To arrest, I have argued, is a necessarily violent process because it seeks to subjugate that which is inherent: political speech. Here is Fanon, in *Alienation and Freedom*, “The colonized people are presented ideologically as a people arrested in their evolution, impervious to reason, incapable of directing their own affairs, requiring the permanent presence of an external ruling power” (Fanon, 2018: 654). Certainly, if we understand political speech as a formulation of a possible future, its denial, in Fanonian terms, amounts to an arrested evolution—a devolution of intersubjective relations, a devolution of Black and Deaf worlds. For these reasons, I have argued that political speech so utilized has been cast under the spell of coloniality and what manifests is the coloniality of political speech. The coloniality of political speech is a violent process of denial; it is a muzzling of existential registers. It mechanizes existence, one where an external power decides its projected future and recorded past. In the Deaf world, the coloniality of political speech is manifested through the historically brutal institution of oralism, whereby the fingers of the Deaf were sometimes beaten into hearing compliance: do not use sign language. Albert Ballin, a Deaf writer who wrote in 1930, his iconic release, *The Deaf Mute Howls*, described the oralist justification as such (Ballin, 1998: 26):

The pure oralists are those so-called experts who claim that all the deaf children can be taught to articulate correctly and speak good English, *without the aid of the sign language*. It is their pet theory that the sign language is a handicap to the deaf

child...Oralists in their efforts to suppress the use of signs practically bind the arms of the child, thereby gagging it, so it may not express itself naturally.

This binding, a gagging, is a common trope of coloniality's arresting *raison d'être*. Such an arrest, a bind, a gag, is executed through force and results in violence—violence to and violence against bodies, ontologies and a certain *persona non grata* existence. The coloniality of political speech is an undue imposition, “to articulate correctly” Deaf worlds through hearing registers. It assumes an advanced state of being, one that teaches the lesser form (of being human), how to be (human). “Oralism further implies a strict and rigid rejection of any use of sign language. Thus oralism is as much an ideology as it is a method, and one with a distinct teleology” (Wrigley 1996: 16). A teleology in service to the phono.

It is precisely these reasons that led to the imposed speechlessness of Blacks. The contemporary world is constantly aghast by the reoccurring sights of Black silencing. Whether the 2014 Ferguson Uprising, where Black protestations of state and carceral violence against Black communities were met with the jackboots of state oppression; the strongman tactics of the National Guard to the 1989 Virginia Beach protests; or, the penalizing fist of imperial capitalism against Black athletes' protestive kneeling on sports fields, Black political speech has historically been met by the imposed state of Black speechlessness. Fanon diagnosed the socio-genetic makeup of colonialism, one with a pulsating vein of (and for) violence, “The colonial regime is a regime instituted by violence It is always by force that the colonial regime is established. It is against the will of the people that other peoples are more advanced” (Fanon, 2018: 654). Because the coloniality of political speech induces speechlessness, such an inducement is fostered and achieved through a violent rending of lives and wills. Within this colonized milieu, whiteness speaks for (not with) blackness, hearingness for (not with) Deafness. It dictates the possibility of black

existence. As I have posited, the coloniality of political speech is a directedness of wills, an imposed declaration of ontological limits and heights: I am what you contend me to be. And so, the axis of power gravitates around this singular contention.

Faux Universalism

The coloniality of political speech operates under the auspices of Euromodernity. To be sure, deafness and its exclusion predates the Euromodern epoch. Yet, Euromodernity perpetuated and sustained the audist practices of antiquity. Hobbes, for example, writing within the Euromodern epoch, contended that Deaf people are non-rational beings because they cannot engage in appellation—the act of naming, which is a characteristically rational faculty. Hobbes argued the Deaf cannot name because they are without words. Audism found refuge and purchase within the normative strictures of Euromodernity. Lewis Gordon describes Euromodernity along these lines of argumentation (L. Gordon, 2018: 335):

Race, as its philosophical anthropology, made Europeans white and modern into European. The result was *Euromodernity*. Euromodernity demands more than kinds of customs, laws, and languages to belong to the future; it also avers kinds of *people*. This mark of Euromodernity meant, as Fanon also observed, a single edict to a newly formed set of conquered and colonized peoples: become white. In effect, this meant that such groups were to disappear, which also meant an eliminated future and, as a consequence, an illegitimate present.

Race centers and directs the Euromodern compass. The *telos* of anti-black racism is the diminution of blackness as a lesser form of race, one not quite fully human, subhuman or dehuman. Its “corrective” is a Eurocentrism of an avowed enlightenment. It is both the westernization of

reason and the rationalization of the West. Yet, as Gordon indicates, its *sine qua non* is the elimination of a Black future. I contended the coloniality of political speech enacts that disappearance by aborting pregnant moments of Black political speech. If one cannot *do* (labor, or act), how can she hope to imagine, or even more concretely, how can she build? Euromodernity's undertone encompasses both an attitude of eviscerated futures in Black and Deaf directions. For the Deaf, the undertone, *i.e.* the attitude, is pre-Euromodern, for the Black it is Euromodern.

Sylvia Wynter offers a critique of the emergence of African American Studies as an exemplification of the liberal ideal, one whose directed impulse was a supposed universal appeal, when in reality it substituted black particularism with the more palatable, but less radically altering, liberal universalism (Wynter, 2006: 108):

Black Arts and Black Aesthetic Movements...like Black Studies as a whole, were to find their original transgressive intentions defused, their energies rechanneled as they came to be defined (and in many cases, actively to define themselves so) in new 'multicultural terms' as African-American Studies; as such, this field appeared as but one of the many diverse 'Ethnic Studies' that now served to re-verify the very thesis of Liberal universalism against which the challenges of all three movements had been directed in the first place.

In a similar vein, I argued that a faux universalism attends Euromodernity's movements. These movements contend that all are heard (and allowed to be) with equal measure. These universalist appeals ornament the public domain. They become lodged within the sinews of the juridical: Equal justice under law, touts the Supreme Court; the famed factoid of "rule of law" affords institutional legitimacy by marketing equal treatment as commodity purchased by all and sundry. Against this backdrop of Liberal universalism, Black political speech, in its radical origins,

is framed as disruptive, uncivil and undemocratic. The politics of respectability manifests. And so, state resistance—in its bid to maintain law and order—legitimizes Euromodernity’s shielded violence, wherein its imposed Afro-speechlessness is repackaged as exaggerated, racial hullabaloo, one without a scintilla of truth and one “propagated” by the radical left. This, in effect, becomes a cloaking of Black and Deaf deprivation as social normalcy and therefore, such deprivations become desensitized in the public imagination. There is an overrepresentation of Euromodernity’s manifesto as universal. Yet, as the existential reality of Black and Deaf bears witness, such subjects routinely fall outside its universalist parameters. Euromodernity’s hushed movements, its *undertone*, is an attempt at falsification; it is a project of concealment.

I have argued, as a consequence, in lieu of Euromodernity’s undertone, a transmodern tone must be resituated as the normative anchor for human relations. Transmodern tone because it goes beyond (Euro)modernity. It is a transcendental movement forward—toward new horizons. It is a renewed and repositioned orientation, a resituatedness of self and other. Euromodernity begins with situating the self *within*—within the universal, within the limits of the social contract, within Euro-American rationality. Indeed, as Lewis Gordon mentions, Euromodernity positions itself as white and therefore, within the bounds of civilization and within the spatio-temporal domains of the future. Transmodernity tectonically shifts this paradigm, realigns and relocates boundaries through necessary disruption. Transmodernity becomes, then, not located within, but rather *outside*. It pluralizes the universal and births, instead, a pluriverse of possible positionalities. Pluriversalism becomes its anchor. By situating itself as being outside, it is constantly contesting borders, boundaries and barriers, including its own. The outside never congeals; it is ever pulling, stretching and remaking.

The implications of a progression into transmodernity are many. First, transmodernity requires what Maldonado-Torres (2007) dubs political and epistemic interventions. Such interventions reorient ways of living, of doing, of being. It is for these reasons, I have argued for a reconceptualization of speech beyond its more iconic sonorous and phonocentric definitional core. Agreeing with the Aristotelian premise that speech is foundational to the precinct of politics, speech—in its formulaic iteration—becomes understood as an audiblized essence, which, alas, allows for critical losses to politics. Those losses are liberatory, in nature (as exemplified by the lived experience of the Deaf). I argued for a movement beyond its more Greco-Roman origins, one that marries Africana praxis and epistemological claims in enriching political practice. African, particularly, from the Akan peoples, as well its original Greco-Roman formation, practiced speech as a relational act, one deeply steeped in actionality. Particularly for the Akan people, located in West Africa, speech was understood as *dwamu*, a public domain where socio-political issues were addressed, it was an arena of consensus, of debate, or dissent, broadly, of relational engagement. The *dwamu* held similar (though not identical) functions as the Greek *agora*. But both were sites of socio-political contestations, of vivified relational struggle. Speech, was, under these rubrics, reimagined as a meeting ground that allowed for subject-object appearance.

Speech reimagined, reconceptualized as a meeting, of wills and minds, allows for a new ethical disposition, one where human beings are *met* as human beings. For these reasons, truth sediments this enterprise of meeting, or relating. In this sense, speech understood as a way of situating one's self in the world, becomes not foreclosed to particularistic modalities of existential articulations, captive to one modality (say, the phonocentric) over and against another. Rather, a relational orientation to speech suspends decadent normative practices, as it allows for an

appearance (though not exclusively) of the queer, of the non-normative. It is here sign language, as Deaf political speech, manifests; Deaf culture and Deaf norms may germinate. Similarly, Black political speech, in all its diverse formulations, becomes articulable, claiming political spaces for the erection of Black worlds. Transmodernity stands as the ethical portal to enter such a world. On this score, transmodernity's pluriversalism inaugurates what Fanon once dubbed, a new humanism, exploding emaciated epistemes and proffering new, more humanistic ways of relating to self and other. Such a *modus operandi* is practiced not preached, lived not abstracted. For these reasons, its ethical root becomes a tone, stitched within the fabric of normalcy; it rejects liminality and embraces those living quotidian, outside lives.

Chapter 10

The Plurality of Political Speech

Political speech denotes the communicative means through which human beings engage themselves and others through partaking in the political world. It is expressly a revelatory project. It embodies norms of disclosure, a revelation of self and the world, through dialogic apparatuses. As such, it is immanently relational. Yet, political speech offers diversity of dimensions, ways of categorizing itself across multiple moments and movements. Take for instance, political speech at its primal base. While there are efforts to arrest political speech, to make some subjects speechless, as is the expressed rationale of Euromodernity's undertone, political speech is not entirely suppressed; it is not exhaustively denied. Nor is it necessarily always corrupt, hegemonized or colonized. Deaf political speech, speech among the Deaf and within Deaf lifeworlds, illuminates moments of political speech conforming to principles of liberatory intersubjectivity. In other words, the Deaf, generally, have *lived into* the politicized act of making other Deaf subjects heard. Deaf political speech within Deaf worlds is an instance of what I named petite political speech—political speech on a more particularistic, fractional dimension. To be sure, this does not suggest petite political speech is less than, or is of an anemic stature. It is only descriptive, localizing political speech, mapping its coordinates, within the ethno-domains of diverse communities: Black, Deaf, Latinx, *inter alia*. Petite political speech lends itself to the specificities of a particular, distinct social identity. It is the localization of these cultural specificities (race, gender, sexuality, etc.) that makes it less generalizable.

Petite political speech differentiates itself against its broader, intermixed, or collectivized (in the strictest sense) variant, what I have previously dubbed political speech *writ large*. On this more expanded ethno-sphere, global in many respects, intersubjectivity fractures, relationality solipsizes, as people engage the world as it is: uneven, unbalanced and unstable—it means norms vary in their liberatory or as it is, non-liberatory expressions. Political speech squarely collides against hegemonic attitudes, rendering it wholly captive to colonizing epistemes. It then dons the vestures of Euro-American imperialism and New World colonialism. Political speech *writ large* simply replicates a colonialist posture—it reifies as the coloniality of political speech.

At this juncture, it behooves clarification that petite political speech, properly understood, is not an attempt to romanticize or idealize localized quadrants of communicative acts. Black political speech hardly implies there exists no fractures or failures in the communicative process, that relational ethics never undergo periodic suspensions. No. Unquestionably, not all types of Black people, those occupying differentiated intersectional spaces, are heard. We inarguably witnessed this grim reality in chapter 4, where Deaf political speech (petite in its dimension) revealed cracks in its exterior. Many Black Deaf subjects were unheard within the Deaf world. For this reason, audism became insufficient to wholly diagnose processes of dehumanization. That is, Black Deaf subjects professed it was not merely on the condition of their blackness that peripheralized them to a liminal space, a space of expunged agency. It was a dual result of anti-black racism coupled with a hardened audism. In other words, Deaf political speech was, episodically, Eurocentric in its actualization and Black political speech was, more often than not, phonocentric in its translation. To locate the intersectional position of being both Black and Deaf, I argued that ethno-audism functioned in dual concert to render Black Deaf subjects speechless.

This notwithstanding, Black political speech and Deaf political speech signified transgressive acts, as sustained moments that evidence Black and Deaf subjects as speaking subjects. Sign language, a language with a visual vernacular, was performatively transgressive against a hegemonized phonocentrism. It problematized and destabilized the episteme of the phono as the “universal” orientation to communicative humanness. Sign language, a human register of embodied site and bodied sight, exploded conventional norms about “hearing”—for one had to see (Deaf) voice and not, in a literal sense, hear it. In a phenomenological move, one must suspend the natural attitude toward the notion of “voice” to allow for a demonstrable, evidentiary experience of what it truly is, or at least, could be. When considered phenomenologically, voice became imbued with an added dimension: visuality. The visual voice constituted and communicated Deaf existence. For these reasons, Deaf political speech embodied a radical act of transgressive expansion or enlarging of the category of speech. Similarly, Black political speech deracializes and denaturalizes “sight” as a colored phenomenon. The Black subject is unheard by being seen, her speech is eclipsed on the basis of her illicit appearance. Blacks had to transform the racialized ocular, a plane of somaticized hierarchization. “Racism makes productive use of *this look*, using learned visual cues to demarcate and organize human kinds” [emphasis mine] (Alcoff, 2006: 198). It is precisely the gaze, “this look” that racially stratifies personhood.

Many, Linda Alcoff most notably, have identified the perils of an engrained ocularcentrism: “A further danger of an ocularcentric epistemology follows from the fact that vision itself is all too often thought to operate as a solitary means to knowledge” (*ibid*). I have argued that Black political speech challenges an ocularcentric approach to politics by deconstructing and reconstructing *how* we see, and therefore, altering *what* we know. This approach does not espouse the failed scripts of racial eliminativism. Enacting black political

speech does not advance a color-blind sensibility, in fact it militates against it. Black political speech disarms Euromodern racialization, or more pointedly, it violently contests anti-black racism through transgression, intervention and rearticulation. The latter, especially, re-announces differentiated humanistic forms of political practice and participation. Concerning the former, Black political speech as transgressing Euromodern norms, I am underscoring one of the ways that anti-Blackness functions; that is, when Black people are seen as Black subjects, a closing off of the ears begins, unless the Black person enacts cues that distance or diminish the significance of their Blackness. Without doubt, in a world that polices and penalizes endemically Black protestations, their very existence stands as deviance and serves as resistance. This means that through racialized subjects, political speech is sometimes confronted through an embodied vernacular, for when one's mere physical presence is taken to "speak for itself," this creates an obstacle for others to intentionally listen to the content of one's words. In other concrete terms, African cosmological practices, an expression of Black lifeworlds, were routinely outlawed stretching from and to every colonially controlled (and enslaved) island within the Caribbean. Nevertheless, such rituals were religiously practiced and conjured in the shroud of night. Afro-cosmology aided Haitian revolutionism (Clinton: 2011). African cosmological practices hardly exhausted instances of Black political speech, linguistic practices too, *qua* creole, sometimes branded as "patois," stood as inconvertible truths (Gordon 2014). These templates were among the first existential articulations within the New World, imagining and building black futurity.

The political valence of petite political speech is important. Accordingly, a larger question looms, what of black political speech with a visual frame and deaf political speech with phonocentric influences? If ethno-audism verifies the existence of dehumanizing impulses bi-directionally, along lines of both Blackness and Deafness, it follows that these worlds must align

or, minimally, intersect as evidenced by the lived experience of those who are Afro-Deaf. I have argued that, for the Afro-Deaf subject, two distinct worlds converge. But such a convergence is not contrived nor artificially induced. Drawing on creolizing theory from Jane Anna Gordon, I contend that petite political speech presents itself as fecund ground for creolization, for illicit blending. Gordon summarizes creolization as explicating the sociability of lived experiences (J. Gordon, 2014: 177):

creolization has referred very explicitly to illicit blending or to those that contradicted and betrayed the project of forging a Manichean racial order in the heavily mixed, transnational movements that shaped the plantation societies of the New Worlds on both sides of the Atlantic...what is now termed *creolization* refers to instances of such symbolic creativity among communities that included those thought incapable of it.

This “symbolic creativity” proffers pregnant moments of unpredictable political intercourse, where worlds collide, birthing new wonders and generative ways of being. It is a process of renegotiating social existence, as political actors struggle with extant political realities enmeshed within colonized relations (Chevannes 2018). Processes of creolization are not deliberate or scripted but emerge organically from intermixing socio-political milieus emanating from the political force of intersubjectivized relations. I have postulated Black political speech, in the form of an African American hearing vernacular, and Deaf political speech, in the form of American Sign Language (ASL)—understood by some Afro-Deaf subjects as a Euro-racialized discourse—produces, nonetheless, a creolized variant: Black American Sign Language (BASL). Take for example, the word “trippin’” (denoting, irrational, over-aggerated behavior). This lexicon exists within non-Deaf/hearing African American vernacular, but does not constitute a word/sign

within ASL. However, *trippin'*, employed as a discursive rearticulation, exists within BASL, a creolization of Black and Deaf political speech. This notwithstanding, some within the mainstream ASL community, view BASL as an illegitimate, profane mixture of hearing and Deaf worlds; of Black and white worlds. But therein lies its promise: one of an expansive decipherability. Here, the creolizing of language reminds us of the forged, contingent and open nature of language development, if it is being used in contexts that are dynamic, changing and fluid. And so, by identifying its expansive decipherability, it is less that any one linguistic product is universally decipherable, it is that we are reminded of the made quality of language so that we can embrace a more constructive attitude toward language and speech. If we are actually committed to speaking with/hearing people, we are amenable to realizing that language can be a primarily visual medium and will want to hear language being used to advance different aims.

Creolizing political speech denotes the illicit blending of petite political speech from differentiated worlds. Progressively, creolizing political speech globalizes discourses by liberalizing, expanding petite political speech from its more localized, particularized sectors. It instantiates, as matter of political survival, Rousseauian generality. Rousseau explains, “the general will is always right and always tends to the public good” (2002: 172). The public good is the common good, the good of all. Its teleology gravitates toward the people’s general welfare. The political cosmos, if you will, consists of many existential worlds: Deaf, Black, queer, indigenous, gendered, among others and all of the combinations thereof. Petite political speech operates as particularized humanistic engagement. Within each world, there is a coherence of a more localized generality. Simply stated, petite political speech is the speech of general wills that are smaller than the society itself. Yet, the political world is not, at its core, entrapped in the stasis of division, bifurcation or compartmentalization (though some would attempt to make a project of

that). It is instead a plane of plural human relationality. Petite political speech only accounts for relations within, it is intra-related. Creolizing political speech stands as a multiplication of relational nodes, its telos shifts toward inter-relations. Creolization offers political speech a globalist signature, wherein intersubjectivity becomes its ethical mooring. There is a certain degree of legibility and comprehensibility that attend the project of creolizing political speech. In the end, creolizing political speech encompasses the fluidity of movements *among* multiple existential registers in negotiating the multi-layered terrains of our social world (Chevannes 2018). Thus, it liberates by opening once foreclosed facets of political life for the colonized.

Conclusion:

Liberation through Political Speech—Limits and Possibilities

Ultimately, throughout this project, I have raised the spectre of speech as a political problem, that is, rather than it being a means through which politics is undertaken, *a priori* commitments about who can participate determine who will be heard as speaking. Such speech is political precisely because it is a problem around and about power. Power to determine, or even problematically, power to overdetermine. This discussion theorizes from a primarily Aristotelian position: the indispensability of speech to politics. This is not to say that all that is political is necessarily speech. Consider, say, capital. The question of capital, in a Marxist sense, raises profound political questions. However, it is not my contention that capital functions as political speech and even if it does, my concern here orbits around the condition of the human being and her political existence. Moreover, orthodox conservative jurisprudence, within the American context, constitutionalizes certain expenditures—money in politics—as protected speech. At the outset, this project defined politics as a form of doing—an actional impressing upon—which effects human affairs. Its ability to “effect” invokes claims about power and its possession, distribution, and impact on the social world. Yet, in demarcating what is not political speech, I do not intend to exhaustively demarcate all that constitutes said speech, as doing so needlessly manufactures a vexed *a priori* condition. Suffice to say, the minimum threshold of political speech begins with an existential inquiry. It is, in part, a meditation about life and its living.

I have posited that political speech *writ large*, in its colonized variant, raises considerable problems. Part of what constitutes power is defining who will be able to play a significant role in

making consequential decisions. However, the powerful do not specify which classes of individuals can be heard but they draw on the physical features of these individuals to imagine who can belong. Those who can belong become those who share the physical features of those who have already been selected as possible decision-makers. In so doing, these become hegemonic. Political speech, correspondingly, advances critical inquiries into projects of freedom and unfreedom. Political speech functions as rituals of (re)negotiations, of situating one's self within the social world. It is the contesting, intervening, and shaping of pre-given, ready-made values (Simone de Beauvoir 1948). Yet, that intervention must begin with an assertion, or with a question: who am I? It is this questioning that closes the book of Fanon's *tour de force*, *Black Skin, White Masks*; there, he similarly contends: "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (2008: 181). To question—to assert—implicates a philosophical anthropology, and a critique of self, posed both as an interrogation of and declaration about lived experience. Decolonized political speech actualizes that interrogation and enacts rituals of renegotiation: in waking up, in showing up, in standing up, rising up, and in speaking up. It is an ideology about the up-ness of the human being, or what Rastafarianism regards as the philosophy of upliftment. This mobilizing ethic of *up-ness* was echoed by Caribbean pan-Africanist, Marcus Garvey when he exhorted: "Up you mighty race," meaning speak up. This critical uprising and raising of consciousness are the teleological threads of political speech proper. Its act of transgressive disruption and destabilization through situating the truth of lived experience, the evidentiary claim of Blackness' humanness and the veracity of Deafness' non-defectiveness, is violent. Violence, as Fanon observed, is a cleansing force, one aimed at purification through truthful discourse, truthful relations, and truthful living. Throughout this work, I have proposed that decolonized political speech is an articulation of critical consciousness. These existential articulations, then, serve as the

brick and mortar for building a political future once denied. Under these conditions of intersubjective relations, liberation becomes possible and political life remains an open site of ongoing contestation, where disputes are deliberated, carefully considered, and addressed.

This project is not without limitations. I have identified the question of political speech as engaged in or denied among individual and groups of human beings. This project situates the existential actions and phenomenological movements of the human being. It is the signification of self that has oriented its theoretical inquiry. Yet, the question of speaking does not limit itself, arguably, to an absolute anthropological pursuit. Indeed, the sociology of institutional bodies become similarly implicated. For example, what of social institutions or larger social bodies? Specifically, what of the state? To what extent does the state have the capacity to engage in political speech? How might the sociology of international relations alter, or render moot, the question of political speech? These questions sit outside the scope of this project, though they may be meaningful issues that lie at the heart of societal relations. What's more, even at the level of the anthropological, the classification and application of political speech to the human subject, what remains unaccounted for is the impact of systems of technologies in intermediating political speech. What is the role of a technologized speech within the political domain? How do we make sense of political speech in a digitized world? Is social media a bust or boon to political speech's liberatory end? Finally, this dissertation did not address larger legal questions about constitutionalized free speech. Scholars of public and constitutional law may find reasonably wanting the absence of the juridical as a specific intervening theoretical standpoint from which to evaluate the concept of political speech.

These limitations notwithstanding, the project offers rich avenues to meaningfully rejoin some, if not all, of these pressing issues. First, I aim to connect the themes I have articulated here

to forms of identity that are not limited to race and disability. To explore registers of gender and sexuality, I will ask what must we make of the androcentric and heterocentric registers that co-opt means of existential articulation? How does this cooptation implicate feminist and queer theory, as we explicate the dynamism of the gendered or the queer subject? What, then, becomes articulable as embodied womanist political speech or queer political speech? These questions necessitate, through phenomenological motifs, the queering, broadly understood, of the epistemic grounds on which political speech rests where queering means availing oneself to spaces, attitudes, or orientations of projecting horizons, whereby alternatives, differentiations, and asymmetries come squarely into focus. The convergence of queering of political speech with its already extant creolizing possibilities offers new ways to enter the field of politics from the vantage point of communicative practice.

Finally, I intend to consider conceptions of the polity, beyond democratic considerations, through which decolonized political speech might find its best political appraisal. My focus will include an analysis of the commune and the public, or conjointly, the public commune, as a means of situating political speech because doing so could illuminate limitations inherent in a democratic paradigm in the securing and fostering of political speech, while probing for more liberatory alternatives. In the end, what will remain a perennial inquiry at the center of political theory is: Who gets a say and, by extension, a sway in political life? In order to investigate the latter, we must first suspend normative considerations on the former and begin to critique the presumed modality of existential articulations.

Appendix



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Study: Modernity's Undertone: Toward A Reconceptualization of Political Speech

Questionnaire

(Phase One: To Be Conducted In Jamaica)

1. Is sign language “speech” or is it “sign”? Why?
2. How do you define the term “speech”?
3. Why do you think it’s important to “speak” or to engage in “speech”?
4. What do you think are the limitations of “speech” or “speaking”?
5. What are the consequences of limiting different forms of speech?
6. What do you want hearing people to know about sign language?
7. Do you speak with your hands or your eyes? Or both?
8. Is silence, speech?
9. How would you describe “deaf speech”?
10. When you hear the word “politics” what comes to mind?
11. What do you think is the importance of “politics” in society?
12. Do deaf people have a different attitude or orientation toward politics than hearing people?
13. How would you define the concept “political speech”?
14. Have you, or any other deaf person you know, experienced or forced to indulge in oralism?
15. If any, what are some hearing privileges you can identify?
16. In your mind, how do hearing people view or understand JSL?
17. What is your relationship to and with JSL?
18. Have you experienced audism? If so, and if possible, could you provide one example that impacted you deeply?
19. In your experience, how is it that the hearing world attempts to silence deaf people?
20. How can deaf people, in your mind, resist any attempts to silence them?

21. What do you believe is the consequence of Deaf communities being silenced?
22. How do you engage in political speech, if at all?
23. Is JSL or ASL a political language?
24. Are deaf people political (less or more so than hearing people)?
25. How do deaf people engage in politics that is markedly different than how hearing people engage in politics?
26. If it exists, what is deaf politics? Is there hearing politics?
27. How do you define deafness?
28. How do you define hearingness?
29. Do you consider yourself culturally Deaf? Why? Why not?
30. If you are familiar with these concepts: If so, what's your opinion on "Deafhood," "Deaf Gain," "Deafnicity," "Deaf Way"?
31. What's your view on audiology and cochlear implants?
32. How does Jamaica's history of colonialism, if at all, affect deaf speech or deaf communities?
33. In the American Deaf tradition, the "Deaf President Now!" movement is an example of Deaf revolutionary protest against hearing paternalism and audism. Can you think of a similar revolutionary protest or movement in the Jamaican Deaf community?

Phase 2: (To be Conducted in the United States Exclusively)

34. How do you identify, racially?
35. How does your race affect how you engage in politics?
36. How does your race affect how you engage in speech?
37. How does your race affect how you engage in political speech?
38. What does it mean to be black and deaf?
39. What's the difference in how black deaf people speak, compared to how white deaf people speak?
40. Are white deaf people heard more than black deaf people either in the hearing world or in the deaf world?
41. Do you feel silenced by white deaf speech?
42. Is ASL (American Sign Language) white deaf speech or black deaf speech? Or both?
43. Have you experienced the hearing world being unresponsive to deaf people's concerns? If so, how?
44. Have you experienced the white deaf world being unresponsive to black deaf people's concerns?
45. [If applicable], As a white deaf person, how do you view BSL (Black Sign Language)?
46. As a black deaf person, how do you view BSL (Black Sign Language)?
47. Is BSL black deaf (American) speech?
48. How does the White deaf world view black deaf speech?
49. Should black and white deaf speech be different?
50. What does it mean to be black and deaf? How does one affect the other?

51. What's your experience of being white and deaf? How does one affect the other?
52. How does racism deny you a political voice?
53. Does anti-black racism affect what you do and say? If so, how?
54. Why do you think it's important for black deaf people to protest?

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