DEAF SPACE IN ADAMOROBE

An Ethnographic Study in a Village in Ghana

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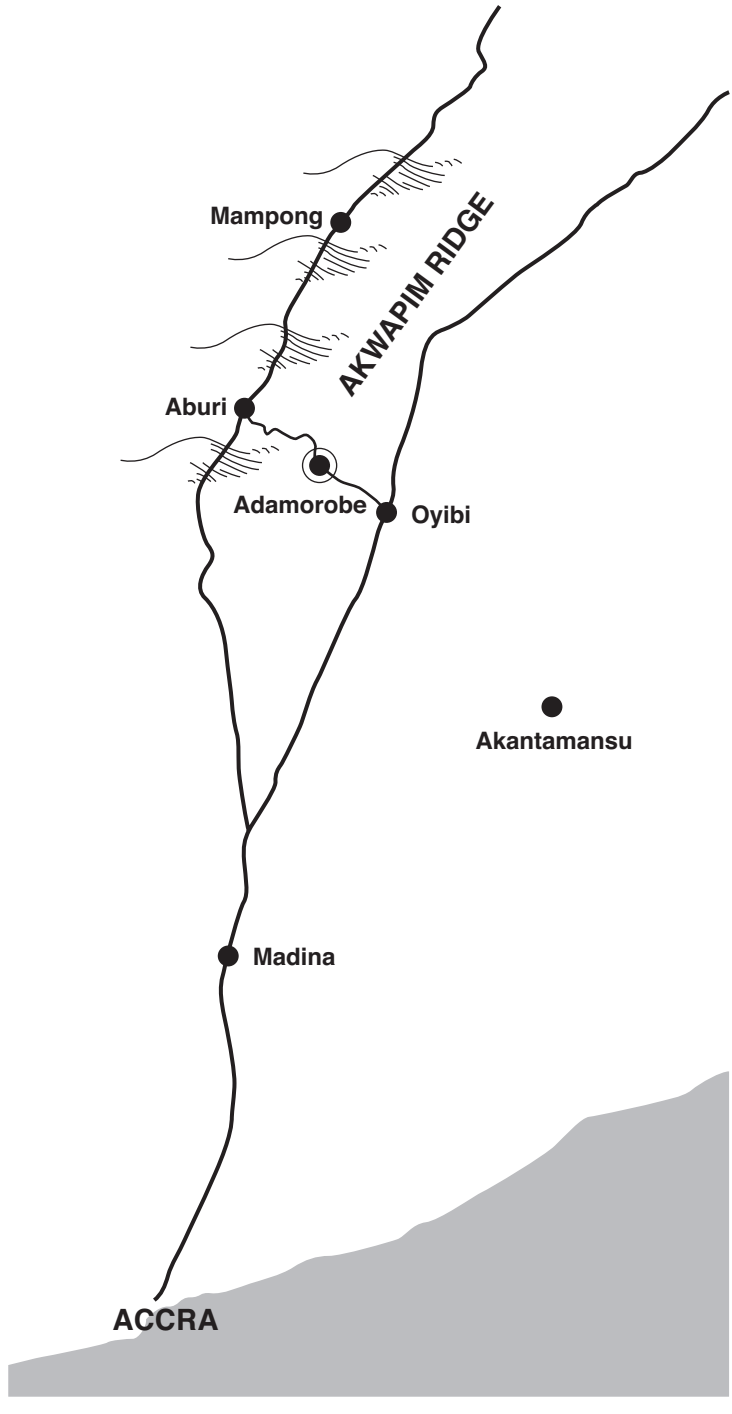
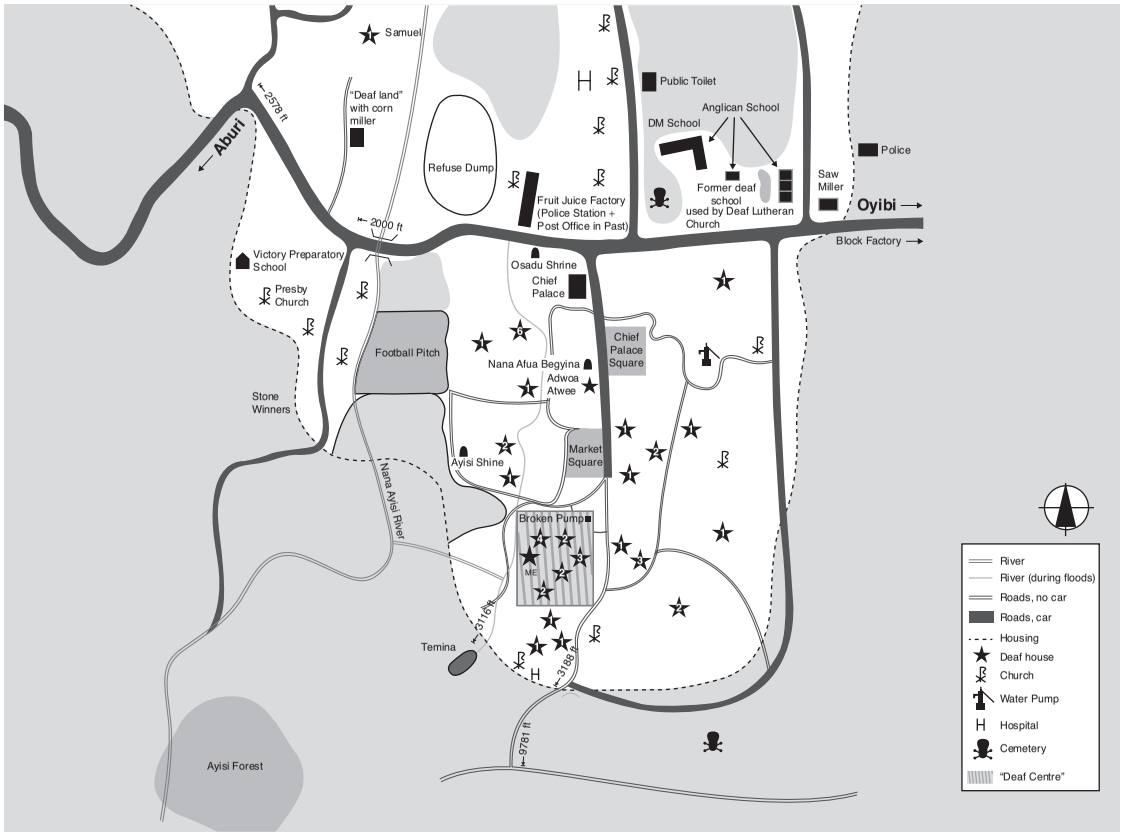


Map 1. The location and surroundings of Adamorobe, with relevant places marked.



Map 2. Adamorobe.

Acknowledgments

FROM THE MOMENT I first set foot in Adamorobe, the deaf people from Adamorobe have always been "present." During my time in the field they formed the center of my daily life in the village, but even after I had left they continued to be alive and present in the fieldnotes and interviews that I analyzed. When I was writing about them I continuously replayed in my head how I remembered them living out their lives. Completing this book is like saying goodbye to them. Not because they stop being so "present," but because in this book, I'm mostly talking about "the deaf people" as a general mass rather than about specific individuals and their specific life histories. As such, I want to take this opportunity to make some particular people known, and to describe what they meant for me during my research.

Kofi Pare was a firm but fair person who demanded a lot from himself and others. At times it was difficult to access and assess this sturdy man in his thirties, whose behavior varied from detailed explanations delivered with great seriousness to reservedness. In any event, Kofi was invaluable for this study. He was a brilliant sign language teacher, the protagonist in many of the interviews, and he often helped me to make sense of the puzzle pieces I gathered in the field. On many occasions when I presented him with two confusing pieces of data, he was able to fit them together for me in a way that made perfect sense.

Kwasi Boahene was a friendly, lighthearted person who regularly visited me in my room with a gift from his farm. Often I got the impression that he had considered in advance what he wanted to tell me; as soon as he sat down, he started to sign away for several hours telling me stories about life in Adamorobe. After a while, I found out that his stories were a patchwork; a bricolage of different elements in time and space that he creatively amended into new wholes. People criticized him for this and urged me to listen to his peer Kofi Pare instead, but I found that his stories were one of the many potential pathways to reach an understanding of life

in Adamorobe. Most importantly, Kwasi Boahene offered me his warm friendship, regularly inviting me to his home on a quiet and breezy edge of Adamorobe to slaughter a chicken and to share stories along with some local liquor.

Ama Korkor brought joy to my days. Whenever I met her, she was cheerful and her house was one of the deaf meeting points in Adamorobe. During my research, Ama Korkor was in her late forties or early fifties. She was very outgoing, enjoyable, confident, and always supplying outspoken critiques of the everyday happenings in Adamorobe. She was indispensable for the practical and social side of my research: she made sure that I lacked nothing, introduced me to people, mediated and translated between myself and others, and regularly accompanied me to Madina to visit the market, where she was not afraid to bargain excessively.

Kwame Osae's face lit up every day when I went to visit him, asking me almost reproachfully, "Where have you been?! I've been bored and alone!" The first days in the field, I felt anxious around him, as he treated me every evening to a tirade about "all those white persons coming here. . . . You come here for a few months and then you leave again and we won't see anything of you anymore!" Despite this inauspicious start, this whimsical man in his sixties became one of my real friends.

Afua Kaya was the one who most often said, "White people cannot do this, that and that," which I challenged again and again, and as a result we typically ended in a loud but playful discussion. Often, other deaf people became annoyed with her behavior and told her, "Just let whitey do," but from her I learned a lot about the rules and sensitivities of Akan culture.

Owusua was a quiet (and sometimes shy), very bright young woman who visited me almost every day with her baby, who unfortunately died a few months after my research. She told me about her childhood on the cocoa farm, the school in Mampong, her deaf family, and about the balance she was maintaining between Ghanaian Sign Language and Adamorobe Sign Language. Her experiential world was very different from that of the adults who had grown up as farmers in heart and soul, and she showed me glimpses of what the future of the deaf youth in Adamorobe could be.

I thank these people, and all other deaf people from Adamorobe: the late Afua Tatyifu, Yaa Awurabea, Kwabena Ofori, Kwaku Appiadu, Kwaku Duodu, Kwame Osae, Kwadzo Bosompra, Adwoa Amoa, Ama Korkor, Afua Aketewa, Abena Asabea, Adwoa Bomo, Yaa Grace, Akua Fiankobea, Kwasi

Opare, Afua Kaya, Kwame Ofori, Kwadzo Toah, the late Kwadzo Okoto, Akosua Obutwe, Akosua Abora, Kwasi Boahene, Ataa, Afua Ofosua, Kofi Tuo, Kofi Pare, Kofi Boahene, Ama Okobea, Kwabena Asare, Afua Toabea, Adwoa Kumi, Owusua, Naomi Kwakyebea, Adwoa Agyiriwa, Belinda, Kofi Kumi, Philomena, Akua Afaribea, Yaa Ansabea, Kofi Afere and the late Kwaku Opare.

Joseph Okyere was a hearing man in his thirties whom, when I had been in Adamorobe only a few weeks, I met in the *trotro* (a public transport vehicle) from Adamorobe to nearby Madina. He guided me around in Madina, using a notebook to communicate with me. A few days later, he spontaneously provided me with background information during Odwira, the yam festival, by writing in that notebook, which he started to bring with him whenever he would meet me. He regularly visited me in the evening to have written conversations: I typed out my fieldnotes from the day, and he simultaneously wrote down the replies to my questions.

These evenings were inspiring and enlightening, often enhanced by a fresh and tasty Ghanaian beer, and as a result we filled four thick notebooks writing back and forth about Ghanaian culture and politics, chieftaincy, Akan religion, Adamorobe's history, and the hearing people of Adamorobe's experiences with the deaf people. Joseph Okyere was of invaluable support in other ways too: he collected historical information, accompanied me to interviews with hearing people, and conducted nineteen interviews with hearing people himself. Without Joseph Okyere, I would have struggled a lot to understand certain aspects of Adamorobe's society, culture, and history, and "hearing life" in Adamorobe.

I also thank the two deaf "outsiders," Kofi Akorful and Samuel Adjei, who earned an important place in the histories and lives of deaf people from Adamorobe, for the long and instructive conversations. I thank all hearing elders who participated in interviews: the late Agnes Bomo, Ama Oforiwaa, Nana Owusu Oduomire, Okyeame Appeadu, Godfried Akufo Ofori, Joseph Kwaasi, Akua Kwasibea and Wofa Sala. I thank the individuals who participated anonymously in interviews done by Joseph Okyere. I thank Odum Mensah and his wife for their generous hospitality in Adamorobe. They kindly supplied me with a nice room that was painted a charming fluorescent green, and my mouth still waters when I recall the generous amounts of freshly prepared *fufu* and *banku* that I was offered everyday.

Glossary

AdaSL	Adamorobe Sign Language
Akan	this term is the name of the largest ethnic group in Ghana (including the founders of Adamorobe), and also the name of their language
ASL	American Sign Language
Banku	cooked fermented corn dough with or without cassava dough
Koko	fermented maize porridge
Odwira festival	yam festival, the Akan new year celebrations
Ga	the neighboring ethnic group
GNAD	Ghana National Association of the Deaf
GSL	Ghanaian Sign Language
Abosom	small gods, divinities
Fufu	a local dish made of cooked and pounded cassava
Juju	manipulation of physical objects using spells and incantations
Kenkey	cooked fermented corn dough shaped into balls, partially cooked, then wrapped in banana leaves, maize or corn husks, or foil, and steamed
Lineage	a localized subdivision of a clan which is the basic unit of descent, succession, and inheritance and of other political, ritual, and legal purposes
Mmoatia	dwarf spirits
Nyame	the Akan Supreme Being, called "God" in English
Trotro	public transport vehicle in Ghana that is privately owned and can be hailed at points along its route

A Deaf Anthropologist's Journey

1

When deaf people ask me what is special about Adamorobe and why I chose this place do to research, I usually reply, "You know Martha's Vineyard, right? The place where a relatively large number of deaf people were born and many hearing people knew sign? You know that this situation has vanished now? But did you know that there are actually similar communities around the world? Well, one of these is located in Ghana and called Adamorobe." Often, the reaction is fascination, and sometimes I got the remark "Wow, I HAVE to see that!" Martha's Vineyard, an island off Cape Cod in Massachusetts on the Eastern seaboard of the United States, is renowned as a community where "everyone spoke sign language" for several hundred years.[1] Due to a recessive pattern of genetic deafness circulated through endogamous marriage practices, the rate of deafness on this island averaged 1:155 and peaked at 1:4 in a neighborhood in the town of Chilmark.*

The community featured a dense social and kinship network, and this close contact between deaf and hearing people resulted in the evolution of a sign language that was widely used by both deaf and hearing people on a daily basis, for generations. Deaf people were reportedly "fully integrated" into the hearing community. Based on her interviews with older surviving hearing members, Nora Groce reported that being deaf was seen as "pretty normal," merely as a human variation as unremarkable as eye color. Beginning in the nineteenth century, changes in the marriage patterns of both deaf and hearing inhabitants resulted in the disappearance of this particular strand of deafness on the Vineyard.[2] Several deaf people married off-island deaf classmates, and hearing islanders increasingly married off-islanders, people who lived on the Vineyard only during the summer holidays, or Portuguese immigrants who moved to the Vineyard.

* In this book, I use the term *deafness* in a purely biological sense. As such, my use of the term does not mean that I subscribe to the medically inspired ideology of deafness as "lack" or "problem."

Martha's Vineyard became an especially powerful part of the collective memory of the international deaf community. Deaf people often imagine it as a paradise, so they are disappointed when they learn that this "dream" ceased to exist after the mid-twentieth century. For example, the author of an online article on Martha's Vineyard writes, "If you could create a deaf utopia, what would it be like? Everyone would communicate in sign language, both deaf and hearing. Many, if not most, children would be born deaf. There actually was such a place once."[3] This idealization of the Vineyard happens because of an apparent contrast of life on the Vineyard with that of so many (if not most) deaf people in contemporary societies.

The reality for probably the majority of deaf people is growing up in hearing nonsigning families, having hearing nonsigning teachers, and having to comply with a hearing nonsigning society, notwithstanding the often devastating social, psychological, linguistic, and educational effects that come with this. Deaf people have, therefore, been described as constituting a geographical diaspora, longing to be together and to use sign language whenever they want to, leading to them imagining ideal places such as Martha's Vineyard.[4] It is not unusual for deaf people who are told about Martha's Vineyard to sigh, "I wish I could live there," or state that they would go there on holiday if the place still harbored its deaf population.

While the retrospective and idyllic stories about Martha's Vineyard have taken on mythical proportions, other communities currently exist where a high rate of genetic deafness leads to the emergence of a local sign language known and used by a hearing majority and a deaf minority. Most of them are located in the global South, mostly in rural rather than urban settings. Since the late 1970s, at least fifteen examples have been reported in Asia, Mesoamerica, South America, the Middle East, and Africa, including Adamorobe in Ghana, West Africa. After my explanation above, it might be unsurprising that communities of this type are attractive for (deaf) tourists and researchers. A white deaf person who once visited Adamorobe explained what brought her there: "I read a simple sentence about Adamorobe in a deaf literature work, and got fascinated by the deaf village."

Such a trip could mean much more than a mere visit to an interesting place. The term *pilgrimage* has been used to describe deaf people's participation in the "ritual" of the Deaf World Games (aka Deaflympics), where deaf people from around the world come together for a "sacred occasion," in which sign language users temporarily constitute a majority.[5] Another ideal deaf place is Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the only

liberal arts university for deaf people in the world, a "deaf Mecca" to where deaf people from around the world make pilgrimages.[6] For deaf people, this experience of a barrier-free environment fascinates them, inspires them, and recharges them.[7]

It is not the search for a deaf dreamworld, nor for a utopian place that brought me to Adamorobe, though. What brought me there were master's degrees in both anthropology and Deaf Studies, and a personal and scientific interest in the many different ways in which deaf people lead their lives in different sociocultural contexts.

Becoming "A Real Anthropologist"

This is how it happened. Just like my younger deaf sister, I was mainstreamed in a "hearing school" at an early age. I did well at school, I spoke well, I used hearing aids. However, since I am profoundly deaf, an easy, natural unhampered flow of two-way or group communication was nonexistent in my life. In 2003, I was an anthropology master's student at the University of Leuven in my home country, Belgium, and dreaming of becoming "a real anthropologist." Something was missing though, a focus, a topic that would fire me with enthusiasm. I was quite adrift, until I received the list of possible dissertation topics. A small flame reluctantly started to smolder when I saw that "Deaf culture" was one of the topics on Professor Devlieger's list.

Not yet convinced that this topic could be something interesting and profound (which strikes me as extremely ironic now) and with a lot of other topics in my mind, I casually told Professor Devlieger that I would maybe, possibly, be interested. He pushed me quite firmly in that direction by suggesting a few books: Padden and Humphries' and Baynton's classics on American Deaf culture and history.[8] The library did not have them, and so my first orders through the Internet became fact. These books were revelations: my interest was aroused immediately, and many things were turned around profoundly and definitively, never to look the same again. I realized that it was not too late, that there were many people like me who had become "late-adopted children" in deaf communities. I withdrew from my hearing scouts group, enrolled in a deaf youth club, and started to learn Vlaamse Gebarentaal (Flemish Sign Language) enthusiastically.

What was more, I found my purpose. Those two books made me throw away all my reservations about the "Deaf culture" theme at once. I decided that I wanted to be a *deaf* anthropologist researching *deaf* people's

life-worlds, rather than an anthropologist trying to "overcome" her being deaf while doing research. I started to devour other Deaf Studies classics and in October 2004, I stepped onto a plane to the former Dutch colony Surinam (South America) to conduct research for my anthropology dissertation. I focused on the urban Deaf community in the capital, Paramaribo, exploring the role the deaf school, the deaf club, and the former colony played in deaf people's everyday lives.

During my three-month stay in Paramaribo, I learned that some of the schoolchildren came from the inland where small communities of Indians and Maroons lived, with a high rate of hereditary deafness and that these children used "their own sign languages." A few months earlier, I had read Groce's classic about Martha's Vineyard. The flame of my interest started to burn more fiercely. I wanted what I then regarded as the "traditional" anthropological experience: doing research in a rural location. I did not go to the interior of Surinam—this was not part of my research, nor did I have the precise coordinates or the financial means to travel into the Amazon, nor did I feel ready for that. I was still very much a new inductee in the fields of anthropology and Deaf Studies. Nonetheless I started thinking: "Who knows, maybe one day . . ."

I not only wanted to learn about Deaf histories and lives from books and by interacting with deaf people; I also wanted to be taught. I commenced an additional master's degree at the University of Bristol, United Kingdom. I immensely enjoyed my MSc in Deaf Studies, but from the outset of the degree, I missed the wide scale of anthropology. At that time, I felt the Deaf Studies canon to be mostly Western-focused, something that has hugely improved over the past few years. As a response, I read every non-Western Deaf culture–related piece that I could get my hands on, and by way of that process discovered that there are "many ways to be deaf."[9]

As part of this quest, I started reading more about "Martha's Vineyard situations," which ultimately led to a published critical review.[10] In that article, I noted that most (but not all) of those studies were done by linguists and geneticists, who often published sociocultural data on the communities without having done sustained ethnographic research there. Several of these accounts have contributed to the existing idealized images of such communities as places where deaf and hearing people intermingle to the extent that deaf people are said to be "equal" to hearing people, living in happy and harmonious relationships with them.

Shared Signing Communities

"Shared signing communities" as Kisch calls "Martha's Vineyard situations,"[11] are villages, towns, or groups in which, due to the historical presence of a hereditary form of deafness that is circulated in the communities through endogamous marriages, a relatively high number of deaf people live together with hearing people for decades or even centuries. Over the years, the need to communicate with each other leads to the emergence of local sign languages used by both deaf and hearing people, called "shared sign languages" by Nyst.[12]

The most well-known and best-documented such communities are the Al-Sayyid Bedouin in Israel,[13] Desa Kolok (Bengkala) in Bali,[14] Chican in Mexico,[15] Ban Khor in Thailand,[16] and Adamorobe in Ghana. There seems to be considerable variation within and between shared signing communities with regard to rates of sign language proficiency and use, deaf people's marriage rates, deaf people's participation in village economies and politics, and the role and results of (deaf) education. Traditionally, the common factors among these communities (factors that are rapidly changing in a number of communities) seem to be the high degree of kin relationships in the groups or locations, traditionally labor-intensive and subsistence-oriented economies, and low degrees of differentiation between deaf and hearing people's levels of education and occupation.[17]

The normal ratio of babies born deaf in the West is about 0.1%,[18] although this is generally reported to be two to five times higher in developing countries. In the 2010 Ghanaian population census, 0.4 % of Ghanaians were reported to have a hearing disability.[19] Some recent figures (at different moments in time) from shared signing communities are represented in Table 1.1. In this table, it appears that the percentage of deaf inhabitants in shared signing communities varies and can change considerably over time. This percentage also seems to decline in a number of communities, especially in places experiencing rapid immigration (such as in Adamorobe). Numbers of hearing inhabitants naturally increase much more rapidly than numbers of deaf inhabitants due to births and immigration. Sometimes deaf people move to other areas, such as in Bengkala and Adamorobe. Sometimes percentages of deaf people are even not that high in comparison to the average numbers in developing countries (such as in Ban Khor).

However, the exact (relative or absolute) numbers of deaf people in such communities do not say much in themselves. Rather than a particular

Table 1.1. Deaf Inhabitants in Selected Shared Signing Communities.

Community	Year	Number of Deaf/ Hearing Inhabitants	Percentage of Deaf Inhabitants
Adamorobe (Ghana)	2000	35/1356	2.58
	2008	43/2500	1.72
	2012	41/3500	1.17
Al-Sayyid Bedouin	2008	120/3700	3.24
(Israel)	2012	130/4500	2.89
Ban Khor (Thailand)	2009	16/2741	0.58
Bengkala (Indonesia)	2000	47/2180	2.15
	2008	46/2740	1.68
Chican (Mexico)	1991	13/400	3.25
	2012	17/720	2.36

Note. The number of deaf people in Bengkala in 2008 would be 38 with emigrated deaf people excluded. The number of deaf people in Adamorobe in 2012 would be at least 52 with emigrated people included.

Sources. For Adamorobe, numbers for 2000 are from Victoria Nyst, *A Descriptive Analysis of Adamorobe Sign Language (Ghana)* (Utrecht: LOT, 2007), and data for 2008 and 2012 are from my own research.

For Al-Sayyid Bedouin, information for 2008 is from Shifra Kisch, "'Deaf Discourse': the Social Construction of Deafness in a Bedouin Community," *Medical Anthropology* 27 (2008): 283–313, and for 2012 is from Shifra Kisch, "Demarcating Generations of Signers in the Dynamic Sociolinguistic Landscape of a Shared Sign-Language: The Case of the Al-Sayyid Bedouin," in *Sign Languages in Village Communities: Anthropological and Linguistic Insights*. *Sign Language Typology Series No. 4*, eds. Ulrike Zeshan and Connie de Vos. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter & Ishara Press, 2012), 87–125.

For Ban Khor, information is from Angela Nonaka, "Estimating Size, Scope, and Membership of the Speech/Sign Communities of Undocumented Indigenous/Village Sign Languages: The Ban Khor Case Study," *Language and Communication* 29 (2009): 210–229.

For Bengkala, numbers for 2000 are from I Gede Marsaja, *Desa Kolok. A Deaf Village and its Sign Language in Bali, Indonesia* (Nijmegen: Ishara Press, 2008), and for 2008 are from Connie de Vos, "The Kata Kolok Perfective in Child Signing: Coordination of Manual and Non-Manual Components," in *Sign Languages in Village Communities: Anthropological and Linguistic Insights*. *Sign Language Typology Series No. 4,* ed. Ulrike Zeshan & Connie de Vos (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter and Ishara Press, 2012), 127–52.

For Chican, numbers for 1991 are from Robert Johnson, "Sign language, culture & community in a traditional Yucatec Maya village," *Sign Language Studies* 73 (1991): 461–474, and for 2012 are from Cesar Ernesto, Escobedo Delgado, "Chican Sign Language: A sociolinguistic sketch," in *Sign Languages in Village Communities: Anthropological and Linguistic Insights*. *Sign Language Typology Series No. 4,* eds. Ulrike Zeshan and Connie de Vos (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter & Ishara Press, 2012), 377–381.

percentage of deaf people in a community, it is the communities' *social activities and networks* that create the possibility for a shared sign language to emerge, and to be spread and passed on throughout a community, especially when deafness exists for a number of generations.[20] Endogamous marriage practices are associated with a dense social and kin organization and collective culture (and not necessarily with geographical isolation, as many authors on shared signing communities have assumed). In these contexts, deaf and hearing people do (or did in the past) similar things in daily life and frequently engage in common activities. They are therefore likely to have considerable contact with each other, and a shared sign

language can thus evolve and be circulated widely throughout the communities, and transmitted down through the generations.

Shared sign languages are said to differ from larger urban/national sign languages, because their user communities and circumstances of development are very different. Urban sign languages (such as Bamako Sign Language in Mali) and national sign languages (such as American Sign Language or Ghanaian Sign Language) have typically emerged in user communities consisting of mainly deaf users, such as in schools for the deaf or urban deaf networks. In contrast, in shared signing communities, there is only a small minority of deaf signers and a large majority of hearing signers. The latter typically play an important role in the development, maintenance, and transmission of shared sign languages. Deaf inhabitants of shared signing communities often also come in contact with urban/national sign languages, such as through attending schools for the deaf. Formally educated deaf children of shared signing communities often use the school sign language with each other.

Shared sign languages are different from urban and national sign languages with regard to form and linguistic characteristics. Examples are the use of relatively few different handshapes, a large signing space heavily making use of pointing to real locations for person and place reference (based on shared knowledge of places and persons' homes), a high degree of macrofunctionality (i.e., one sign can have many different meanings according to the context in which it is used), and the absence (or infrequent use) of classifier verbs and simultaneous constructions. It has been suggested that these languages are maximally adjusted to user communities with more hearing than deaf signers, and where these hearing signers have various levels of language proficiency. The more complex structures that are typical for urban/national sign languages would be more difficult to learn and produce for hearing users.[21]

Most of the linguists and geneticists who visited shared signing communities during the past two decades argued that the use of shared sign languages facilitates deaf people's *integration*, which is a term that has been criticized in disability and minority discourses because it suggests the assimilation or normalization of an abnormal person in a normal community. A more adequate choice of words to describe shared signing communities as spaces produced by both deaf and hearing people is *habitus*; these are communities in which the fact that deaf and hearing people live together is integral to these people's *habitus*.[22]

Bourdieu uses the term *habitus* to suggest that people's practices are structured by their sociocultural environments.[23] I use it not to imply that deaf people in shared signing communities are included in every aspect of the village's public, political and religious life, which is seldom the case,[24] but to reflect the fact that shared signing communities are not just villages, towns, areas or groups with a high number of deaf people, but places where deaf people and being deaf are *situated* and where life between deaf and hearing people is to a great extent *shared*, as are the sign languages used between them.

The deaf-inclusive habitus in shared signing communities is challenged by developments such as urbanization, capitalism, the switch from subsistence economies to cash economies, migration, diversification of employment, and increased rates of formal education. These processes may place deaf people in shared signing communities in disadvantaged or even marginal positions. In addition, many shared sign languages are on the brink of extinction, mostly because of contact with larger, urban (often national) sign languages.[25] As Groce has been criticized for her "glorification of the past,"[26] of Martha's Vineyard, I criticize romanticizing accounts of these communities: contemporary shared signing communities are (naturally) not what could be called deaf utopias. The picture is naturally ambiguous.

Still, even with oppressive and marginalizing discourses, practices, and processes present, the very existence of shared signing communities highlights particular practices and ideas that may seem utopian for many deaf people, such as the practice of using sign language automatically with a deaf person, or the common-sense nature of the knowledge that one can discuss everything in sign language, or the experience of being born deaf in a community where deaf people of various ages have been living for decades, if not centuries. Because of the existence of these patterns, I regard them as very interesting places to do ethnographic research.

Preparing for the Field

Thus, while reviewing the literature, the idea took shape to go to such a "Martha's Vineyard situation" to do ethnographic research on deaf–deaf and deaf–hearing social relationships and discourses about being deaf and sign language. People often ask me what moved me to choose Adamorobe. I had read Nyst's account about Adamorobe Sign Language (which I will refer to as AdaSL from now on)[27] and learned that the number of deaf people there was rather large (i.e., not small and scattered as in Surinam) and

had a significant generational depth. The place had not yet been studied by anthropologists, but only by linguists, geneticists, and medical researchers.

What was more, I had already been in the country. In 2006, I volunteered at a school for deaf children with 200 pupils located in a rural and rather remote setting in the North Ghanaian savanna, residing with a host family in a nearby village. Already having a sense of village life in Ghana and of how to negotiate the country, as well having acquired the basics of Ghanaian Sign Language (which is very different from AdaSL, but proved to be useful in certain contexts), I could imagine myself doing fieldwork in Ghana.

Six months before I began my PhD research, in April 2008, I undertook a two-week pilot visit to Ghana, to introduce myself to the deaf inhabitants of Adamorobe and to seek informed consent. I stayed in Accra, Ghana's capital, which is located about 40 km from Adamorobe, and from there I visited Adamorobe three times. I was accompanied by Francis Boison, a deaf ex-president of the Ghana National Association of the Deaf, whom I had met before in the UK and who had facilitated Nyst's access to Adamorobe when she did her linguistic research a few years earlier. Francis's hearing sister acted as an interpreter, translating between Akan and Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL).

During the first visit, we had a meeting with the deaf people's gatekeepers: the late Agnes Bomo, a hearing woman from a deaf family who acted as the deaf people's interpreter and gatekeeper in interactions with outsiders and village officials, and Samuel Adjei, a deaf man from Accra who lives in Adamorobe. The second visit to the village was aimed at acquiring group consent from the deaf people, after their weekly church service on a Sunday. I signed in plain Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL from now on) and Francis translated this into a mixture of GSL and conventional gestures, adding culturally suitable examples to indicate what my research would mean for the deaf people's everyday lives.

I explained that I wanted to take part in the deaf people's daily lives by observing and having conversations, that I would ask questions about their life experiences, families, communication, histories, and so on, and that I would also record interviews about these themes. Agnes Bomo then offered additional explanations in AdaSL, based on our conversation with her the week before. Because there was nobody who could translate directly from GSL into AdaSL, this appeared to be the best way forward. During the third visit we gained the consent of the village authorities, more specifically from an official called the Assembly Member, with the GSL/Akan interpreter.

Thus, I gained consent for participant observation and interviews, and also discussed the issues of reciprocity, anonymity, and confidentiality. The reciprocity requested by the deaf people in Adamorobe and their leaders during the pilot visits was of the kind they were used to receiving from previous visitors and researchers: regular gifts such as clothes, rice (considered a luxury product), or a big piece of laundry soap (however, see chapter 8). Anonymity in video materials also did not seem an issue for them (however, see chapter 9), and the idea of changing their names in a book that is about them seemed very odd and counterintuitive to them. Hence all names in this book are real names, rather than pseudonyms. I have tried, however, when describing grave conflicts and sensitive subjects in this book, to obscure names by writing in generic terms (such as "a deaf woman" or "X").

Daily Research Practice in Adamorobe

So, in October 2008, I was sitting in a taxi with Francis, my bags, and an excited but anxious heart. After spending hours in traffic jams in Accra, we drove to Oyibi relatively smoothly. We turned right to commence a bumpy ride on the 5-meter-wide dirt road that stretched out before us. Previously, this had been only a path; cars could only go one way and there was no public transportation. In front of us, the green hills of the Akwapim ridge arose. On each side of the road were lush low vegetation and palm trees, and here and there in between the green, houses and stone skeletons had been mushrooming over the past few years. In my eyes, these large villas, built of rough gray concrete, seemed strangely and awkwardly out of place in the landscape. Several small side paths led to these houses—the name of one path was clearly inspired by the then current political climate: Obama Avenue.

The hilly road continued for about 3 to 4 km. Reddish dust blew around us and laid on the vegetation. Here and there people walked, coming from or going to their farms or Oyibi, often carrying a load on the head. Now and then, a car passed. We left behind us a large brick factory on the left side and then the road ran down for the final time, revealing the glistening corrugated iron roofs of Adamorobe that could be seen in the distance, laying extended in the valley between the vegetation. We passed some low small school buildings on the right side between the trees. The dirt road ran further uphill to Aburi, but we turned left, into the main road of Adamorobe village.

I had no idea what it would be like. A village where deaf and hearing people largely mingle? Silently, I feared that this would be why my stay could

Figure 1.1. Adamorobe, seen from a farm on the Akwapim hills.

become very dull. With the warnings of my anthropology professors in the back of my mind, that fieldwork in a village could be unbelievably boring and frustrating, I feared that I might need to drag myself through it, like an exhausting trip through the desert. But while it was often frustrating and certainly exhausting, it wasn't dull. Not at all. What I found was an intriguing village where sign language is indeed used by many, and where deaf people have indeed established their place in the village's everyday life. At the same time, in this village, deaf–hearing relationships are complicated and characterized by ambiguity. I learned about the tensions that exist between deaf and hearing perspectives, and also between outside perspectives and discourses that originated within Adamorobe. I learned about the changes that deaf education, a deaf church group, charity, tourism, development projects, migration patterns, and capitalism had brought about in Adamorobe.

My Fieldwork in Adamorobe

I undertook my fieldwork in two stints. The first one lasted three months (in 2008), and the second stint, in 2009, lasted five months. I resided with a hearing family who had a large house with a spare room, located centrally in the village, just a few meters from a number of deaf people's homes. Every day I woke up at the same time as the sun and the rest of the village: at 5:30 am, bathing myself quickly and going outside to mingle in the highly social village life in the morning hours, before many people left for their farmlands,

jobs, or schools. As the main focus of my study were the deaf people and their experiences of life in Adamorobe, I mainly interacted with them.

AdaSL was used intensively between deaf people in deaf-only conversations that frequently arose in various places in Adamorobe, so I usually went to spots where deaf people often met each other to exchange greetings and have a chat. I also followed the local custom of making rounds in the village to greet (mostly deaf) people that I knew. If I came across deaf people processing maize or other small farm products or plants, I sat down and lent a hand. The majority of daily life in Adamorobe happened in the open air, which facilitated all these contacts, although deaf people also came to my room to visit and chat, or to discuss their lives, concerns, and histories in a more private way. Finally, I visited the farmlands of some deaf people, and attended the weekly signed (in GSL) Lutheran deaf church services and other village events such as funerals or festivals.

Learning AdaSL proved to be the ideal icebreaker. Several deaf people spent many hours teaching me their language. They started by telling me the signs for food items and animals by demonstrating, pointing, drawing, or pantomiming. They talked about topics such as their farms, witchcraft, dwarf spirits at the river at the edge of the village, their relationships with hearing people, village life in the past, traditional religion, and the Christian church. When talking with me, they adapted their signing, signing plain AdaSL slowly and providing additional contextual information that they would normally leave out, and they initially mixed their AdaSL with GSL (which they had learned at school and in the church) here and there.

Gradually our mutual language use became more and more AdaSL, and the deaf people were very proud that their teaching was fruitful. Naturally limitations in my understanding of the language remained (see chapter 2), but conversations in which I was involved (rather than conversations that I observed without participating) went pretty well. Deaf people increasingly expected me to actively participate in conversations and to talk about where I come from. For example, during a recorded interview Kwame Osae signed:

> You should not sit still with your hands in between your legs but have to conduct conversations actively. (…) You have to tell me something, just like I tell you something. Not sitting with your hands in between your legs and me explaining, that is wrong. You have to tell things to me, just like I do. You see? You get it? Well then, bring it on! (Kwame Osae, Interview, 29 August 2009)

My conversations often included explaining my research. Once my AdaSL improved, I found myself explaining what kind of information I was

gathering and why I was making notes. I also showed pictures and movies of myself giving presentations in order to give the deaf people an impression of how I was going to spread the information. We altered some of the initial ethical agreements and plans as they ceased to fit deaf people's expectations and sensitivities, such as the requests for reciprocity that gradually arose in the course of my research (see chapter 8).

There were about fifteen deaf people with whom I conversed most, although I interacted with almost all deaf people in Adamorobe at regular intervals. It was a source of constant concern whether the experiences of the persons with whom I interacted most were representative of all of Adamorobe's deaf people. So, mainly in the second fieldwork period, I intentionally worked on broadening my deaf social network and regularly went around to the houses of the deaf people that I knew less well, in order to greet them and sometimes stay for a short conversation, trying to develop good relations with them and discussing a number of themes with them.

I always carried a small notebook with me to write jottings as an intermediate stage to my fieldnotes. I often openly jotted during conversations when people were describing past and present life in Adamorobe. Most of the time, I didn't use the notebook, however: I did not make any notes when people were greeting, catching up on news, gossiping, quarreling, conversing about sensitive topics, or during observations and participation in everyday life. At those times, I made mental notes. In my room, I used these written and mental jottings to write elaborate fieldnotes on my laptop at least once a day, ending up writing approximately one to three hours everyday, describing observations and conversations, reflections on my methodology, and analytical ideas. In later stages of the research I also organized unstructured ethnographic interviews to explore a number of themes in depth, such as to record stories of historical events.

In order to gain access to hearing people's views, I asked help from a hearing man named Joseph Okyere. We had regular written conversations, filling several notebooks with writings on Ghanaian culture, chieftaincy, the Akan religion, Adamorobe's history, the experiences of hearing people with the deaf in Adamorobe, and so forth. When Okyere did not know the answers to my questions, he took the initiative to ask one or more elders and reported back to me some days later. Upon my request, he interviewed nineteen hearing people, asking them about their positive and negative experiences with deaf people, whether they regarded deaf people to be equally intelligent as hearing people, and so on.

He visited the interviewees at their homes, asked the questions in Akan, and wrote their answers down in English. The interviews were anonymized, but having given Okyere an explanation about sampling with the aim of creating as varied a sample as possible, he documented the interviewees' (estimated) age, gender, ethnic background and migration status, AdaSL knowledge, if they had close deaf relatives, and if they had a lot of contact with deaf people. Joseph Okyere also accompanied me as interpreter (spoken Akan–written English) during about ten unstructured interviews I conducted with hearing elders who had specific knowledge of Adamorobe's culture and history, such as a priestess, one of the subchiefs, the deaf people's former teacher, and some other elders. He also helped me to construct family trees and to draw a map of the village.

My Positionality as a Deaf White Female Anthropologist

Most researchers who visited shared signing communities were hearing linguists and geneticists/audiologists, and a few hearing anthropologists. It is only in the last few years that some deaf linguists have visited shared signing communities, but at the time of writing, no deaf anthropologist other than myself has emerged in the literature on shared signing communities. The research that led to this book therefore responds to a gap: it was conducted by a deaf researcher with a deaf supervisor, it had a deaf-centered theme, and most research participants were deaf. During the pilot visit, the deaf people in Adamorobe were enthusiastic about my being deaf: they said this was the main factor for their willingness for giving the consent. This is an early example of how my being deaf played a role for the people under study, at least in their discourse. During my fieldwork, deaf people told me that they were attracted by the fact that I was "like them." For example:

> A few deaf people gathered at Ama Korkor's house in the night. Kwasi Opare was very enthusiastic. He said he wanted to give me cassava from his farm because we are both deaf. He shook my hand and said enthusiastically: "We are both deaf, you are white, but do I chase you away? No! We are friends, both deaf." He repeated this time after time: "You are white and I am black, but do I chase you away? No!" (Fieldnotes, 25 October 2008)

Several deaf people contrasted my visit with those of the many white hearing people who had visited Adamorobe for shorter or longer periods. Kwame Osae told me, "These visitors let the deaf people be called to talk with them, but they are hearing white people, bah." He paused, pointed at me, and said, "YOU DEAF SAME!" and continued, "They just talk and talk,

they give money to us, say bye-bye and are gone" (Fieldnotes, 9 November 2008). Because in Ghanaian culture, hospitality and generosity are highly valued, I cannot judge if they were really more hospitable and generous toward me than they would be toward hearing white people; but this was the discourse they maintained when giving me a place in Adamorobe. As a result, after ten days in the field, I wrote, "I don't really feel like a complete outsider here, because the deaf sign WE DEAF SAME so often."

As a deaf person, I understand certain deaf-related experiences from the inside out, for example, being primarily visually oriented and experiencing barriers. This commonality was meaningful for deaf people in Adamorobe. Central to the research was the experience (or the discourse) of being deaf, and I became a magnet for deaf people and for the discussion of deaf-related themes. They wanted to learn my deaf-related opinions and experiences just like I wanted to learn theirs. For example, I was asked "if a faith healer came and offered to make you hearing, would you say yes?" (see chapter 5). These conversations made me wonder whether deaf-related issues would be spontaneously shared in the same way, and to the same extent, with a hearing researcher. I also suspect that they complained more about hearing people to me than to the hearing linguistics researcher Nyst, who interacted with the deaf people intensively during an equally long fieldwork period. Nyst told me that, in her presence, they did not often say that "hearing people are bad," a remark caused by experiences of discrimination.

It was much easier for me to sign with deaf than with hearing people, because hearing people's signing was often more or less accented by spoken Akan (see chapter 2). Hearing people's behavior toward me varied from curiosity and friendliness to reservedness and sometimes annoyance. Because I unwittingly became a kind of a magnet for deaf people, it was difficult to analyze longer deaf–hearing interactions. A related difficulty was that deaf people "protected" me from (allegedly "bad") hearing people and claimed me as "their" guest; the price I had to pay for their hospitality was being "theirs" in the sense of membership and even ownership. If hearing people approached me with doubtful intentions (according to deaf people), such as playful requests to marry me, deaf people would tell me to ignore them, pull or push me away or scorn these people. Joseph Okyere's assistance was therefore indispensable to gain insight into hearing people's perspectives.

While important and powerful, the argument "DEAF SAME" did not overturn other cultural customs or values such as "respect for (foreign)

visitors." In Ghana, it is customary to give guests the chance to eat alone: this is a sign of respect, and it took me some time to convince deaf people to eat with me. Similarly, they would not allow me to sit on a small chair or dusty surface and would always make the effort to fetch a comfortable plastic garden chair for me, arguing, "You're a white foreigner and our guest and so you stand above us, you are big." Helpfulness and politeness toward guests are central aspects of Ghanaian culture, and I could not convince them of my standpoint that white foreigners are not "more big" than black Ghanaians and that I would stay in Adamorobe for so long that they should not treat me as a guest, or that we are DEAF SAME and thus should sit on similar surfaces. I was told that it would be wrong if someone passing by saw me on a bad or small chair, which would signal that the deaf people do not treat their guests well, the underlying implication being that if I respected the deaf people and their reputation in the village, I would accept my position as "big" or "important" guest.

Another element central to my positionality was my gender. To a certain extent, men and women in Adamorobe do the same things in everyday life. For example, both genders go to the farm, and while household tasks are mostly done by women, I also saw men washing clothes and pounding *fufu*, a local dish made of cooked and pounded cassava. Deaf and hearing men and women mix and interact all the time but also have male-only and female-only conversations. I noticed that some themes—fertility, pregnancies, the female body, and gossip about men—occurred more often (or only) in female deaf conversations. However, many deaf conversations were mixed; deaf women did not exclude men from entering female deaf conversations and I was always naturally welcomed in male deaf conversations.

As a result, I never gave much thought to gender until my (deaf) husband visited the village. I was baffled when a number of deaf men took him to one side, and indicated to me that it was now a male deaf conversation in which I was not welcome. I wondered if up to that point, my status as foreign deaf guest had prevailed over my gender. I realized that a deaf male researcher would possibly be drawn into male deaf spaces and have less access to women's conversations. Being a foreign woman working alone meant flexible access to different spaces, including unchallenged access to male spaces. I also wondered if and in which way my gender was influencing the gender construction of deaf group conversations. However, while deaf conversations tended to be (more) mixed in gender after I joined them, I very often stumbled upon already mixed deaf conversations. Also,

although hearing men often engaged in the above-mentioned playful marriage proposals (typical in Ghanaian culture), only a few deaf men did so; deaf people regarded it as unethical behavior to ask me to marry. Hence, I felt to a certain extent de-gendered in deaf spaces.

My being deaf, my gender, my status as a guest, and my race had more far-reaching implications than facilitating or hindering access. Deaf people made me aware of researcher effects by pointing out how the atmosphere changed when I was present in Adamorobe. For example, several of them told me that when I was there, deaf people had fewer arguments and conflicts. They also said that deaf people more often sought each others' company for conversations. In addition, deaf people who normally do not visit each other would stay at the homes of other deaf people when they saw that I was there: "When you are not here he never comes to our place!" Deaf people's reflections on the effects of my presence thus revealed how they theorized deaf–deaf relationships and expectations, what it meant to show "good behavior," and which values were important for them. They led me to question how I should interpret those researcher effects. Was this because they want to behave better when outsiders are there? Was my presence a refreshing new experience or distraction? Did they feel more united as deaf group when a (deaf) researcher investigated their deaf experiences? Did I unconsciously and unintentionally confirm and boost their DEAF SAME intuition?

Being a magnet for deaf people and conversations about being deaf led me to wish I could be a fly on the wall to see what deaf–deaf and deaf–hearing interactions were like without my presence. Also, if only that fly could understand spoken Akan, I would have been able to learn more about what hearing people say about deaf people. While deaf people often complained about hearing people discriminating against them in daily life (such as insulting them), I rarely observed such discrimination. Did hearing people also behave "better" when I was around? Also, did hearing and deaf people perhaps have more contact with each other when I was not around? After all, when I was present, many deaf people preferred to talk with me or with other deaf people (who joined our gathering or whose conversation I was joining) than with hearing people.

There were other obvious limitations in my understanding: I am deaf, but I am not Adamorobee, not Ghanaian, and not black. I am deaf, but I did not grow up with sign language. I am deaf and I can read; I am educated, while they were not. I am deaf and I married a deaf person without

any problem, a right that they could not enjoy. In short, I was an insider in terms of being biologically deaf and having certain social experiences that come with it, but I was an outsider in most other domains. The latter became especially clear with regard to our differences in access to financial capital. Even though I was a student and not yet earning money, I had a laptop and a camera, I lived in a "rich country" and had more access to financial capital. This gave rise to increasing expectations of (financial) support, and deaf people argued that I was DEAF SAME and therefore had the obligation to help. This caused difficulties with regard to my being accepted and tolerated in Adamorobe (see chapter 8 for an elaborate account of this problem).

As a result of my positionality and research theme, I experienced a constant tension between "identifying a focus" and preventing that focus from becoming "too deaf." I often caught myself wondering: "Is this deaf-specific?" with regard to behavior, spatial practices, attitudes, and beliefs. During the highly selective process of writing, I found myself disregarding data that was not so much associated with being deaf. If the deaf people from Adamorobe were able to read this book, they might be surprised about the strong focus on deaf experiences. For them, life in Adamorobe was so much more than "being a deaf person." It meant being a member of an extended family, being a farmer, hating the Ga (the neighboring ethnic group), and being afraid of witches. Most of the time they were *not* talking about "deaf issues"; even when meeting each other in deaf-only conversations, they were mostly discussing what was happening in their village. Similarly, I recognize that it is potentially problematic that I often use the phrase "the deaf people," as it might signal that deaf people in Adamorobe are a unified and undifferentiated group (which they naturally are not). "The deaf people" is a generalization that gradually happened in the process of looking for patterns in Adamorobe's deaf people's experiences and utterances. I have tried to point out individual variations where relevant, however.

This book thus comprises *my representation of my observations and our conversations during my visit in Adamorobe, not a representation of Adamorobe deaf people's everyday life*. My position as (deaf) outsider with a background in Deaf Studies and anthropology was important in that I asked (often unexpected) questions, stimulated my interlocutors to elaborate on certain themes, to tell me certain stories. We revisited the same themes over and over again and a (highly ambiguous) picture started

to emerge. In this book, I am presenting quotes, situation descriptions, and transcripts of dialogues to illustrate and evoke what I saw and what we discussed; but again, these are the interpretations and translations of an outsider with a necessarily limited understanding of local culture, kinship structures, history, and language. Also, since this research happened during a particular moment in time (2008–2009), deaf people in Adamorobe might tell other stories and lay different emphasis in their present discourses.

Deaf Space and Deaf Sociality

In the previous sections I have illustrated that the experience of being deaf in Adamorobe (and the researcher's hearing status) is an important aspect in these people's social lives. However, an assumption made by several early visitors and linguists in shared signing communities is that in these communities, no Deaf culture, community, or identity exists. This has led to simplified conclusions such as that in these communities, "being deaf itself is irrelevant, as deaf people have access to everyone in the village."[28] Authors have reasoned that if deaf people can use sign language with the hearing people who surround them in their daily lives, they do not *need* social relationships with deaf people in particular.[29]

I suggest that, on the contrary, deaf people in shared signing communities engage in deaf social relationships easily in everyday life *because* they are part of a shared signing community. Because of the high number of deaf people in these dense communities, they automatically meet other deaf people in everyday life. Evidence that deaf people in at least some shared signing communities actually do identify with each other and seek each other out is typically downplayed by arguing that these deaf social interactions and relations cannot be described by using Deaf Studies' founding concepts, Deaf culture, Deaf identity, or Deaf community.

The most important example is that, first, in shared signing communities, deaf people do not organize themselves in large deaf-only events or organizations, and second, that deaf identity is not seen as primordial or hierarchically more important than the family. Since deaf people in shared signing communities are well embedded within their hearing families, they may resist the creation of formal deaf-based support networks for financial assistance, income generation, and social security (although see Marsaja's account on Bengkala in Bali).[30] However, that does not mean that existing deaf-based social relationships are nonexistent, irrelevant, or meaningless. I argue that the problem is one of terminology and classifications, and

I suggest that the alternative terminology of *deaf space* and *deaf sociality* works better to frame deaf social interactions and relationships.

The term *deaf sociality*, coined by Friedner, refers to deaf people interacting with each other, having social relationships with each other, and/or having orientations toward each other.[31] "Deaf sociality" is more broad and inclusive than the founding concepts of Deaf Studies such as "Deaf identity," "Deaf world," "Deaf community," and "Deaf culture." Murray suggests that the oralist rhetoric (i.e., that deaf people should only speak and not sign) and assimilation of deaf people in hearing environments have (ironically) given a push to the understanding of a Deaf world, culture, or community as a closed sphere, especially in the twentieth century.[32]

The concepts "Deaf culture/community/world" are exclusive, and their persistent and often uncritical use is a wider problem in deaf-related writing. These terms are particularly inappropriate when used with regard to shared signing communities, where oralist or other divisive ideologies and practices have apparently not had significant influence (yet). Therefore, these communities are splendid examples of the shortcomings of the separate "Deaf worlds" or "Deaf cultures" paradigm in framing how deaf people experience and describe relationships with deaf and hearing people.

The title of this book suggests the use of another relatively new concept: "deaf space." Gulliver writes that although deaf people inhabit the same physical spaces as hearing people when working, eating, drinking, shopping, and so on, signing deaf people also produce special spaces when they engage in deaf sociality, that is, "deaf spaces."[33] In writing about deaf spaces as *produced*, Gulliver was inspired by Henri Lefebvre's magnum opus *The Production of Space*.[34] Some authors have described deaf spaces as a kind of "safe space" in opposition to a hostile, unaccommodating, marginalizing, and disabling hearing environment.[35] However, like Gulliver, I suggest that deaf spaces are not produced in the first place *because of these negative experiences*, even though these experiences are internalized in how deaf spaces are produced, experienced, described, and depicted.

I argue that instead, deaf spaces are produced in the first place because deaf people share their embodiment, their first language, *their way of being*. I therefore clearly distinguish deaf spaces from deaf–hearing spaces in which sign language is used. The dynamics and expectations with regard to language use, way of social interaction, and values are different in deaf spaces from those in deaf–hearing visual communication

spaces; at least they were in Adamorobe. For these reasons, deaf people in Adamorobe described their interactional spaces as being "deaf specific." They had certain expectations and fostered certain values linked with the shared experience of being deaf. In other words: while deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe signed together, it is *only the deaf who can be deaf* (and produce deaf spaces).

Interestingly, Adamorobe deaf people's descriptions of themselves and their place in society took similar forms as the "co-equality" discourses of nineteenth-century deaf Americans. *Co-equality* means that deaf people as individuals have their place in larger society; they are able to be successful and productive, capable workers, family members, and citizens in larger society *but without being submerged in it*: they also are members of a sign-language using community (hence the "*co*" in "co-equality"). The idea of *equality* (with hearing people) in "co-equality" does not mean that deaf people are (or should aspire to be) *the same* as hearing people, but means "to be equal in a manner of their own choosing."[36] Rather than the discourses on "integration/assimilation" *or/versus* "separate community/culture" (such as the earlier mentioned concepts "Deaf culture" and "Deaf community"), "co-equality" *incorporates, emphasizes, and transcends both dimensions*. Significant in Murray's descriptions of co-equality is his regular referencing to "Deaf spaces," (although he does not explicitly define or describe the "deaf space" concept as a wider framework), for example as found below:

> Co-equality should not be read to mean Deaf and hearing people sought to come together in an idealized mainstream, but of Deaf spaces and non-Deaf spaces as being mutually constitutive in the lives of Deaf individuals and of Deaf-centered spaces necessarily being influenced by ideas in the societies in which these spaces existed.[37]

Murray uses "co-equality" in a national (American) context of literate, educated, widely scattered deaf people sharing their deaf social and linguistic identities in not only local and national but also transnational and thus cosmopolitan contexts. However, the abstract version of co-equality, i.e., the understanding of "Deaf lives as being influenced both by Deaf-centered spaces and by larger society,"[38] could just as easily be applied to the context of Adamorobe. The deaf people from Adamorobe see themselves as part of wider society and as equal to hearing people, but they are also proud to be deaf sign language users who have an existential bond with each other.

Thus, rather than describing a separate Deaf world or Deaf culture in Adamorobe, I find the concept of "deaf sociality" useful, to point to the existence of social bonds between deaf people and to pinpoint that these bonds are experienced differently from deaf–hearing relationships. I use the concept of "deaf space" to frame *how deaf sociality is produced in space*. The book describes my interpretation of the production of different deaf spaces in Adamorobe, discourses related to these spaces, and how both have changed through time.

The Book

In this book, I aim for an accessible and descriptive style of writing, deliberately not inserting many theoretical interpretations or interventions until the conclusion. I also avoid making comparisons between Adamorobe deaf lives and deaf lives in Western settings. While the contrast between Adamorobe and Western contexts certainly motivated and triggered me to do this research project, comparison was not the *aim* of the project.

On another but unrelated note, when narrating historical events and processes in Adamorobe, I mention quantitative information such as years and numbers. Most of this information is based on competing accounts of oral history, hence I was uncertain about the amount of detail to include. In order to offer the reader some rough estimates and time frames, I mention some of the quantitative historical material that I gathered, but with a caveat. It is safest to understand and treat this information as approximations or even guesses, not as truthful claims.

To be able to differentiate deaf from hearing people in this book, it should be noted that all the people who are called by their names are deaf people, unless otherwise stated. People in Adamorobe have at least two first names: their day name (i.e., the day of the week that they were born) and a second name, after an elder from the family. In the day names, the gender is easily identifiable (see table 1.2).

An example of a full name then, is Kofi Boahene. The women's names often have a similar core as the men's, but often end on "wa" or "bea," for example, Ofori becomes Oforiwa and Asare becomes Asabea.* If I only used one of a deaf person's two first names, it would often not be possible to

* These names are often written down phonetically and consequently did not seem to have a fixed written form, so Okumbia and Okobea were the same person, or Esabia and Asabea; Apetere, Obuture, or Obutwe.

Table 1.2. Day Names in Akan Culture.

Day	Male	Female
Monday	Kwadwo	Adwoa
Tuesday	Kwabena	Abena
Wednesday	Kwaku	Akua
Thursday	Yaw	Yaa
Friday	Kofi	Afua
Saturday	Kwame	Ama
Sunday	Kwasi	Akosua

identify whom I am talking about, because people often share either the same day name or the elder name, such as Kofi Pare, Kofi Boahene, and Kwasi Boahene. Therefore, for most people I will use both names. Sometimes names are turned around, as Asare Kwabena instead of Kwabena Asare. In some cases when a person has an elder name that he/she does not share with another deaf person (such as Owusua or Okoto), I use that name only.

Also, one person can have even more names, such as nicknames and Christian names, and some younger, schooled deaf people were better known by their Christian name rather than their Akan name, such as Naomi and Belinda. Hence, for these people I use their Christian name. Some deaf people, such as the late Abena Mumu, had "mumu" or "mum" as nickname, which means "deaf." The same phenomenon is visible in deaf people's name signs: they always first sign "deaf" and then the person's name sign, as such deaf and hearing people were distinguished on the level of their name.

When I do not mention a deaf person's approximate age, the reader can assume that the person involved is aged between 30 and 50 approximately, like the majority of the deaf people in Adamorobe.

I begin setting the scene in chapter 2, offering information on Adamorobe's geographical situation and its social, historical, political, economic, and religious life. I also describe what is known about the historical presence of deaf people in this village, the causes of their being deaf, demographic facts about them, and some features of AdaSL.

Chapter 3 starts with a narration of a morning in a compound house, in order to shine light on everyday deaf–hearing interactions. I illustrate which social contexts were (made) accessible for deaf people and which were not and include reflections of hearing people on AdaSL and on their interactions with deaf people, which they contrasted with life outside the village.

Deaf people produced deaf spaces, and chapter 4 highlights how and where in the village this happened, and how deaf people gave meaning to

these spaces, authoring the DEAF SAME discourse. I highlight how historical processes such as capitalism, land commodification, and processes of immigration were said to have impacted on deaf–hearing and deaf–deaf relationships.

The large presence of deaf people in Adamorobe was explained in multifarious and ambiguous ways. Stories and explanations that I encountered in print and in the field are set out in chapter 5. I describe how these discourses were utilized, negotiated, and renegotiated during my conversations with the people from Adamorobe. Deaf people's feelings with regard to being deaf are discussed as well.

In Adamorobe, deafness was given meaning and deaf people were situated in multiple ways, but the village also carried a stigma as a "deaf village." This stigma played a role in the marriage ban for deaf people: in order to avoid producing new deaf offspring where possible, they were not allowed to marry each other. Chapter 6 reports on discourses surrounding the law and describes how deaf people both challenged and complied with this law.

Outsiders have singled out the deaf people from Adamorobe. In church and educational contexts, deaf people were separated from hearing people and Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) has been introduced. This process, the relationships between deaf school children and deaf adults, and their views of both on AdaSL and GSL are described in chapter 7.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), churches, and visitors brought charitable donations and initiated development projects aimed at the deaf people from Adamorobe. In chapter 8, I suggest that the consequences of the construction of deaf people as "needy" created an economic and ideological division between deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe.

In the wake of these patterns, visitors and researchers were received in Adamorobe in ambiguous ways. I describe stories of visits of white deaf tourists, deaf Ghanaians, and researchers in chapter 9, concluding with the question to which extent tourists were deemed welcome in the village.

In the concluding chapter, I summarize how the production of deaf space in Adamorobe seems to have changed through time, and I situate the socio-historical trends and patterns that affected deaf people's situation in Adamorobe in a broader frame. I then try to imagine what the future of deaf spaces and deaf people in Adamorobe might look like.

Adamorobe: An Akan Village in the Akwapim Valley

2

> One day, very long ago, there was a man who came down from Aburi, on a hunting expedition, because there were a lot of game animals in the forest like grasscutters, antelopes, springbok, and other small animals. When the man came, he was surprised to see a lot of pineapples over here and exclaimed: "Yie! This place is full of ripe pineapples!" He peeled one and tasted that it was very sweet. When he went back to Aburi, all attempts by his wife to persuade him to eat proved futile. The man explained: "Over there, I've discovered a very delicious fruit. I got satisfied after taking some, hence my inability to eat as expected." One of his brothers agreed to come along with him and they made a hamlet over here so they could live here as hunters, regularly transporting the meat to Aburi. Whenever people demanded to know how he came by food, he responded: *"Medan m'aborobe,"* meaning: "I always depend on my pineapples," hence the name Adamorobe. (Abbreviated version of a story told by the late Agnes Bomo and recorded by Nyst in 2004)

The name of this hunter was Nana Akotuako Opare,* and Aburi is a town located on the Akwapim ridge in South Ghana, about 4.5 km westward from Adamorobe and 40 km from the coastal capital Accra (see map 1). It is located in the South of Ghana, which consists of coastal plains and rainforests, while the Northern geography is dominated by savanna. The South is economically more developed and more densely populated than the North. The country is politically organized into ten regions, and Aburi and Adamorobe are located in the Eastern region. In 2010, Ghana had a population of 24.5 million people, of which 4 million lived in Accra.[39]

The people who founded Adamorobe were Akan, the largest ethnic group in Ghana. Almost half of the Ghanaians are Akans (47.5 percent in the 2010 Census),[40] a group that consists of a number of divisions—including the Ashanti, Fante, Akim, and Akwamu—sharing political, social, cultural, and religious institutions and speaking dialects of a

* I encountered other ways of writing his name: Nana Tete Paegya and Oketepeogya.

common language, Akan (also called Twi). The founders (and the majority of the population) from Adamorobe were Akwamu Akan, speaking Southern Akwapim Twi. Examples of other (smaller) ethnic groups in Southern Ghana are the Ga-Adangbe, Krobo, and Ewe.

The Akwamu Akan and the Akwapim area experienced an eventful history. From the fifteenth century, there was an increasing presence of European traders at the Ghanaian coast, and the Akwamu Akans came to control the trade with the European trade forts in Accra and occupied the Akwapim ridge from the seventeenth century. In 1731, the Akwamu were defeated by the Akim (another Akan division), who took over the area and created the Akwapim State. Subsequently, in 1742, the Ashanti (who established the most extensive and longest lasting empire of the Akan) overran the Akim.[41] In 1772, Nana Akotuako Opare came down from Aburi and established Adamorobe.

The people of Akwapim were in constant wars to break away from the Ashanti empire, which culminated in the victory at Akantamansu (also called Katamansa; see map 1) in 1826, when a coalition of the Akim, Ga, Akwamu, British, and Danes fought the Ashanti and drove them away from the area. This war features in several of the stories explaining the deafness in Adamorobe (see chapter 5). As exemplified by the British and Danish involvement in this war, European traders became increasingly involved in political affairs. The British were successful in taking jurisdiction over the Akwapim State in 1850.

The Presbyterian Basel mission laid the framework upon which the British later applied their governing structure. Beginning in 1835, they established churches, schools, and hospitals and were active in trade and enterprise.[42] The British defeated the Ashanti in 1874 and annexed the Ashanti kingdom in 1902. Cocoa became the number-one cash crop that was traded from the Gold Coast. The British had problems attaining full jurisdiction over the area, however, due to continual resistance. In 1957, Ghana was the first sub-Saharan nation in Africa to gain independence, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah.

Meanwhile, the hunting post that Adamorobe once was had grown into one of the many hunter-farmer villages known as "Aburi-villages."[43] During my research, Adamorobe was still strongly allied to its "mother" Aburi. Traditional festivals such as Odwira (the yam festival) were attended in Aburi, and Aburi chiefs and priests attended important ceremonies in Adamorobe. The name sign for Aburi (and the area around Aburi) was the

same as for Adamorobe, signifying the use of hooked drumsticks in Aburi and its satellite villages. Many people from Adamorobe had relatives in or around Aburi, had lived there, or had married there.

For trading and buying products, many people from Adamorobe had shifted to Madina, a growing suburb of Accra about 20 km from Adamorobe (see map 1), because of its large market and because of the easy and regular public transport running between Adamorobe and Madina. Public transport was unavailable on the bumpy dirt road uphill to Aburi, which was traditionally reached on foot. Adamorobe is also located very close to the ethnic border between Ga and Akan: the nearest village (3 km to the east) is Oyibi, which is a Ga village (see map 1).

In the 2000 census, 71 percent of the 1,272 respondents (out of 1,356 recorded inhabitants in total) were born in Adamorobe and 86 percent were Akan.[44] At the end of 2008, Adamorobe consisted of about 2,500 people, many of whom were relatively recent immigrants. Intensive migration processes are in fact inherent to Ghanaian history and continue to the present, especially North–South migration, cocoa frontier settlement, and migration to the capital Accra.[45] New immigrants in Adamorobe were often non-Akan and came from different ethnic groups from all over Ghana. A number of immigrants came to Adamorobe in search of employment: since the early 1990s, people from all over Ghana have come to Adamorobe to extract stones from the Akwapim hills at the edges of the town. Others migrated to Adamorobe or its vicinity after buying lands there, often because of its proximity to the capital.

While the founders of Adamorobe were hunters, hunting has greatly declined, and subsistence farming is the main occupation (though also in decline). Most farmlands, where mainly corn, cassava, and yam were cultivated, were located on the surrounding hills (map 2). While Adamorobe once consisted of jungle, the valley was deforested and densely populated, marked by the white area in map 2. The stars show where deaf people lived during my research, and how many of them lived at each location.

The population census of 2000 registered 293 dwellings in Adamorobe. Although there were about 100 detached and semi-detached houses, the village mostly comprised brick or clay houses in a traditional compound structure (162 dwellings in the 2000 census).[46] Compound housing means rooms or huts built around an inner courtyard (figure 2.1), where people do everything in the open air (e.g., wash clothes, prepare food, and socialize). Most kitchens were bamboo-and-wood sheds where corn was dried in a

Figure 2.1. Deaf people in the courtyard of a compound.

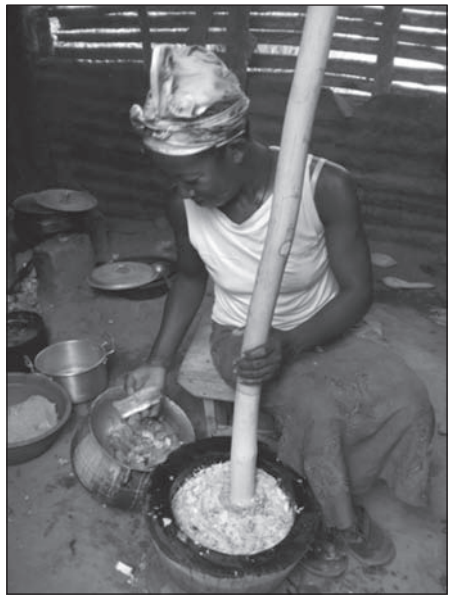


Figure 2.2. Akua Fiankobea pounding *fufu* in her kitchen.

small attic above the cooking fire (figure 2.2). Scattered between the compounds were bathrooms composed of bricks, corrugated iron, or bamboo, constructed as square shields where people washed themselves with a bucket of river or pump water (figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Owusua in her bathroom.

Figure 2.4. The market square.

Animals such as goats, sheep, chickens, and a few dogs and cats scratched around everywhere. There was electricity, some people had a car, a television and/or a mobile phone, but there was no sewage system, almost no telephone lines, and no Internet. On the market square (map 2 and figure 2.4) and along the paths of Adamorobe stood tables and small shops where people sold prepared meals such as *jollof* rice, "red red" (local dish made of beans) and *kenkey*, but also fried snacks, fish, eggs, tomatoes, onions, and other products.

Kinship and Marriage

Contrary to other ethnic groups in Ghana where descent is patrilineal, the Akan consist of eight large dispersed matrilineal clans, which are groups of

people who descend from a common ancestor through the female line. Fathers and their children do not belong to the same lineage, because in this system, people receive their lineage membership from their mother. A lineage or *abusua* is a localized subdivision of a clan in which common descent is traced back up to ten to twelve generations, and is the basic unit of descent, succession, and inheritance and of other political, ritual, and legal purposes.[47] In Adamorobe there were six Akan (matri)lineages of four different clans: the Agona, Asakyiri, Aduana, and Asona.

A matrilineal system is not the same as a matriarchy: although descent does not run through men, authority does. Men have authority over the women and children in their matrilineage rather than over their wives and children.[48] Men pass on property to their siblings or to their sisters' children. Someone's mother's brother is therefore a powerful and important figure in someone's life. This does not mean that a father has a minimal role or minimal significance for his children, however. Children are said to get their name, spirit, personality, and moral training from their father. In addition, children belong to their father's *ntoro* group, which is the Akan system of patrifiliation: a group sharing certain surnames, customary norms of amity, marriage prohibitions, and certain rituals for the *ntoro* divinity that people share with their father.[49]

In Akan society, there are several rules about whom one can marry and whom one cannot.[50] I will explain only those that are important to understand in the context of this book. First, polygyny is commonly practiced. Traditionally, the wives take turns cooking for their husband and the man takes turns in sleeping with each wife in her own room, typically in his own compound or in the wife's maternal compound. It is seen as a sign of wealth and prestige for a man to have more than one wife, which is the privilege of a minority.[51] Joseph Okyere guessed that about 20 to 40 percent of men in Adamorobe had more than one wife. Polygyny is less common today than in the past, probably because of the Christian ideal of monogamy, growing (economic) individualism, and the proliferation of living as nuclear families (i.e., father, mother, and children) rather than as extended families.

Second, marrying someone in one's own lineage or clan is not allowed. Also marrying a parallel cousin, meaning one's mother's sister's child or one's father's brother's child, is not allowed. The term *parallel cousin* also includes, for example, the mother's mother's sister's daughter's daughter; that is, the uterine children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of

one woman through daughters or daughters' daughters are "classificatory" siblings. Also, two women from the same lineage cannot marry the same husband or marry two brothers or two parallel cousins.

Third, marrying one's cross cousin is allowed (and was in the past preferred), that is, one's mother's brother's child or one's father's sister's child. The benefit is that property remains in the same family. Marrying cross cousins has become increasingly unpopular since the 1940s, however, the enlargement of the freedom of movement, choices of education and occupation, and the spread of Christianity meant that more people want to be free to choose their partner and are less willing to marry someone so familiar.[52]

Fourth, in Adamorobe, there was an additional marriage rule. In 1975 Chief Nana Kwakwa Asiampong II decreed that it was not permissable for deaf people to marry each other. They had to marry hearing people in order to minimize the chance of producing deaf offspring. There was a tension between deaf people's subjection to and resistance against this law, a tension that could be observed in the existence of relationships between deaf partners, and abortions when these unions lead to pregnancies. In chapter 6 I analyze these tensions in depth, as well as the historical background of this law.

While the process of intermarriage between the six matrilineages in Adamorobe had probably been going on from the establishment of the village, it was not unusual for people from Adamorobe to marry outside the village. Many people had partners from other ethnic groups such as Ga, Krobo, Ewe, or Northerners, whom they met during funeral ceremonies (funerals are big events in Ghana, as opposed to weddings), in churches, at the market, at their places of work, at school, and so on.

For married couples, there are several forms of residence that are common among the Akan: living in the husband's family (i.e., his mother's) compound (patrilocality); living in the wife's family compound (matrilocality); each partner living in his/her family compound (natalocality or duolocality); and nuclear family dwellings (which is a more recent phenomenon).[53] Thus, people from different generations who are sharing a compound and forming a household are typically related in the maternal line, or are married to someone in that compound.

A customary Akan wedding consists of an agreement concluded with money and gifts from the man to the woman and her family (*tiri nsa*), and is not celebrated elaborately.[54] For the Akan, marriage is no more than

a contract that gives the husband sexual rights to the wife, makes him the legal father of any children born during this marriage, states that the wife has to perform services for him (i.e., cooking, washing, etc.), and states that the husband has to provide the wife with food, clothing, care in case of illness, and so on.[55] In Akan culture, it is not the marriage bond, but the matrilineage that is most important: "whatever he wishes to do in life, the Akan turns to his lineage (*abusua*) for help; kindred consciousness is the most important fact in his life."[56] Akan culture is, however, undergoing drastic changes: sometimes someone chooses a focus on the nuclear family rather than the *abusua*.[57]

Marriages are often temporary and even during old age, divorce is common.[58] The Akan marriage contract is easy to break. The *tiri nsa* is not expensive and partners are typically economically independent. The husband and wife typically do not own or inherit money or property together, nor put their incomes together.[59] Reasons to divorce (in half of the cases initiated by women) include infertility, cruelty, immorality, and carelessness.[60] Many people who have a sexual relationship omit to fulfill the traditional customs to marry, especially after a divorce or with their second and third wife in a polygynous union, for the following possible reasons: the disapproval of the marriage by one of the partners' lineages, for example, because the Akan marriage rules are broken; not having enough financial resources to pay the *tiri nsa*; wanting a "trial relationship" with their partner before marrying; and/or not intending to be in a long-lasting union. Bleek adopted the term *free marriage* for a situation in which such a sexual relationship is publicly displayed (such as people living together, sleeping together, eating together, having children together) and recognized, but the customs have not been (fully) performed.[61] It is not always known to others whether a couple is contractually married or in a free marriage.

All this does not mean that it is not important to get married at all; marriage is indeed regarded as an important turning point in social maturation.[62] Also, even more than being married, it is important to have children, otherwise one is "incomplete."

There was an economic and capitalist development in the Akwapim area that is important to consider with regard to kinship, marriage, and residence, namely, cocoa farming on uninhabited and undeveloped lands west of the Akwapim ridge. There, the best cocoa-growing area of the world was found, which led to cocoa being the number-one cash crop in the Gold Coast trade in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[63] People did not need

an accumulation of capital to be able to buy a piece of land, because the chiefs who sold these lands accepted payments in installments, generated by the yields of the cocoa farms. In the Akwapim, cocoa farming resulted in a massive migration of people into these pristine forest areas. These people resided on their cocoa farms under humble circumstances to cultivate the lands, which they also used for subsistence farming. They remained attached to their hometowns, however, for family and ritual life: "They work on their lands like sailors taking very long voyages."[64] Even people who were born in the cocoa farming area saw themselves as "camping" there.[65]

The practice of cocoa farming extended over the generations, with ups and downs in the patterns of migrating and returning, and when the Akwapim lands were sold out in 1914, the cocoa frontier expanded into Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, and the Western region.[66] Therefore, many people from Adamorobe told me they had deaf and hearing relatives all over Southern Ghana, working on family lands or working as migrant laborers or sharecroppers. The traffic between Adamorobe and the cocoa farms has declined in comparison to the past, especially since 1983, when there was a catastrophic bush fire that destroyed most cocoa farms in Ghana. Also, the economic profits of cocoa processing became too low for many farmers. However, some of them married locals and resided there permanently.

The Deaf Population

When General Sir Alexander Drummond did a national survey for the Commonwealth Society for the Deaf in 1961, he noted the high incidence of deafness in Adamorobe.[67] From then on, several other researchers and visitors have reported the high prevalence of deaf people in Adamorobe (see table 2.1). A number of medical explanations of the deafness in Adamorobe have been reported by these visitors. David et al., Osei-Sekyereh, and Amedofu et al. did audiometric tests in Adamorobe; the latter reported that all the deaf people were either "profoundly deaf" or "totally deaf."[68] David et al. also looked for "congenital anomalies" by inspecting the head, neck, and skin of a number of deaf and hearing people. However, it was not until a team of researchers from Kumasi and Hamburg (Meyer et al.) took blood, sweat, and skin samples from deaf people in Adamorobe in 2000 or 2001 that it was discovered that a connexin 26 R143W mutation was associated with the "recessive sensorineural deafness" in Adamorobe.[69]

Several researchers have tried to explain how it happened that a stable pool of deafness was established in Adamorobe. In 1972, David emphasized *the*

Table 2.1. Researchers and Visitors Who Have Reported the High Prevalence of Deaf People in Adamorobe.

Year	Population of Adamorobe	Number of Deaf People	Percentage of Deaf People	Researcher/Visitor
1960	405			
1961		45	11 % (1960 Census)	Sir Alexander Drummond
1970–71(?)		34		Osei-Sekyereh
1984	1171			
1996		38		Amedofu, Brobby, and Ocansey
2001	1356	35	2.6 %	Nyst
2003		45		Frimpong
2008	2500	43	1.6 %	Myself
2012	3500	41	1.2 %	Myself

Note: Some sources on Adamorobe only mention a percentage such as 10 or 15% and no absolute numbers of deaf/hearing inhabitants, so these are not included in the table.

isolation of Adamorobe because it is located in a valley, which he considered an ill-conditioned situation: "malaria, intermarriage, cut off from the surrounding world."[70] He even suggested that deafness in Adamorobe was contagious. However, the practice of cross-cousin marriages, which is probably (partially) accountable for the spread of the "deaf gene" in Adamorobe, is a common practice in Ghana and it is not associated with isolation. Moreover, Adamorobe is neither geographically nor socially isolated, as seen in its relationship with Aburi, its proximity to Aburi and Accra, and the mobility of the inhabitants as demonstrated, for example, by cocoa migration.

The genetic research team offered an alternative explanation: *natural selection*. Meyer et al. described how people carrying the mutated gene had an alternate skin and sweat production, creating "a more robust mechanical skin barrier against pathogen invasion, trauma and insect bites."[71] Through a process of evolutionary balancing and counterbalancing, the gene causing the "superior" skin and sweat was selected, even though the carrier would be deaf. They compared this with certain red blood cell disorders which protect against malaria and thus counterbalance the disadvantages of this condition. Rather than concurring with this genetic determinism, Nyst suggested a *founder effect* from the early settlers in Adamorobe, analogous with Martha's Vineyard, where migrants from Kent (England) brought the "deaf gene" to the island and intermarried.[72] The explanations offered by people from Adamorobe themselves were multifarious and are described in chapter 5.

What stands out in table 2.1 is that while the number of deaf people remained more or less stable, the percentage of deaf people strongly declined. This decline is the result of a dramatical growth in the overall population of Adamorobe, the result of both procreation and immigration. Still, 1.2 percent is significantly higher than the incidence of deafness in other parts of Ghana: the 2010 census reported that 0.4 percent of people in Ghana had a hearing disability.[73] Another notable fact is that while Nyst counted 35 deaf people in 2001, I counted 43 of them,* which seems to indicate a sudden rise of the deaf population. However, I knew of only one deaf birth since 2001 and at least three deaths, so as many as ten deaf people were on my list eight years later but not on hers. I found out that three deaf people had migrated back from cocoa farms and that Nyst missed at least two deaf people in her count who lived in Adamorobe but did not interact with other deaf people.** Regarding the other five people, it is not clear whether Nyst missed them in her count or if they were temporarily elsewhere in 2001.

These and some other findings made me realize that the total number of deaf people born in Adamorobe, or born to people who came from Adamorobe, might have been higher than it appears from the available reports. First, *not all deaf people living in Adamorobe were born there.* At least two deaf men from surrounding villages came to Adamorobe to marry deaf women and had deaf children with them. Samuel Adjei, a deaf person from Accra, moved to Adamorobe and married a deaf woman and had hearing children. The specific gene mutation in Adamorobe was also found in 90 percent of a sample of 121 genetically deaf children from wider Ghana,[74] which may explain the fact that the two male deaf migrants produced deaf children in their unions with deaf women from Adamorobe.

Second, *not all deaf people born in Adamorobe live in Adamorobe.* At the time of my research, at least eleven deaf people born in Adamorobe lived

* With the help of Joseph Okyere, I identified in total seventy-nine names of dead or living deaf people in or from Adamorobe. Forty-three were living in Adamorobe or at the boarding school in Mampong, eleven were living elsewhere and twenty-five were deceased, several of them as a child or young adult.

** I found out only after six months of research that there was a young deaf woman whom I had never heard of, because she was intellectually disabled and was not included in deaf people's interactions.

outside Adamorobe: three married deaf or hearing partners from Accra or Aburi and moved out and eight lived in cocoa areas, some of them had married in the cocoa areas, had brought forth both deaf and hearing offspring, and resided there. In the past when cocoa migrations were more frequent and intense, the number of deaf people who were temporarily away must have been very high. Almost all deaf people living in Adamorobe have spent shorter or longer periods of their life on a cocoa farm, either in their childhood with their families, or as temporary migrants on a contract basis.*

Third, *I could find no information about numbers of deaf people before 1960.* The number might have been higher back then.** Fourth, *the deaf population is ageing.* Because deaf (and many hearing) people in Adamorobe typically did not know their ages, I attempted to calculate the deaf people's average age based on ages estimated by their families and some documents (which only a few deaf people had), combining this with information about relative ages (i.e., who was older/younger than who). The result was a mean age of 38 (in 2008), which was a much higher number than Amedofu et al.'s calculation ten years earlier: they reported a mean age of 32.4 (although they were not able to include all the deaf people).[75] Even without this calculation, it seems to be a logical conclusion that the deaf population is aging, given that there were very few young deaf children.

The aging of the deaf population is probably due to a dual cause that impeded the internal circulation of the "deaf gene": Since 1975, deaf people had not been allowed to marry each other, because deaf–deaf marriages were said to bring forth deaf offspring; and the people from Adamorobe increasingly married immigrants and people from other ethnic groups. Following these findings, I suspect the total number of deaf people from Adamorobe (and thus not only the percentage) is declining rather than being stable.

The family trees that I gathered were incomplete and therefore not suitable for publication. However, I did find some patterns of how deafness appears in the families and marriage bonds of the forty-three deaf people in 2009.

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* Administrator chief Nana Gyasehene even estimated the number of deaf people that migrated for cocoa farming at three hundred people, which is probably an exaggerated number but it indicates the fact that the number of deaf emigrants was felt to be high.

** Ama Oforiwaa, one of the oldest (hearing) ladies in Adamorobe, guessed that in the first half of the century there were 60 to 100 deaf people in Adamorobe.

Deaf people and their parents:

- Thirty-one deaf people had hearing parents
- Three deaf people had one deaf parent
- Nine deaf people had two deaf parents

Present and past unions and their children:

- Deaf–deaf couples only had deaf children.
- Most deaf–hearing and hearing–hearing couples only had hearing children.
- Couples with at least one deaf child typically had more than one deaf child: twenty-six of the forty-three deaf people had one or more deaf siblings.
- Hearing–hearing couples with one or more deaf children typically also had hearing children.

Deaf people and their relationship status: While some deaf people in Adamorobe had customarily wed their partner, most deaf people were in "free marriages" with either hearing or deaf partners. Also, many of them had divorced previous deaf and hearing partners. In 2009, there were thirty deaf adults aged twenty or above (sixteen women and fourteen men), of whom:

- There were more single deaf men (64 percent) than women (43 percent).
- Being single was a more persistent reality for deaf men than for women: most deaf women had been in marriages with hearing (or sometimes deaf) partners for long periods, often in polygynous unions. I have no reliable information whether the percentage of "being second wife" (which is a less powerful position than being first wife) in these unions was higher for deaf than for hearing women. As such I cannot confirm what David et al. wrote: "Since polygamy occurs, a normally hearing man would take a deaf woman as his second wife."[76]
- As a result, 87.5 percent of the deaf women had children with one or more partners, while only 21 percent of the deaf men had at least one child.
- Even though deaf–deaf marriages were not permitted, 18 percent of the thirty deaf adults were in a "free marriage" with a deaf person, that is, there were four couples. Three of these four couples were childless.

Language and Translation

Due to the historical presence of deaf people in Adamorobe, a local sign language emerged. For a descriptive analysis of this language I refer the reader to Nyst's account on AdaSL.[77] Most deaf adults (numbering about thirty) aged over twenty-five were largely monolingual in AdaSL and nonliterate, and knew some GSL: they had been in contact with GSL for at least fifty years during short periods of formal education, and during church services (see chapter 7). No fingerspelling of words and names was used

by the deaf adults, and only to a small extent by the deaf schoolchildren. Most deaf schoolchildren and young adults under twenty-five (about ten at the time of my research) were bilingual in AdaSL and Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL), the latter being the language taught in schools for the deaf in Ghana, and had some basic literacy in English. Hearing people demonstrated varying rates of proficiency in AdaSL (see chapter 3), spoke one or more different spoken languages, such as Akan, English, and other Ghanaian languages, and were either nonliterate, semiliterate, or literate in English, Akan, and/or other languages.

The structure of AdaSL developed in a way that, according to Nyst, makes this sign language easier for hearing users to learn and understand than sign languages used by large groups of deaf signers (such as GSL).[78] For example when someone signs, "The car is coming/going," the person would sign "car" and then delineate the car's path with an index finger, rather than use a classifier (so that the hand becomes a car when delineating the path). Another example is that for example "two days/weeks/years" are not combined in one sign in which the different semantic elements are expressed simultaneously.

Simultaneous structures and classifiers would be more difficult to learn and produce for hearing users, who constitute by far the majority of AdaSL users. Nyst argues that it is probably for this reason that this language, which emerged in a situation of intense deaf–hearing contact, did not develop such structures (which does not mean that this language is therefore less developed!). Hearing people also co-produced the structure of AdaSL, which, Nyst reports, is thoroughly influenced by spoken Akan in mouth shapes, which figure in 15 percent of the signs and conventional gestures, and in parallel semantic and syntactic structures.[79] In my eyes, striking characteristics of AdaSL were the laxness of many handshapes and movements, and the large signing space used, as some signs were made on the legs, feet, back, and crotch. There was no regular use of fingerspelling nor did deaf signers ever replace a sign with a spoken word (although there were the above-mentioned Akan mouthings in AdaSL).

I came to master AdaSL enough to have conversations and conduct interviews with deaf people, but I naturally could not understand most conversations among themselves, which were often too loaded with "insider information" for me to understand fully. Having grown up together in Adamorobe, deaf people shared their history from birth till present and

back to their mutual ancestor and shared their culture and religion, and they knew the complex family and community ties in Adamorobe.

Thus, when they communicated, they acted out events from the past, demonstrated what they do on their (cocoa) farms and when talking about a specific god or festival, they referred shortly to what visibly happens. When referring to someone who lived in Adamorobe, they often just pointed in the directions of this person's residence and quickly impersonated the person's behavior. This all means that if I did not know the precise context, person, location, or event they were talking about, I could not completely comprehend the conversations between deaf and deaf, and deaf and hearing people, even though I came to know the lexicon of AdaSL relatively well.

Another striking feature in my eyes (and an obstacle for me when learning the language) was the high degree of macrofunctionality of the language: many AdaSL signs have a wide range of meanings.[80] For example, the sign for "elder/important/older/firstborn/authority/Monday/chief" is one and the same sign, as is the sign for "god/ghost/spirit." For the people involved it was apparently clear what others meant, because of shared context, history, and culture. But as for me, I was often not sure how to interpret the deaf people's stories, which were confusing for me particularly in the first months of the research.

When I tried to understand kin relationships between people in Adamorobe, this macrofunctionality posed a huge challenge (which I did not fully overcome). The signs for the concepts "woman/girl/mother," the concepts "boy/man/father," and the concepts "marriage/relationship" were in each case one and the same sign. In addition, the sign SAME was used for the terms "sibling/relative/clan/friend" *and* for other ways of having something in common (such as being deaf or being a woman). Thus, it was no easy task to unravel the family ties and other interpersonal relationships in Adamorobe when using AdaSL, and I kept on questioning deaf people in order to clarify these relationships, such as asking who had the same mother and who was the firstborn in a family, and who were friends rather than sisters, cousins, or clan-related. An illustration from the beginning of my field work:

> After a conversation about which families are related, I wanted to double check and I asked the five deaf people surrounding me: "So you are all SAME [i.e., family related]?" "Yes," signed Ama Korkor, "We are all SAME." "Her too?" I pointed at a deaf woman, whom I had just been told not to be related to them. She answered:

> "Yes, all of us!" I gave her a defeated look. Asare Kwabena explained: "We are all deaf, that is why we are all SAME." His facial expression showed me I had to interpret the sign as "friends" or "in common" this time. I wanted to start with: "But . . . ," but I smiled, shrugged my shoulders, and nodded.

The difficulties I experienced when interpreting the sign SAME are visible in a number of translated interview quotes and situation descriptions in this book where I use small caps (SAME) in order to indicate that it is a gloss rather than a translation. The macrofunctionality of kinship terms in AdaSL also complicated the documentation of family trees, which was further complicated by the fact that it was difficult to get hold of names, as all deaf adults and many hearing people were illiterate or semiliterate. In addition, kin relationships in Adamorobe were highly entangled and complex, and there was a generic use of kinship terms in Adamorobe not only by deaf but also by hearing people: for instance, hearing people would call their parallel cousin a brother/sister. And on top of this, I do not know spoken nor written Akan. Nonetheless, even though there were obvious limitations in my understanding, I experienced the research as fruitful as it led to the interpretations and insights that I share from the next chapter onwards. An understanding of key facts regarding political institutions, religion, education, employment, land ownership, and immigration in Adamorobe, however, will enrich the discussion of deaf lives in the village.

Political Institutions

The political powers of the village chiefs were partially taken away by the British when they ruled the Akwapim.[81] However, although the institution of chieftaincy has encountered many challenges, it was still in place during my research.[82] The chief's entourage consists of the Queenmother (who has an important role in installing and deposing the chief) and the *okyeame* (chief's spokesperson), called "linguist" in Ghanaian English.

There are several other high positions with their own duties and powers, such as administrational chief, war leader, treasure chief, and lineage head. The duties of a lineage head are the approval of heirs, management of family lands, and giving consent for marriages and divorces. Another position of power is household head. In the 2000 population census, 275 household heads were registered.[83] A household head is the man or woman most senior by age, generation, or status in a household, with duties to maintain cooperation, harmony, and cohesion in the household.[84] If the person most senior by age is considered incompetent for the task, someone else is selected.[85]

Since 1992, when a democratic government was installed, assembly members have also had certain duties in Adamorobe, to represent the people in the District Assembly, and to represent the chief when he/she is not present in the village. In Adamorobe, chiefs were provided by the Kwakwa Asiampong Asakyiri lineage, and I found that different chiefs were characterized by different attitudes toward the deaf inhabitants of the village. The chiefs of the last 50 years were Nana Osae Amantem, (?–1975), Nana Kwakwa Asiampong II (1975–1992), and Nana Osei Boakye Yiadom II (since 1992). Although Akan chiefs have usually been male, Nana Osei Boakye Yiadom II is female. (Women can become chief, if, for example, the male line becomes extinct.[86]) She is or was a human rights activist and ambassador in the United Nations and holds residences in Aburi and America. When away, her duties are assumed by her entourage and the assembly member.

In 2009, the chief had not been in Adamorobe for seven years, and in September of that year I observed a protest with a petition to depose the chief: people were unhappy with the way she obtained the position, felt she did not lead the village adequately, did not endeavor to develop Adamorobe, and caused divisions with the position she took in land litigation. The attempts to depose her were unsuccessful, and in 2011 efforts were undertaken to restore the relationship between the people of Adamorobe and their chief.

In addition to the female chief, in Akan culture, the Queenmother has a high and powerful position. A senior woman assists the lineage head, women can be assembly members and can be household heads (although the majority were men). While women were thus represented in Akan political structures, there were no deaf household heads or lineage heads, nor have there been any deaf chiefs or assembly members in Adamorobe. There were several senior deaf men who were the firstborn in their family and therefore would probably be household head if they were hearing.

Traditional Religion and Christianity

The political institutions of the Akan are closely interrelated with their religious beliefs and practices. For example, household heads have to perform rituals for family ancestors, and the chief and lineage heads have certain priestly functions. In Akan religion, there is a Supreme Being called *Nyame* in Akan or "God" in English, who is seen as the creator of the world and of other gods and spirits. *Nyame* is believed to have handed the

Figure 2.5. *Gye Nyame.*

cares of the world to the *abosom* ("divinities" or "small gods"). The *abosom* dwell in (or are associated with) natural objects such as rivers, ponds, forests, rocks, and the sea, and operate through shrines where they are served by designated priests and priestesses who can invoke them.[87] Adamorobe's first and ruling divinity is Nana Ayisi, and there is also a deaf god called Temina. There are stories that relate deafness in Adamorobe to these divinities (see chapter 5).

In contrast, there are no shrines to *Nyame*, and he is not the object of organized worship. He is believed to be omnipresent and is approached directly by individuals. He features in many proverbs, and the most famous Akan symbol, ubiquitous in Ghana on textiles but also on walls, stools, drums, and so on, is the *Gye Nyame* (see figure 2.5), meaning "except for God," symbolizing his omnipotence and immortality.[88]

Akan religion is also very much connected to the ancestral roots of the community. The ancestors are said to watch over the living and punish or reward them. People carry along their earthly status and honor after their death; those who led exemplary lives, had children, lived up to advanced age, and died a natural death qualify to become ancestors. They are addressed during periodic rites, but also in everyday life. It is a very common practice to offer the first morsel of food or the first drops of drink to them (by dropping or pouring it on the ground), that is, to perform libation.[89] There are both deaf and hearing ancestors, and I was told that deaf ancestors are addressed through sign language.

The deaf people I observed participated in regular religious ceremonies and had roles such as clearing the ground, arranging chairs, fetching water, directing people to seats, and holding goats or sheep to be killed.

Okyere and Addo[90] wrote that in Ghana, deaf girls were generally not included in nubility ceremonies (not practiced anymore) when their menstruation started, but this was not the case in Adamorobe. Speeches and prayers mostly happened in spoken Akan, but deaf people learned about religion from their signing hearing and deaf relatives, and recalled ceremonies—which seemed to have been a feast for the eyes—with great joy. They told me vivid stories, with their eyes twinkling, about festivals in Adamorobe and in the surrounding forest, especially about spirit possessions and dances, which they often started to demonstrate.

The majority of inhabitants of Adamorobe at the time of my research were Christians as well. While the mainstream Protestant churches (such as the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Methodists) were still popular, the Catholic Church (which is the biggest church in Ghana) and the African Independent Churches (AICs) were losing members.[91] The AICs, such as the Church of the Twelve Apostles and the African Faith Tabernacle, had proliferated since the 1880s. They synthesized African culture and Christianity into a new religious phenomenon. But the popularity of new Pentecostal-Charismatic churches (PCCs), such as Assembly of God and the Apostolic Church, had increased since the second half of the twentieth century, especially from the 1980s–1990s.[92]

Van der Geest states, "One can safely say that, apart from the *abusua* [i.e., lineage], churches are now the main bodies of social belonging."[93] In the 2010 population census, 71.2 percent of Ghanaians were Christians[94] (in contrast with 43% in 1960[95]) and 17.6 percent were Muslims. In Adamorobe, 83% of the people were recorded as Christians during the 2000 census and 1.6 percent of the village's population were reported to be Muslim.[96] In North Ghana, a much higher percentage of the population is Muslim.

The proliferation of Christianity was paired with a gradual decline in the organization and attendance of traditional religious ceremonies, but while these practices have weakened, they have not disappeared. People added Christianity to "the totality of the spiritual resources they already possess."[97] The Christian God was assimilated with the God of the ancestors, *Nyame*. Many African scholars have argued that African people knew about God before the Christian missionaries told them about the Christian God: "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the God and the Father of Jesus Christ, was assimilated with the God of the ancestors,"

that is, Nyame.[98] While the Akan do not define or describe the distant God that Nyame is, these notions were now refined. However, while the Christian God was depicted as a jealous one that did not tolerate "lesser gods," this is not how Nyame is understood, hence "the replacement of the exclusive notion of Western Christianity with the inclusive rule of African Religious Traditions."[99]

Thus, I learned that when people were talking about "God," it did not matter if they were referring to the Christian or Akan God, as these were one and the same in their eyes. In English, Nyame is translated as "God" and in AdaSL, people pointed to the sky. In the Akan origination myth, Nyame is associated with the sky (just like the Christian God), while the Earth Goddess Asase Yaa is associated with the land. In the course of this book, I use the English term "God."

Ghanaians show varying degrees of engagement with "traditional" practices, depending on the denomination they belong to. The Catholic Church and AICs maintained positive stances toward ancestor veneration, although the AICs rejected the ideology of the *abosom.*[100] The new PCCs, on the other hand, showed a striking intolerance toward African traditional religion, equating this with practicing demonization.[101] They mostly used English instead of local languages such as Akan. They also established and emphasized their place in an international network rather than focusing on (regions in) Ghana or Africa in particular.

The first Christian church establishment in Adamorobe was the Presbyterian Church in 1924, which the Anglican mission took over in 1937 when the Presbyterian missionaries were called back to Germany before World War II broke out. At the time of my research, there were about fifteen Christian church groups active in Adamorobe, which were mainstream Protestant churches, AICs as well as PCCs, most of them established after 1990. Some of them had their own buildings, others celebrated in the open air, and yet others used school classrooms.

An acquaintance of the chief of Adamorobe regarded the Christianization of Africa as "cultural imperialism," "brain washing," and "neo-colonialism," but called Ghana the foremost country in Africa that maintained its traditional religion and chieftaincy culture while incorporating Christian values.[102] He described his visits to Adamorobe as "a most fascinating experience, a true example of this so-called dichotomy working well together."[103] He attended the Methodist church in Adamorobe with Chief Nana Osei Boakye, where people wore traditional African clothes,

beat the drums and dance, as well as a traditional ceremony where the chief took the role of elder priestess. He commented that "the transition seemed quite normal to her, this switching of roles, this moving from one culture to the other was taken all in stride."[104]

One of the many church groups in Adamorobe is the Deaf Lutheran Church. What is significant is that deaf people were *united* in religious spaces as a group *based on their being deaf* and *separated* from hearing people in order to provide services in sign language. This did not happen in "traditional religion" nor in the Anglican Church where a number of deaf people were baptized. This was an initiative of deaf preachers from outside Adamorobe who regularly visited the village to organize services in American and Ghanaian Sign Languages. The history of church services for the deaf in Adamorobe goes back to the late 1950s or early 1960s, and in 1998 the Deaf Lutheran church group was established (previously, deaf people from other denominations such as the Presbyterian Church came to preach in Adamorobe).

The deaf pastor (called Kofi Anaman Akorful) who led this church group used a combination of GSL, AdaSL, and SEE (Signing Exact English); wrote in English; emphasized deaf people's place in the larger world, such as bonds with the Lutheran churches in America and Finland; and was very intolerant toward traditional religion. In chapter 7, I describe the services organized by this pastor, and how deaf people experienced and evaluated these.

In contrast with customary weddings, funerals are big events in Ghana, and today these often combine traditional religion and Christian prayers. Before the funeral, a group of men related to the deceased person dig the grave in one of the cemeteries around Adamorobe. The task of the women is to prepare the body, and to prepare *kenkey* for people who attend the funeral. Deaf women and men are expected to partake in these activities if the deceased person is a close relative. When deaf people attend funerals, sometimes arriving with deaf friends rather than with hearing relatives, they greet the deceased body and the grieving family and partake in dancing, drinking, and crying, mixing with hearing people, but even so often remaining in the vicinity of other deaf people.

However, deaf people often felt reluctant to attend funerals, for three reasons. First, some parts of funerals (such as the dancing) were regarded as "traditional religion" and were thus forbidden by the deaf Lutheran priest. Second, they did not like funeral visitors from outside Adamorobe

to see them signing, for fear the visitors would mock and insult them (see chapter 3), and those people could gossip about Adamorobe afterwards (see chapter 6). Third, speeches were not often interpreted (see chapter 3). I attended one funeral of a deaf person, the late Okoto, in which parts organized by the Deaf Lutheran Church were in GSL, parts by the Anglican Church of his family in spoken English, and some of the parts organized by his lineage were interpreted to AdaSL by the late Agnes Bomo.

Causes and Explanations of Misfortune

Akans (and many other Sub-Saharan African societies) typically seek the cause of misfortunes such as collapsing houses, long-lasting or serious illness, sudden deaths, accidents, and failures in hunting through exploring the relationship between human beings and their physical environment, gods, ancestors, and family. Natural causes (such as bad weather) are accepted, but there is often believed to be another cause behind the natural cause, such as in the case of long-lasting illnesses, accidents, and disability (including deafness). In the physical environment, food prescriptions, sex taboos, and other rules are common, and when these are not respected, it can result in illness or disability. If the ancestors feel disrespected by someone, they can show this by causing misfortune to this person.[105]

Ghanaians often explain misfortune as the deed of a witch. There is a very widespread belief in witchcraft in Ghana (and a large part of Africa). Witches are men and women with supernatural powers that they use in order to harm others and benefit themselves. A witch is usually someone the victim knows, such as a relative or neighbor. Witches are thought to be acting out of hatred or envy. They are said to become jealous when someone is lucky, good-looking, has a successful business or farm, a beautiful house, and copious food, and therefore render the lucky one sick, crippled, blind, deaf, mentally deficient, barren, and so on.[106]

One who practices magic (also called *juju*) can also bring about misfortune. Juju is the manipulation of physical objects using spells and incantations, for example, to protect against accidents and injuries in fights, to be benefited in court cases, to make someone fall in love, or to cause a disability to someone's unborn child.[107] When looking for the cause of misfortune, people often practice divination—the manipulation of certain objects to foretell the future or to interpret events (such as "Why don't I recover from this sickness?" or "Who has stolen my goats?"). When some misfortune cannot be explained, God is often said to have caused it.

Cures of illness and other misfortune are therefore usually related to these causes and aim to repair the unbalance that happened, for example by trying to appease the gods or spirits during rituals. In the case of disability, this typically happens on the onset (i.e., the birth of a child with a disability) rather than as a continual effort.[108] Traditional medicine (mainly herb based) in combination with spiritual therapies is often used along with modern medicine.[109] The most common traditional types of healers are (possession) priests and priestesses (of *abosom*) through divination and rituals. They usually focus on spiritual conditions but also make use of herbs like herbalists do.[110]

As has become clear in the explanation above, disability (including deafness) is explained through the same mechanisms as illness and accidents. Accounts that describe beliefs about causes of deafness in Ghana are very scarce, and those that are available are anecdotal; they just enumerate such causes without elaborating upon them. Markides, Dery, Sarkodee, and Okyere and Addo reported beliefs that deafness results from parents or ancestors offending a god by breaking a taboo, from witchcraft, and from accidents and illnesses.[111] As I illustrate in chapter 5, in Adamorobe, I found all kinds of explanations mentioned above to explain the high rate of deafness: witchcraft, ancestors, gods, God, magic, breaking pregnancy taboos and contagiousness. Some of these elements were incorporated in stories about the cause of deafness in Adamorobe, called a "particularly curious and bizarre set of legends" by Dery.[112]

Education, Farming, and Guarding

Adamorobe's first school (for hearing people) was the Presbyterian school set up in 1928, which was (just like the Presbyterian Church) taken over by the Anglican mission in 1937. In 2009 the village added two more schools, but the Anglican school was still the biggest, with a nursery, a primary school and a junior secondary school. All three schools were located at the edges of Adamorobe (see map 2). Almost all children in Adamorobe six years old and older attended school. Some of them went to school outside Adamorobe, for example, in Oyibi or Adenta (a suburb of Accra), commuting in school buses.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Adamorobe deaf people started to attend formal deaf education inside and outside Adamorobe but stopped doing so for various reasons (see chapter 7), and since around 2000, the deaf children from Adamorobe have gone to the boarding school for the deaf in

Mampong, on the Akwapim ridge. While the deaf adults from Adamorobe regarded their scholarly education as having failed, this does not mean that they could be regarded as "uneducated." In the oral tradition of West Africa, children learned everything from their parents and elders.[113] In this respect, deaf people learned everything from AdaSL to practical skills such as farming, trading, and housekeeping, to knowledge about the working of herbs, witches, and ancestors from their (mostly hearing) parents and elders. Deaf people held the view that if there are gaps in someone's practical knowledge, it was because his/her parents did not teach him/her well. Kofi Pare emphasized that it was not only his parents who taught him: "I have learned from many different people: from women and men, old and young, [deaf and hearing]. They all explained things well, they told me things until I had a lot of knowledge." Some deaf elders enjoyed particular respect, especially the late Afua Tatyifu.

Most deaf people and many hearing people were subsistence farmers (figure 2.6). The farmers from Adamorobe worked every day but Thursdays (a day that you cannot work the land because it is the day of the Earth Goddess Asase Yaa) and Sundays (the Christian weekly holiday). In the morning I saw them leaving for their piece of land, cutlass under their arms, a barrel of drinking water on their head, and in their old clothes. The journey goes uphill, often through low but dense jungle that has to be mastered with the cutlass (figure 2.7). They used a stick to pound on the ground to chase snakes and scorpions off the trail. The most important farming products were corn, cassava, and, to a lesser extent, yam. Ground corn was used to prepare *banku* (cooked fermented corn dough with or without cassava dough) and *kenkey* (cooked and then steamed fermented corn dough), cassava was cooked and used to pound *fufu*, and yams were cooked and eaten in pieces. These dishes were served with a chutney or soup, often with fish and sometimes with meat. Most farming happened with a single tool, the cutlass that is used to chop, to cut, and to dig.

Although they had a traditional education from their parents and elders, deaf people in Adamorobe connected their lack of formal education to being *limited* to subsistence farming as a profession. Their array of possible employment choices was narrower than that of formally educated hearing people, and they believed that the schooling deaf children's future opportunities would more resemble those of hearing people. While there were many hearing farmers in Adamorobe, there also were hearing people

Figure 2.6. Kofi Pare, Kwasi Boahene, and Kwame Osae at Kwame Osae's land.

Figure 2.7. Kofi Pare and Afua Kaya, ready to leave their farm after a day's work.

who had small businesses, were working as tailors and seamstresses, hairdressers, carpenters, teachers, or commuted to and from a job in Accra daily, sometimes in combination with tending a subsistence farm. It was generally understood that it was best to combine subsistence farming with either commercial farming or (more often) another profession, because subsistence farming did not yield sufficient income in the increasingly capitalist society of peri-urban Ghana. "From farming you cannot build a house and you cannot buy clothes," Kwasi Opare said.

The deaf people, as subsistence farmers, made only very small amounts of money by selling some farm products, firewood chopped in the forests, and occasional catches of bush meat caught in traps, and selling cassava and corn to small merchants in Adamorobe who prepared *banku, kenkey,* and *fufu* and offered it for sale in food stalls in the village. Some deaf people also set aside a plot of cassava to sell its harvests, and this brought in extra pocket money that helped with bigger one-off purchases such as roof sheets. Other deaf people did some trading, selling fish bought in Aburi; some prepare *kenkey* or herbal medicines, sometimes taking part in a family business. Several deaf people (mainly men) occasionally performed day labor (often on other people's farms) in return for payment. A number of deaf people had tried to extract and sell stone from the mountainsides on the outskirts of Adamorobe to make a living (like the economic migrants and many hearing inhabitants of Adamorobe), but they stopped for various reasons including the theft of stones or of crops on their untended farmlands and the danger of getting stone fragments in the eyes.

Hence, most deaf people in Adamorobe were subsistence farmers most of the time. The farm held many associations for the deaf people: nutrition, danger, refuge, and pleasure. The connection with nutrition was a deep one: they largely lived off their farms, harvesting daily what they needed for their cooking. Even when there was not so much work on the land, deaf people went to the farm to check traps, chat, rest, cook on the spot, and to spend time under a tree with view on Adamorobe, enjoying the breeze on the hills, alone or with other people. Many deaf people from Adamorobe really loved to be on their farms, some of them returning late to the village, leading to criticism from hearing and other deaf people, who said that it was dangerous to stay there.

The association with danger was because a number of farms were located on contested land (see next section). The neighboring ethnic group, the Ga, were said to kill or rape people who treaded this land, and it was said to be extra dangerous if you cannot hear. They said this fear was justified because of the story of Kwame Afere, a deaf man who was brutally murdered a few years before my research by some Ga when he was cutting wood on litigation land. There was also danger from thorns, giant wasps, scorpions, snakes, for juju-traps, wandering ghosts of deceased people, and malicious dwarf spirits (*mmoatia*). Furthermore, the farm was a place of refuge: to not have to attend church and to get away from gossip and fights in Adamorobe, from faith healers who came to

"heal" deaf people (chapter 5), and from white visitors who came with empty hands (see chapter 9).

Remarkably, even though farming was the most common occupation for both deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe (at least traditionally), deaf people conceived themselves as better farmers than the hearing (and a number of hearing interviewees confirmed this). They argued that it was in their blood, that farming was their specialty (see chapter 4). The worth of "being a strong farmer" was reflected in a historical story about a handsome deaf farmer (see chapter 5). In addition to being stronger farmers, deaf people were thought to be good fighters and guards. In the past, deaf people fulfilled an active role as warriors such as during certain confrontations with the Ga (see chapter 4). Also, Ama Oforiwaa, one of the oldest (hearing) women in Adamorobe, explained that some fifty to eighty years ago, deaf men were appointed as the town guards of Adamorobe:

> In the olden days there were four strong deaf men who were guarding the town to prevent any bad stranger or thief to come and steal anything in this town. These four men tried to communicate in the dark to understand each other. They spread to the four different corners of Adamorobe: West, South, North and East, throughout the night till daybreak.

According to her, these deaf men were chosen "because they were giant people, very tall, strong and therefore everybody was afraid of them, even the Ga." Their names were Kwaku Mumu, Kofi Otopa, Kofi Dompe, and Kwasi Okyere. After their death, they were not replaced. During my research there were only hearing town guards who were trained by the police, although Bosompra and the late Okoto (two deaf men in their late forties or fifties) were appointed by the assembly member to guard the environment of the dump heap, where many people relieved themselves, while the rule was to go further from the village. If they caught someone, they disciplined him or her physically. This seems to be a small contemporary example of what that happened to a larger extent in the past.

Land and Migration Patterns

Deaf and hearing farmers had the use of an area of the family lands in the environs of Adamorobe. Land belonged to the ancestors, and descendants were seen as its custodians.[114] Each of the six matrilineages in Adamorobe had the use of family lands in or around Adamorobe, and the lineage head allocated plots to members for building or farming. Another way

to get land was to rent a piece of another family's land by paying a small amount of money and alcoholic drinks (schnapps or palm wine). During my research, several deaf people used a plot of land next to a deaf sibling, cousin, or friend. Two pairs of deaf brothers farmed on four adjoining plots of land.

Land was thus not a direct source of wealth because it was given on loan by lineage heads and not sold. However, there had been a recent move from stewardship to individual property of lands in Ghana.[115] Adamorobe's location near peri-urban Accra was an important factor in land sales. Accra was rapidly expanding and most of the land surrounding the city had been bought up. Therefore as developments spread, the land in Adamorobe's immediate vicinity had become attractive to property developers and migrants, mostly to construct bungalow-type (single family-oriented) housing rather than compound (extended family-oriented) housing.[116]

These changes in peri-urban Accra led to a decrease in the communal and mutually supportive spirit that had characterized rural communities in this area, and increasing social differentiation, also within families.[117] While in the past it was the cocoa farmers from Adamorobe who possessed some capital, during my research the people with capital were those who received the largest shares from selling family lands. Land disputes had brought general unrest in Adamorobe. In peri-urban areas in Ghana, there are often questions and conflicts about who has the authority to sell family lands, and who wins or loses depends on the strength of people's negotiating positions.[118] The increase of capital in some families, due to individual and familial profit from the land sales, was indicated by changes in housing structures in and around Adamorobe, including the brick structures that had mushroomed around the road between Oyibi and Aburi, where Adamorobe is located. There was an increasing number of single-family dwellings, and a number of families were rebuilding (parts of) compounds.

It seems that deaf people generally remained in the lower scale of the newly stratified society of Adamorobe. During my research, deaf people (both women and men) received shares from land sales just like their hearing siblings and cousins and used the money to build or improve rooms, or for their subsistence. Many of them felt disadvantaged in land sales, however: sometimes they complained that they got a smaller share than their hearing siblings or other family members. Joseph Okyere suggested that such differences were the result of deaf people not getting the opportunity to take active positions in land negotiations. In 2012, 2.5 years after

my fieldwork, I learned that deaf people and other subsistence farmers were recently disadvantaged in another way too: many of them lost their farmlands, which were sold to estate developers. As a result, farmers had to walk daily to farmlands located further away. This particularly disadvantaged the people who were subsistence farmers and had enjoyed only limited formal education.

Land sales also caused a number of conflicts with the eastern neighbors, the Ga. Joseph Okyere related that after fighting together in the Akantamansu war in 1826, relationships with the Ga were cordial; there was intermarriage, friendship, and trading. In the past, the hunters from Adamorobe moved far from the village in order to hunt, and established cottages or hamlets, which grew into villages that were later leased to the Ga. Therefore, none of the Ga villages around Adamorobe (such as Oyibi) were named in the Ga language because these were established by Adamorobe hunters.

This caused disagreements about the ownership of vast stretches of land up to North Accra, that is, whether these belonged to Adamorobe families or to Ga. In the time of increasing land commodification, the Ga were claiming (to have the right to sell) these (formerly Adamorobe) lands. According to Joseph Okyere, conflicts about litigation started in the year 1987 when chief Nana Kwakwa Asiampong made a declaration on the Asakyiri clan's lands. Mainly the area close to Adamorobe, between the Accra-Aburi and Accra-Dodowa roads (the area where Adamorobe is located) was contested (see map 1).

Another development related to the land sales was a dramatic increase of Adamorobe's population due to immigration. Following the land sales, there was a rapid influx of new migrants: the population was 1,356 in 2001, around 2,500 in 2008, and around 3,500 in 2012. In the book's conclusion I speculate upon what all these changes could mean for the daily life of deaf people in Adamorobe in the longer term, especially because these migrants do not sign.

3 A Deaf-Inclusive Village "Since Time Immemorial until the End of Days"

When I first arrived in Adamorobe during my pilot visit in April 2008, I was surprised that I did not see many people signing. The extent to which the use and knowledge of sign language was widespread in Adamorobe, became visible by searching out or following deaf people rather than by "looking around in the village." To provide an impression of such everyday deaf–hearing and deaf–deaf signed interactions, I now offer a long fieldnote excerpt. In the remains of this chapter and the next chapter then, different elements that appeared in this example will be discussed separately.

> Monday, June 29, 2009, 7 am. I walked into a compound where approximately 15 people live, three of them deaf: Ama Korkor (aged about 45–50), her brother Kwame Osae (aged about 60), and her partner Kofi Boahene (aged about 30–35). I first went to greet three hearing women who were chatting with each other in a corner. One of them asked me playfully if I wanted to give her a head scarf and continued more seriously, asking me for a picture of her recently deceased teenage son, which I took a few months ago. I did not readily remember which picture she meant and Ama Korkor joined our conversation to explain it to me. Ama Korkor then told me that one of Kwame Osae's chickens was stolen and another had been killed (see figure 3.1 for the spatial setup).
>
> Ama Korkor left the compound to have a look at the dead chicken, and I had a seat on a bench in front of her room, next to her hearing daughter of my age. When two girls in school uniforms entered the compound to sell deep fried fresh "African doughnuts" and *koko* (fermented maize porridge), I got up to buy some for breakfast. At that moment Ama Korkor returned, exclaiming to me, "Hearing people are bad!," explaining that they steal, beat, or poison chickens. Then a young hearing woman came in the compound and Ama Korkor immediately told her outragedly about Kwame Osae's chicken. One hearing man bought *koko* and a doughnut from the schoolchildren and Ama Korkor teased him that it is something for children to have breakfast and that adults wait to eat until the afternoon. The man laughed and ignored her.
>
> Then, Ama Korkor and I had a seat in front of her room (see figure 3.2 for a picture taken at this location) and had a chat about the organization of their microbusiness projects (see chapter 8), walking over to Kwame who was sitting

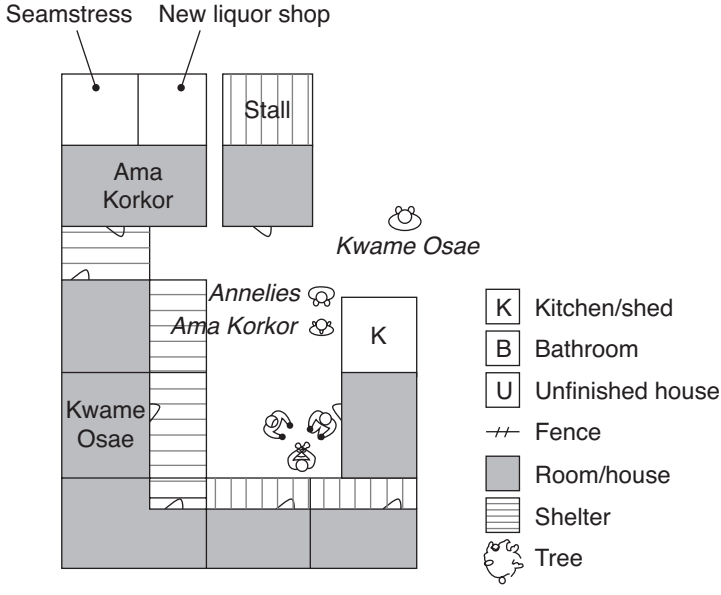

Figure 3.1. Meeting Ama Korkor in her maternal compound. *Note*: Because a lot of people were moving in, out, and around all the time, not all the people present are represented in this and other figures, but only those whom I am mentioning in the fieldnote excerpts.

Figure 3.2. Deaf people in Ama Korkor and Kwame Osae's maternal compound. *Note*: The door to Ama Korkor's room is located under the shelter at the right and Kwame Osae's room is at the left.

Figure 3.3. Kwame under his shelter.

under his shelter (figure 3.3), to ask if we could keep a freezer in his room for Ama Korkor's business. When we had just got back to Ama Korkor's room, Afua Kaya came around. She sat down on a small chair and started to pass on the news that her (hearing) mother, from whom she had just returned, had told her. She vividly narrated about a hearing man who had fought and was arrested by the police. This triggered Ama Korkor to tell me about similar fights and events in the village. Afua Kaya also reported some "deaf news": rain water had run into the room of Akosua Abora, a deaf woman, and Akosua Abora's deaf daughter Owusua would temporarily move in with the late Okoto (a deaf man) until their new room was ready.

A hearing man walked around in the compound with two rusty knives in his hand and when Ama Korkor saw him, she remarked upon this. He responded quite defensively in AdaSL mixed with Akan. Afterwards, Ama Korkor explained to me that the knives were hers; the man (who was probably one of her relatives) had just taken them without asking. Meanwhile, Ama Korkor's hearing granddaughter of kindergarten age had woken up and regularly interrupted our conversation, for example, to ask for toothpaste. Ama Korkor teased her, saying that I would take her to America [*sic*]. The child signed that she was afraid of that, which led Afua Kaya to nag her, resulting in the child accusing Afua Kaya of being a witch, declaring that she "has red eyes." Ama Korkor laughingly told me how her granddaughter often playfully insults deaf people in AdaSL, for example, "Kwame-Osae-with-the-ugly-teeth."

At that moment, some of Ama Korkor's hearing relatives entered the compound to greet the people who were present there. Ama Korkor explained to me that these people were originally from Adamorobe but were living in Accra now. She pointed to a woman and said she had three children that were big

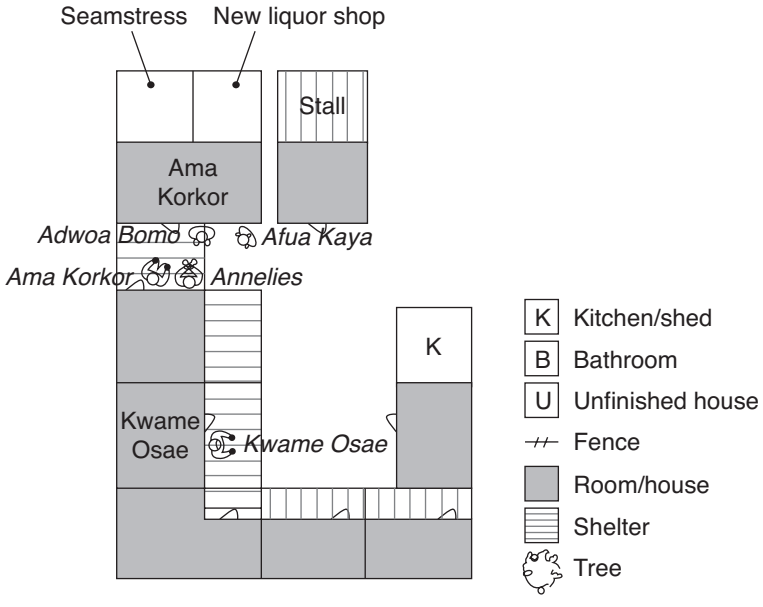

Figure 3.4. Deaf space in front of Ama Korkor's room.

and strong. A tall man came to us, telling me that he wanted to fly abroad. He signed he did not want to marry me (which I had already refused during an earlier conversation), but just wanted a document that would enable him to travel abroad (i.e., a visa). Ama Korkor translated for me, but I could understand him too. He emphasized that he and Ama Korkor were close family, as if to say that I should help him for that reason. When he went away, Ama Korkor told me a little bit more about the man, that he is a Muslim and has two wives. Then, Adwoa Bomo came around to greet us and joined our conversation (figure 3.4).

Kwame Osae left, then returned from the market square a few minutes later, complaining that there were no fish for sale; he had wanted to take some to his farm to eat with his *fufu* for lunch. I told him he could have some of the snails that I had got from Akosua Obutwe, which he refused. The three deaf women started pestering him that he was afraid to accept a gift from me, and when I remarked that he should not be so stubborn, he accepted the snails. I left for my room to collect them, and on my way, I ran into a group of four deaf men who were chatting with each other on a nearby square (figure 3.5).

What stands out in this excerpt is the frequency of social interactions and natural ease of contact between deaf and hearing people; in the example above they were sharing news, teasing each other, and filing complaints. The importance of greeting and introducing people became

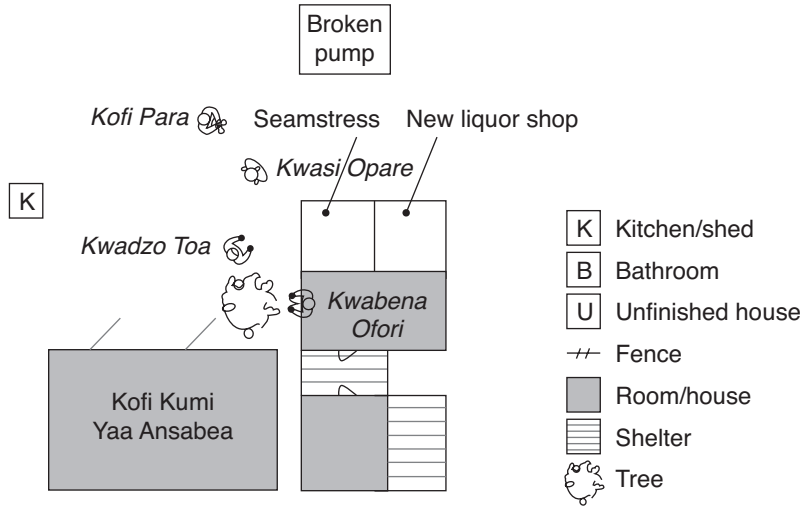

Figure 3.5. Deaf men chatting near the broken pump.

apparent. A lot of emphasis was placed upon family ties, even if these were quite distant. These ties were pointed out to me daily and stressed by both deaf and hearing people: "We are SAME" or "We are all one." As explained in the previous chapter, SAME could mean many things, for example that people are siblings, cousins, and/or from the same clan. It cannot be underemphasized that the deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe were not merely neighbors or cohabitants: they were parents, grandparents, cousins, members of a matrilineage, and offspring of the ancestors of Adamorobe.

In the excerpt, it also appears that deaf people sought each other out, and that deaf–deaf interactions were generally of a longer duration than the short interactions with hearing people. Also, while the interactions above give the impression of a natural and healthy everyday flow of life, the complaint from Ama that "hearing people are bad" suggests ambiguity. In this chapter I further explore deaf–hearing interactions, addressing deaf–deaf interactions and relationships in chapter 4.

Greetings and Other Social Interactions

When the (deaf and hearing) people of Adamorobe talked about the cordial relationship they have with each other, they pointed out that they greet each other. This might sound trivial, but the Akan regard

their greeting rituals, which exist in shorter and longer forms, as the basis and foundation of human interaction. There are regulations as to who should initiate the greeting and how the greeting should happen. The person who is moving (i.e., arriving in a house or passing by someone) is the person who needs to initiate the greeting. People greet each other with their right hand, moving from the person on the far right to the left, so even if you came for the (deaf) person in the middle, he or she is not the first person to greet.[119] An essential part of the greeting ritual is inquiring after each other's health and well-being: people ask if "the body is firm/strong," because of the Akan belief that "if the body is fine, the whole person is fine and everyone else is happy and in harmony."[120]

As explained before, all deaf people in Adamorobe had deaf and hearing relatives in the village. People went to the compounds of close relatives or friends just to greet them, typically in the morning but also at other times of the day, for example after returning from the farm. This did not mean that *all* relatives and friends had to be greeted every day, but those people had to be greeted regularly, especially those who were closely related or close friends. Paying a greeting is paying respect to other people and to one's relationship with them, so if one does not greet his or her close relatives regularly (or passes by their homes without greeting), this will be interpreted as an insult or as the denial of their existence. When people are upset with each other, others will find out from their grudging or reluctant or restricted way of greeting, or their ignoring of the greeting. Ignoring a greeting is interpreted as a grave insult and can lead to (or is the result of a) conflict. When one is ill or suffering a loss, more people will greet that person. An example, narrated by Kofi Pare, a deaf man in his thirties:

> The deaf and hearing are SAME [i.e., connected through family ties], so we say for example: "Our female [hearing] relative there, we go to look, she is ill, we go to greet." And together we walk there, and arrive together. (…) We greet and ask what's wrong. "You are ill? Oooh too bad… Go to the hospital. Ah, you've already been? You have taken pills? You already feel a bit better? I pray to God that you will be healthy." The ill hearing person nods and understands, and we say goodbye. I say: "I'm going and in the late afternoon I'll be back to see you again." And together we walk away again. (…) And when she's healthy again, she will come to greet me. We are SAME, not divided. SAME, connected, and not divided. If then later a deaf person gets ill and the hearing person does not know that, another deaf person goes there and says; "My deaf SAME

> [relative/friend], the one who came to greet you a long time ago, is ill." The hearing says: "Uh oh, what? I'll come with you to see." Together they go to the ill person. (. . .) There is some chatting and a bit later the hearing person gets up and leaves. The deaf person stays to chat some more. (Kofi Pare, Interview, 10 October, 2009)

There was thus very much emphasis on how deaf and hearing people are SAME—there was a habit of emphasizing sameness in all ways, sameness that leads to a connection with the family, matrilineage, or clan, or through friendship bonds. Also note that Kofi Pare concluded his story with the remark that a deaf person might stay to chat a bit longer. I will expand upon that in the next chapter.

In addition to greetings, there was of course a wide range of other social interactions, particularly in the highly social morning hours and evenings after people were back from their farms and had bathed, and sat together outside and chatted. A lot of time was spent teasing and playfully interacting. Teasing could consist of slapping someone playfully, wrestling, or joking about the other's body. This direct and extroverted way of interaction is very common for Ghanaians. Teasing could also happen in the way of fake marriage proposals or joking invitations to visit at night. Single mature deaf men were most often the "target" of such teasing and would reply that the woman (either hearing or deaf, married or single) is a "cheater," but they usually clearly enjoyed the attention.

People conversed with (and advised) each other about practical matters such as housekeeping or business. People also argued with each other and told each other off frankly. They exchanged family and village news, gossip and opinions such as about births, illnesses, accidents, deaths, relationships, marriages and separations, people (re)building houses or rooms, people going away and returning, the land litigation problems with the Ga, witchcraft accusations, and upcoming ceremonies. Also under discussion was news that was spread by the beating of the gong, which is the means to spread important news in the village: the gong-beater shouts information while passing through the village. National politics and the 2008 government elections were discussed and TV news was shared. Ama Korkor's sister often passed on national news that she saw on TV, such as fights between the supporters of the NPP and NDC (the main political parties in Ghana), the fact that a tanker had crashed and caught fire, and so on. People analyzed many of the above-mentioned kinds of conflicts and occurrences, discussing not only *how*, but also *why* they happened,

explaining them as caused by people's good or bad intentions, by God, nature, witchcraft, and/or juju.

Often, deaf people's relatives such as parents, cousins, siblings, and (grand)children, either living in the same or in another compound, shared information with them. The fact that news mostly flowed from hearing to deaf people does not always mean that deaf people only have "second-hand information," however. When dramatic events such as grave illness, escalating conflicts, or death happened in the village, deaf people arrived just as quickly as (and sometimes even more quickly than) hearing people. They called their deaf friends, observed the situation, and became involved in the excited conversations and sometimes in fights, or helped people who were ill or hurt. Deaf people usually understood the essence of what had happened, knowing so many people from the village and their backgrounds, and if they had questions, they just asked a present hearing person to explain in AdaSL.

> Around 7 am, I went to greet Akua Fiankobea just at the moment that there was a stir, a few compounds farther. We went there and there were a lot of people at the compound, including three deaf neighbors. One man had vomited a lot of blood on the ground. After a while there were eleven deaf people: certainly almost half the people present there were deaf. Most were just looking, but Akua Fiankobea and Ama Korkor helped to scoop sand to mix with the blood in order to clean the floor. Ama Korkor explained to me that this happened before: that time the man was brought to the hospital, and now it happens again. That same evening, the man died. (Fieldnotes, 6 August 2009)

Deaf–hearing interactions intensified especially when someone was very ill or had died, as in the example above. It appeared that when sharing grief and feelings of shock, deaf and hearing people felt more united. When greeting each other in compounds or on the paths of Adamorobe, people talked about the deceased or severely ill person, about what happened, and why it happened. The death or grave illness of the person had to be explained: a juju, a poisoning, a witch? Deaf people initiated discussions of such issues with hearing people and vice versa. Such events fed and strengthened the bonds between the people of Adamorobe, leading to a temporary sharp increase of utterances such as "We all are SAME" (i.e., related, connected), and "Hearing and deaf are friends."

While deaf people actively participated in everyday spatial practices like greeting people and having short conversations, I observed differences between deaf and hearing people at the level of village events. I remember vividly the first time that I saw many people from Adamorobe in the same

place, which was during a football match at the village's football pitch. I saw no sign language and no deaf people. One hearing person commented in an interview that Joseph Okyere conducted that deaf people "are always in the home, they don't go out for fun, they are always quiet." This was not only true for football but also for traditional ceremonies and some parts of funerals. They often went and had a look, but did not attend *en masse* or stay for a long while. When I asked them for their reasons for not attending, deaf people often simply signed "I don't like to go" or "I will go later" (which they then didn't). One possible (partial) explanation is the fact that deaf people wanted to avoid deaf-related insults and gossip (see further in this chapter and chapter 6).

Sign Language Proficiency and the Role of Gesture

During the interactions described in the previous section, there were variations in hearing people's signing proficiency. Because my research methodology was not sociolinguistic in nature, I did not gain a deep insight into the spread of AdaSL knowledge and proficiency in the village, although I was able to identify some patterns through participant observation. It is difficult to make clear distinctions between hearing signers and nonsigners in Adamorobe, as there seemed to be a continuum of signing proficiency. I noticed that people who were especially able to sign well were typically close relatives of deaf people, people who lived in the same compound as deaf people, people who grew up with deaf people, were friends of deaf people, or were people who worked with/near deaf people (for example having adjoining farms). There were many hearing fluent signers who did not have a lot of contact with deaf people anymore but had learned to sign during earlier frequent contacts, for example as relative, friend, co-worker or neighbor. Many hearing people, even if they were very fluent in AdaSL, mixed AdaSL with varying degrees of spoken Akan.

I did not notice any difference between men and women regarding signing proficiency. There were differences in age, however: children generally did not know AdaSL unless they had close deaf relatives, a deaf person lived in their compound, or they had a deaf neighbor. More elders than young or middle-aged people were proficient in AdaSL. Even if they were not often in touch with deaf people anymore, they could have been in the past, in the ways stated above. Overall, sign language proficiency was said to be declining, a development that is explained further in the

next chapter. Most (recent) migrants did not know AdaSL, although some migrants who stayed since a long time in Adamorobe and regularly encountered deaf people gained proficiency in AdaSL.

Even though there were many hearing people who were fluent in AdaSL, I met hardly any hearing people who I felt to be as fluent in producing the language as deaf people. The fact that deaf people were generally the most fluent signers does not mean that deaf people learned the language from other deaf people only. Most of them told me that they learned the language from their relatives, particularly hearing or deaf siblings and (grand) parents, and in a few cases from unrelated deaf people.

When deaf people and hearing people who were not fluent in AdaSL communicated with each other, deaf people tended to sign slower, use a larger signing space, engage in extensive pantomiming, and make use of the large number of conventional gestures that are commonly used in Ghana (which are partially incorporated in AdaSL). Hearing people used co-speech gestures, conventional gestures, creative gesturing, pointing, and words in spoken language. People thus made use of a broad repertoire of language skills. The repertoire of conventional gestures that are used in Ghana is vast: Kirby[121] described no less than 69 gestures that are used in Ghana, and conventional gestures used in West Africa show a degree of consistency throughout the area.[122] Here is an example of the use and recognition of conventional gestures:

> When Ama Korkor, Akosua Obutwe, and I were walking through the market in Madina, it came to my mind that I wanted to buy peanut butter. I explained to Ama Korkor what I wanted, by making the sign for "peanut": rubbing together my thumb and index finger and blowing on them to show how you remove the skins from the nut, and adding to this the sign for "runny/sticky." Once of a sudden a woman signaled me. Firstly, I was not inclined to react: because of my being white, people at the market constantly try to lure me to their stall to buy their products. However, my deaf companions, who were walking behind me, stayed put and signaled me back. It appeared that that woman sold peanut butter. She had seen from a distance what I signed and had understood what I meant. (Fieldnotes, 29 December 2008)

The gesture PEANUT-BUTTER is one that is widely understood and is incorporated in AdaSL. Other examples of conventional gestures are: HOW-ARE-YOU?, SORRY, I-BEG-YOU, NOTHING, HOW-MUCH, REFUSE, CHEAT, ILL, GOOD, INSULT, TOILET, MONEY, SCHOOL. When counting in conventional gestures, a closed fist means 5, two hands folded together means 10 and the

numbers 6 to 9 are counted in the other hand. When the sign most used in AdaSL was *different* from the conventional gesture (such as for the concepts MONEY, BANKU, MAN, WOMAN, MARRY, CASSAVA, and POLICE), deaf people from Adamorobe used the conventional gesture rather than the AdaSL sign when communicating with a nonsigner either inside or outside Adamorobe.

In addition to the use of conventional gesturing with nonsigners, there was also a lot of pantomiming and pointing. People who wanted to buy a household utensil pointed at it or acted out what they do with it. People who wanted a garment in a certain color, for example, lined out on their body what kind of clothing they wanted and looked in the immediate surroundings for an example of the color to point at, and the vendor would scoop up the right article in the right color from a pile of clothes. Deaf people ordering a dish acted out how it was prepared, such as a pounding movement for *fufu* or a heavy stirring movement for *banku*. It happened a few times that hearing people who did not know AdaSL understood deaf people faster than I did, because I did not know all the local foods and utensils and the ways to prepare or use them.

Gestural communication went further than merely explaining what one needed; it could lead to conversations. For example:

> We bought oil on the market and Afua Aketewa was signing to the saleswoman, explaining which snack she would make with it to then sell. She said that in the past, she used to walk around the Madina market with mangoes and asked if the woman recognized her from that. The woman smiled in a friendly way and nodded only once in a while. I wondered if Afua Aketewa presumed too easily that that woman could understand everything that she signed, just like that. But in the end, the woman gestured that Afua Aketewa should come and bring her snack once she had made it, and had to come back and buy oil again from her in the future. (Fieldnotes, 28 September 2009)

In the market, a whole lot of teasing and flattering happens back and forth during negotiating, and the more self-confident deaf people from Adamorobe actively took part in that. For example, Ama Korkor regularly argued: "Hey, I do work hard on my farm you know, it's easy for you to say no to discounts because you're just sitting here on your big backside," and then they laughed. She promised steadfastly that she would bring sellers *fufu* if she got a discount, which is a playful strategy in negotiating.

All this happened in gesture: when Ama Korkor talked about the farm, she made a slashing movement with her arm with an imagined cutlass, and *fufu* was enacted by miming the action of pounding cooked cassava, as

explained above. Conversations also incorporate playful marriage proposals and (complaints about) politics, such as remarks that everything is more expensive under NPP. The main Ghanaian political parties NPP and NDC were communicated through a common gesture linked with a dance (the AdaSL signs for NPP and NDC were different from the conventional gesture). The AdaSL signs for ethnic groups as Akan, Ewe, or Krobo are also based on their outlook or typical dance so many hearing people outside the village could understand these.

A gesturing person in Adamorobe was generally more easily understood than a gesturing person "outside," because of context and the shared experiential knowledge of living in Adamorobe. An example of such shared context is the following:

> Kwasi Boahene and I went to a shop to ask for a yellow oil barrel to fill up at the petrol station. Because the vessel looks similar to white water containers that people in Adamorobe take to their farms, but bigger and in yellow, Kwasi Boahene signed to the young lady behind the counter that he wanted a yellow water container. He pointed to a bottle of Fanta in the cabinet below the counter to indicate the color. The woman opened the freezer and took a bottle of Fanta. Kwasi Boahene signed: "No no, a water container." The woman took water from the freezer. Kwasi Boahene repeated himself. The woman did not understand. Kwasi Boahene concluded: "You do not know how to sign." The woman nodded: "Indeed, do not," with a bored and disinterested expression. Kwasi Boahene finally decided to give a more extensive explanation: "A barrel you fill up with water and you put it on your head to take it to the farm, but then bigger." She finally understood and gestured us to the adjacent room. Indeed, there was such a thing, but it was not for sale, so she directed us to another shop. When we walked away, Kwasi Boahene said, with an indignant look: "See, she does not know how to sign . . . " (Fieldnotes, 8 September 2009)

Deaf people in Adamorobe emphasized that hearing nonsigners outside and inside Adamorobe were limited, because they did not know or understand AdaSL. (Their sign for "AdaSL" was hands twirling each other around in the air, sometimes accompanied with the sign for "Adamorobe.") However, there was no total communication breakdown in the situation above: while Kwasi Boahene commented on the woman's lack of AdaSL knowledge, the woman still understood his longer explanation. Also, when communication through gesture felt limiting or slow or was not deemed successful, there were usually better signers around who could help with interpretation.

In fact, it feels artificial to strongly distinguish between "conventional gesture" and AdaSL as if they are entirely distinct categories. The distinction between gesture and sign is a product of modern linguistics in which a formalist model of language is maintained.[123] However, when I observed communication in gesture and AdaSL, there seemed many similarities in lexicon and even grammar, and these ways of communicating seemed to exist on a continuum inside Adamorobe. Asare Kwabena, a deaf man in his early twenties, described the differences and similarities between AdaSL and gestures as follows:

> AdaSL is hard, gestures in Madina for example are simpler, here it is hard in comparison to there (…) In Nsawam they say "chicken" simply like this: "WINGS-FLAP SLICE THROAT BLEED."(…) Everywhere they gesture man/father like this (*demonstrates*). Around there they are all the same, all using the same way, only here [in Adamorobe] it is hard, here there are several different signs for "MAN" (*shows me which ones*), but in other places they do not understand those. Eg. This [AdaSL sign for man], if you explain that they say, impressed: "Wow, it is hard there in Adamorobe!" (…) I ask: "Would you like water?" and that person [a visitor from outside to Adamorobe] does not understand it: "That sign, what is that?" I gesture more elaborate: "SEE DRINK WATER." Still he might not understand. So I give water. And he understands it. I ask: would you like something to eat? And well that he understands, because outside they sign the same way to say "eat."(…) And eg. "CASSAVA." That they do not understand. If you act out how you cut the peel and act out that it is used to pound *fufu*, then they understand it. Adamorobe is HARD, unbelievable, here in Adamorobe it's top notch. (Asare Kwabena, Interview, 4 September 2009)

Asare Kwabena thus explained how there are a number of widely understood conventional gestures that are incorporated in AdaSL (such as "FOOD"), how sometimes the AdaSL sign differs from the conventional gesture (such as "MAN/FATHER"), and how AdaSL has signs for concepts that would need more elaborate gesturing in order to explain it to a nonsigner (such as "CHICKEN" and "CASSAVA"). AdaSL was regarded as more complex, compressed, extensive, and therefore more "HARD" for outsiders, more difficult to learn and use than gestures. The description of AdaSL as a "HARD" language, and the positive evaluation of its being "HARD," is further explored and analyzed in chapter 7.

Sign Language Access and Interpretation

What stands out in the interviews that Joseph Okyere organized with hearing people is that the respondents talked about AdaSL as the language used

"by them, the deaf people." AdaSL is called *mumu kasa* in Akan, which means "deaf language." AdaSL was used to communicate *with* the deaf people and *by* the deaf people, and this is probably why it was associated with them. AdaSL was used by hearing people only when talking *directly* to or with a deaf person. It is not the case that in any situation where a deaf person is present, the language of conversation was switched to AdaSL, not even when all the hearing people present were fluent signers. This contradicts nonethnographic statements about shared communities, such as Bahan and Nash's claim that "if a deaf person arrives, the hearing people unconsciously shift to signing without missing a beat."[124] An example of such a situation:

> Around 7 am in the morning, Ama Korkor and I passed a compound where a number of her close relatives live. There were about 7 to 8 elderly and middle-aged women sitting in a semicircle and we greeted them. Ama Korkor told me a story about a woman from this family who recently was bitten by a snake and not brought to the hospital by her husband: he tried to treat it himself. An elderly woman had seen what Ama said and signed to her: "Yes, that man said nothing about it, even when he came around to greet, he said nothing." She and a few other women started chattering about it among themselves in Akan, until two of them directed themselves to Ama in AdaSL to add something to the story. (Fieldnotes, 28 November 2008)

The fact that AdaSL was the only language to which the deaf people had full access while many hearing people had access to both AdaSL and Akan (and other spoken languages), resulted in a certain assymetry between deaf and hearing people, because the former were excluded from Akan conversations and the majority of social interactions in Adamorobe happened in Akan. (There were also deaf–deaf conversations that were not accessible for hearing people who did not sign well—see next chapter).

Most of the time, deaf people did not seem frustrated in situations like the one above. I never saw any of them requesting language access in the form of a change of the conversation language to AdaSL even when all the people present were fluent signers. It was not clear whether they just put up with it, tolerated it, or maybe the idea did not really occur to them. They rather asked what hearing people were talking about, received paraphrasings or summaries, and were addressed directly on certain points in conversations (such as in the example above). However, some deaf people complained that they were bored in the compounds where they live: "Look, hearing talk so much with each other and deaf people are quiet and passive."

During public events on the other hand, interpretation was organized, or at least expected. Examples of public or semipublic events in Adamorobe are traditional ceremonies, festivals, rallies of political parties, funerals, and when visitors come for the deaf people in Adamorobe. During such events, a designated interpreter (the late Agnes Bomo, who had a deaf mother and deaf siblings, uncles, aunts, and cousins) sometimes interpreted speeches. It might be surprising that there was a specified interpreter when there were so many hearing people who could sign, but a distinction was made between "being able to sign" and "being able to interpret adequately for an audience." Apparently, in the past, two men who were already deceased at the time of my research were interpreters. Agnes Bomo narrated how she started to interpret when she was a schoolgirl:

> A long time when I was in school class one, (…) on one occasion our late chief Nana Osae Amantem got a visitor from overseas. At the meeting all the deaf people were present and the visitors wanted to talk to the deaf. I, Agnes, was with my mother. They asked who could interpret and I was called upon [by Agnes' deaf uncle Yao Owusua]. That was my first time of being interpreter. (Agnes Bomo, Interview, 6 August 2009)

It seems that in the past, interpretation was provided more often: Agnes Bomo, who died in 2014, was not that young when I interviewed her, and no new or additional interpreter had turned up yet. This led to frustration when deaf people attended a public event in Adamorobe where speeches were held but no interpretation was provided. Sometimes the deaf people put up with the lack of interpretation, sometimes they got upset and left, and sometimes hearing people provided ad hoc translation after a complaint. Kofi Pare gives an example of what happened during a funeral:

> An elder spoke into the microphone and all of us could not hear it. We said to each other: "Come on, what's being said now?" We didn't know… So we were quiet. I asked the hearing person next to me: "What's being said?" The hearing shrugged, did not want to explain. So the deaf were all quiet and fretted and got angry. They got up to leave. They did not want to stay and got up (…) The hearing then asked what was wrong. We said: "When talking into the microphone, there has to be translation for the deaf. If that's not the case then we get upset." The hearing elder said sorry, he called back the deaf and translated: "An elder has died. We are all SAME, together here, without divisions." The deaf listened and nodded and the hearing translated: "The deceased is an elder—I am a younger relative, and now we are all together here to talk. When I leave Adamorobe again, don't fight please. Now I'm the only one of the family who stays behind." The deaf understood. That's the right way to do it. (Kofi Pare, Interview, 1 October 2009)

Some deaf people commented that hearing people are stubborn and selfish because interpretation was not always spontaneously organized, criticizing the fact that everyone expected Agnes Bomo to interpret. Therefore, many of the deaf people were reluctant to attend the speeches during funerals. Other parts of funerals were generally better attended, such as dancing and paying one's respects to the mourning family.

Hearing People's Sign Language Ideologies

The lack of access during town events and the lack of use of AdaSL for group conversation, even when all hearing people present were fluent signers, raise questions about what hearing people think about the possibilities, limits, and status of the language. In the interviews that Joseph Okyere organized, these issues were brought up. One question was: "What do you see as the difference between deaf and hearing people?" In the replies (in which some people indicated more than one difference), there were seven references to not being able to speak, six to not being able to hear, and thirteen to the fact that deaf people use sign language, for example: "We use verbal language but deaf use sign language." Only three people reported to see this language difference as problematic, saying that it causes breakdowns in communication in customer relationships, or that deaf people sign incomprehensibly when they are angry.

Two of the questions asked by Joseph Okyere concerned language ideologies with regard to AdaSL in particular. He asked the interviewees if they thought that one can say anything in sign language or not, and if they felt if the language was of equal worth and value in comparison with Akan or not. Hearing people's replies on both questions were positive and strikingly similar. Responses on other questions, such as hearing people's positive and negative experiences with deaf people, were much more varied (see further). Recognizing that language ideologies are multiple, coexisting, and often conflicting, I take pervasiveness and coherence across users of the language as requisite for ideologies to be described. The fact that the replies of the very diverse sample of hearing (both signing and nonsigning) respondents were so similar seems to confirm that we are talking about pervasive language ideologies here.

Eighteen out of the nineteen respondents replied positively to the question if anything can be said in sign language, most of them arguing that deaf people can name or describe everything, just like hearing people can do in Akan, "because it is their language, their way of speaking." One

respondent thought that this language "is the way God has given them to say or describe anything." Two persons added that for them the living proof that everything can be said in sign language is that "We stay together in the same house and town and understand them very well. They too understand us very well."

The one person who replied "no" to this question explained that "Even the few people who understand the sign language [very well], fail to understand certain signs from the deaf people." In fact this person does not seem to imply that the language itself is limited, but that hearing people are never as fluent in the language as deaf people are. There seems to be a positive correlation between experience of living and communicating with deaf people and a language ideology that recognizes rather than denies that signed languages can do what spoken languages can do.

Regarding the question about the worth and status of AdaSL in comparison to Akan, again eighteen out of nineteen replied positively. The one person who replied negatively again did not explain his opinion with a reference to the structure of sign language, but pointed at the scope of its dispersal: "The sign language is only limited to a few sections of Adamorobe people, while the Akan language covers Adamorobe and almost the whole Ghana." The eighteen others' explanation of the equality of AdaSL and Akan generally was that "both deaf and hearing speak the same language." Some people called AdaSL "Akan sign language," while others said that it was Akan. Ghanaian Sign Language, by contrast, was called the "school sign language" or "English sign language" and was perceived to be entirely different. Just as hearing people, deaf people strongly contrasted AdaSL with GSL. They stated that AdaSL is HARD, in contrast to GSL, Akan, and gesture (see chapter 7).

Thirteen replies gave the impression that AdaSL was regarded as a signed version of Akan: for example, "The signs look like Akan language" or "The way we speak Akan, the same we can translate in sign language to deaf people." This ideology, in which AdaSL and Akan are identified as the same language, contrasts with the ideology of mainstream sign language linguistics that sign languages are languages in their own right, the perspective applied by Nyst, who documented AdaSL.[125] Perhaps this sense of AdaSL as being Akan in a different modality parallels the knowledge that Akan has a written form, too. In addition, as explained in the previous chapter, the structure of AdaSL is thoroughly influenced by spoken Akan in several ways and has a number of features that makes it

easier to learn and understand for the hearing users in Adamorobe than GSL, for example.

Related to the observation above, a number of hearing interviewees emphasized the common root or breeding ground of Akan and AdaSL: "We are not English people. Not Northerners. We are Akan." Akan culture and society, and the languages sprouting from these (i.e., Akan and AdaSL) were seen as belonging to the same family, as if these were two branches of the Akan cultural tree. AdaSL (contrarily to GSL, which is based on American Sign Language) is entirely grounded in Akan culture, that is, its core consists not only of a large number of local conventional gestures, but also of mimes of Akan customs, local foods and their preparation, farming terms, and festivals.

Contrast between Adamorobe and Beyond: Leaf-Insults

Deaf people in Adamorobe experienced a contrast between people from Adamorobe and people not from Adamorobe, not only with regard to signing proficiency, but also with regard to people's attitudes. Also Joseph Okyere contrasted Adamorobe with the world outside:

> People don't understand what "deaf" means. They think that it is a disease or taboo to give birth to deaf and they don't regard deaf at all as people who can do something even better than hearing. But in Adamorobe we do everything with deaf so we do understand them.

Although it happened that hearing people in Adamorobe insulted deaf people for their deafness by signing "HEAR-NOTHING" or "EAR-HARD" (see next chapter), insults happened far more frequently in the contact with hearing outsiders, and in a ruder and explicitly mocking way, in what I call "leaf-insults." It is a common insult in Ghana to compare deaf people with goats or sheep by putting a leaf in the mouth, sometimes accompanied with wagging the tongue, slavering, and spitting.

When asked what they thought about the leaf-insults, the nineteen hearing interview respondents invariably replied that the insult totally made no sense, because deaf people are like hearing people, are born from hearing people, eat like hearing people, have the same blood and body, and are human beings living in human society. One person remarked that this insult "is an abomination in our community from time immemorial," implying that it is taboo in Adamorobe to insult deaf people in this way. While leaf-insults only seldomly happened in Adamorobe, they

regularly happened in Accra (and I experienced such an insult myself), on the cocoa farms and in contacts with the Ga, which led to physical fights. Here are three examples narrated by Kwame Osae: the first incident happened in a cocoa area, the second one around Adamorobe, and the third one in the city:

> I was on my way to my cocoa farm and I do not hear. I had my gun with me and I was walking there. Someone put a leaf in his mouth and I was like: huh? That meant that I am like a goat or sheep, that I think the same way those animals do. I got angry and told them that he was out of his mind and started to tell him off. He said sorry but I was really angry and said: "You think that I'm like a dull animal, do you think you can easily defeat me??" I was already set to fight, but the man begged me not to do anything. I took money offered by him and the man left. I did not want to see him anymore! I still threatened him with my gun in case he did not leave quickly enough. He ran away quickly and I scolded him once more to his back. (…) [another time] On the way from here to Oyibi something happened. I had chopped wood and was carrying it on my head and walking with it to that road. I hid the wood somewhere in the bushes to take it to Accra the next morning at… (*thinking*) 4 o'clock. Well, I went there and met a Ga on that road, and he had a leaf that he tossed up and down in his mouth. I saw that and I thought: "WHAT? Has he gone mad?" When I showed him I was getting angry, he waved his hand as if to send me away. That really made me angry and I grabbed him. He floundered but I hit him with my fists, he fell to the ground, I continued to beat him, we fought. I kicked him, he rolled over. Then he ran away scared, scared from the fighting deaf man. I scolded him to his back: you should be ashamed! Are you afraid!? (Kwame Osae, Interview, 5 July 2009)
>
> Once I took the *trotro* in Accra, and I gestured that I had to go to Madina. A hearing person saw me sign and laughed with me, he insultingly called me a goat, mimicked that I cannot talk. I got very angry and hit and hit him and his teeth got knocked out! The police came and angrily asked why we were fighting. I explained that I was compared to a goat and they punished the hearing person and not me, because I am deaf and was insulted. (Kwame Osae, Fieldnotes, 2 July 2009)

While all these examples come from Kwame Osae, every deaf adult whom I asked had already physically fought people following leaf-insults. I learned stories about deaf men and women who nearly killed people, kicked people's teeth out, or hurt people so gravely that they died afterwards from their injuries. One of the hearing interview respondents mentioned a rule or law that was introduced in 1975: the rule was that deaf people should not fight people who insulted them by holding a leaf in

their mouth. Deaf people also fought people who had a leaf in their mouth or hand without the intention to mock deaf people, and the consequences were felt to be too grave for people who did not realize that in Adamorobe there is a taboo on that. According to some interviewed hearing people, this behavior prevented people from outside coming to Adamorobe. When I asked some deaf people about this rule, they claimed that it was designed for the hearing people instead: they should not insult deaf people, otherwise the deaf people will fight them.

Even though this insult is taboo in Adamorobe, a number of deaf people felt not fully safe in their village from insults from outsiders. Several of them told me they were uncomfortable hanging out at the main path or the market square for signed conversations, because these were the places where they were most visible for visitors from outside Adamorobe, and thus most susceptible to insults that would infuriate them.

This is also one of the reasons why a number of deaf people felt ambivalent about attending funerals: these often attract outsiders from other ethnic groups, such as Ewe and Ga who are related by marriage or are friends or acquaintances of the (family of the) deceased person. I observed that when deaf people attended funerals, several of them tended to sign very small, avoided signing too much, or avoided signing altogether. Others did not let themselves be restricted by the possibility to be insulted, and signed away. It also happened that deaf individuals refrained from attending altogether. When I asked Ama Korkor why she was not attending a particular funeral even though the deceased person was someone she had known, she answered:

> When you use AdaSL and for example a Ga sees it, they will say something to the person sitting next to him. They laugh and that person puts a leaf in his mouth and mocks the deaf person, gesturing "YOU HEAR-NOTHING." And that leads to physical fights. Here in Adamorobe, the hearing people are good, they don't put a leaf in their mouth, we are friends. (Ama Korkor, Fieldnotes, 12 December 2008)

"We Are All the Same People, One Family"

When Joseph Okyere questioned hearing people's perspectives on differences between deaf and hearing people, the argument that returned over and over again in the interviews was that "There are differences but not vast. It is only they can't speak. Very little difference." Respondents said

that deaf people "are just like us," and that deaf and hearing people do the same things, such as farming, marrying, and housekeeping. They thus emphasized the fact that daily spatial practices are the same for the hearing and deaf people.

One might argue that such a focus on daily practices could obscure a possible apprehended difference in deaf and hearing people's intelligence. However, when asked if they thought that deaf and hearing people have the same intelligence and knowledge or not, eighteen hearing people replied that deaf and hearing people's intelligence is the same and fifteen people thought that the amount of knowledge is the same. Examples of their replies were: "Deaf people's thinking is the same as ours," "Deaf can go to school, only they study in sign language."

Some of the interviewees remarked that there are differences among individual deaf people regarding intelligence and knowledge, but that this is also the case for hearing people, and that this also means that a deaf person can "surpass" a hearing person when higher educated. There were no highly educated deaf people in Adamorobe during my research, but hearing people from Adamorobe have met educated deaf people at least since the late 1950s, such as the Rev. Andrew Foster (who had two master's degrees) and a number of deaf church workers and tourists (see chapters 7 and 8). The four people who responded that they thought that deaf people have less knowledge than hearing people pointed at deaf people's limited access to education and to discourses in spoken language. Hearing people thus not only see what deaf people *do* the same as hearing people, but also have insights in deaf people's capacity of thinking, natural differences among them, and the barriers they experience.

I wondered about hearing people's attitudes toward the idea of deaf people in political institutions and other "high" positions such as household head or lineage head. Eleven of the nineteen respondents gave the "Yes, can do" argument, one of them citing literacy and formal education as a condition. As such, this person in fact excluded all deaf adults older than 22 years as they had only a few months or years of formal education or no formal education at all. Eight people pointed at the limits that not being to express oneself in spoken language poses in positions of power, such as during meetings, in contacts with the police, and at court. Also with regard to religious ceremonies, it was believed that speech is important: it is possible to do libation and talk to ancestors, spirits, and

deities in sign language but it was also said that it is important to say the names of the gods in spoken language, because not all deities and spirits know sign language.

Thus, while no single interviewed person expressed that deaf people are inherently incapable of holding high positions, they emphasized the limits of being "confined" to the use of sign language. The notion that deaf people could use an interpreter seemed not to occur to them. Deaf people themselves did not complain to me about being excluded from such functions; it appeared that their concerns lay elsewhere, with the marriage prohibition and their being nonliterate, as will be demonstrated in chapters 6 to 8.

To go further, in the interviews with hearing people, deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe were not only said to be SAME but also to be *one,* one family: "What I can say is that deaf and hearing in Adamorobe have a cordial relationship. We do everything together nicely. We eat together, farm together, almost everything"; "We have been with them since time immemorial and we will be with them until the end." The last quote emphasizes that the presence of deaf people in Adamorobe, as well as the unity of deaf and hearing people as one people or one family, is embedded in Adamorobe's past, present, and future. Hearing people said, "Deaf people are our ancestors"; "Communicating with deaf people is what our ancestors did."

It is significant that this unity was emphasized by *both* deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe. I have already mentioned the practice of people pointing out kinship relationships to me, during everyday encounters, and such unity was felt in situations of shared grief. Kofi Pare compared this with the unity of different ethnic groups: "There are Ga, Ewe, Akan, Krobo, and we are all one. Just like that, there are hearing people and deaf people, we all mingle, we are all one. We are not different."

It is not the aim to draw an ideal picture here, like the romanticized accounts of Martha's Vineyard. In the remainder of this book, differences between deaf and hearing people, ambiguous discourses, discriminatory practices, the discriminatory marriage law, far-going conflicts, and historical changes will be discussed. Thus, throughout the chapters, a complicated and nuanced picture will emerge. I want to foreground this discourse before investigating the growing gap between deaf and hearing people and discriminatory practices, making clear where the deaf and

hearing people of Adamorobe *themselves* laid the final emphasis in their discourses. During conversations and interviews, and in often-repeated every day utterances they mostly ended with the note that "We are all SAME and connected."

Historical and Demographical Changes

During the numerous informal conversations that I had with deaf people in Adamorobe, a number of them nostalgically told me that in the past there were more hearing people who signed fluently and more deaf–hearing (group) conversations, and that these conversations were longer in duration rather than short interactions such as greetings. They explained the decline of deaf–hearing contact as due to the fact that not all the hearing people knew how to sign well: "Talking with each other is easier for them." The late Agnes Bomo, the hearing woman with a number of deaf relatives, pointed out that percentage-wise, the number of deaf people in Adamorobe had declined, so fewer hearing people came in contact with deaf people frequently, which negatively influenced the percentage of hearing people with signing skills.

However, changes in demography and the (relative) number of people with signing skills do not explain why hearing people who signed very well did not always use the language when deaf people were present, and mostly did not join longer group conversations with deaf people. Several deaf and hearing interviewees came up with the explanation that people were less often engaged in collective activities such as work and eating (which had been a communal experience with members of the compound and neighbors). These activities traditionally kept villagers in close (language) contact, and a lot of signed conversation would go on then. Yaa Awurabea, Adamorobe's oldest deaf woman (in her seventies), gave expression to a growing gap between deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe:

> We were all friends, we were all the same! We shared food with each other. (…) We talked with each other, all together. But now that is finished (*regret*). Before, we talked together. With hearing people, with deaf people, together. (…) Deaf and hearing people talked together: now with a hearing, then with a deaf, then again a hearing, and so on, signing with each other. (…) We went to cut *fufu*-sticks together, deaf and hearing people together. (*smiles*) We had fun together and all of us were cutting sticks. Deaf and hearing people worked

> together, we were connected. Now that is finished. (Yaa Awurabea, Interview, 29 August 2009)

The changes described in chapter 2, of growing differentiation among villagers with regard to employment, housing and societal status, and land disputes, were said to have impacted the extent to which deaf and hearing people eat and work together, and thus the extent to which AdaSL was used. These processes were influencing sign language proficiency and language choices. They negatively influenced the degree to which hearing people, including those without deaf close relatives, were likely to learn and use AdaSL. The late Agnes Bomo had once commented, "Those modern people don't know how their ancestors did." An important finding is that while these demographic and economic changes had influence on sign language practices in Adamorobe, they did not seem to have had a negative influence on the language ideologies about AdaSL (yet).

Another factor is the increasing number of migrants. Migrants were less likely than they had been in the past to communicate with deaf people, due to the increasing population size and the increasing occupational and educational differentiation in the village. While deaf people generally did not complain if a particular person did not know AdaSL well, unless it happened in customer relationships, like in the example of Kwasi Boahene and the yellow barrel (chapter 3), they complained that general signing proficiency was decreasing.

The chief was also said to be a factor, as deaf people saw a contrast between the current chief and the previous chief. When deaf people talked about the late Nana Kwakwa Asiampong (the previous chief) they usually explained that they appreciated the fact that he often addressed the deaf people as a group during the Odwira festival (the yam festival, the Akan new year celebrations) and other festive occasions, offering them gifts such as soft drinks and some small amounts of money. Apparently, he was not a proficient signer, but he learned some AdaSL and actively tried to communicate with deaf people directly, in addition to employing the late Agnes Bomo as interpreter. The reason for this chief addressing the deaf people as a group did not become clear to me, but might better be understood in the context of chapters 7 and 8, in which I describe how the deaf people were addressed as a group by educators, NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), churches, charity agencies, and tourists.

A number of deaf people complained that in contrast, chief Nana Osei Boakye Yiadom II did not (or not anymore) address the deaf people as a group. Kofi Pare stated that festivals were now only for/from the hearing people, and did not explicitly include the deaf people like in the past: "Long time ago we were all together, all together one, not separate, not different." Kofi Pare thus indicated that change had happened not only on the level of individual interactions, but also on the level of village events.

4

"DEAF SAME": Deaf Spaces and Deaf Sociality

In the long fieldwork excerpt in the beginning of the previous chapter, I described how in everyday life in Adamorobe, deaf and hearing people naturally interacted with each other, but deaf people also clustered together to converse with each other. As such, they produced *deaf spaces*. The places where deaf people in Adamorobe engaged in deaf sociality, setting up deaf spaces, were part of their everyday routes in the village. The features of deaf spaces differed with regard to the organization of deaf people in the space, the time of day and the role of daylight, the privacy or openness of the places, and the gender of the people who interacted. Although these spaces came into existence anywhere in Adamorobe (and also at the farms) where a few deaf people met and engaged in a conversation, there were some particular places, such as the compound I described, where deaf spaces were set up more frequently. Most of these places were in the Southwestern part of Adamorobe, in an area that I will call the "deaf center" of Adamorobe (which is a purely descriptive term, not used by the people from Adamorobe) (figure 4.1). See map 2 for the location of the "deaf center" in Adamorobe.

The fieldwork excerpt below gives an example of interactions at a crossing that was located between two compounds (see point a on figure 4.1) where a number of deaf people lived at the time of my research: Kofi Pare and his partner Afua Kaya in a one-room house, and in the compound diagonally opposite of them lived the late Afua Tatyifu, her elderly brother Kwabena Ofori, her daughter Akua Fiankobea, and son Kwadzo Toa (both were in their thirties/forties), with the late Agnes Bomo and other hearing family members.

> At 6 am I went outside to go greet people and I bumped into Kwasi Boahene, Ama Korkor and Kofi Pare who were talking at the crossing. Kwasi Boahene was in fact on the way to my home, but stopped by on the crossing for a chat. Ama Korkor shared some news she had just heard from her sister: someone was killed in Aburi—and she continued with an excited story that people are assaulted at their farms and that farmers have to take care. Then Kwame Osae approached us.

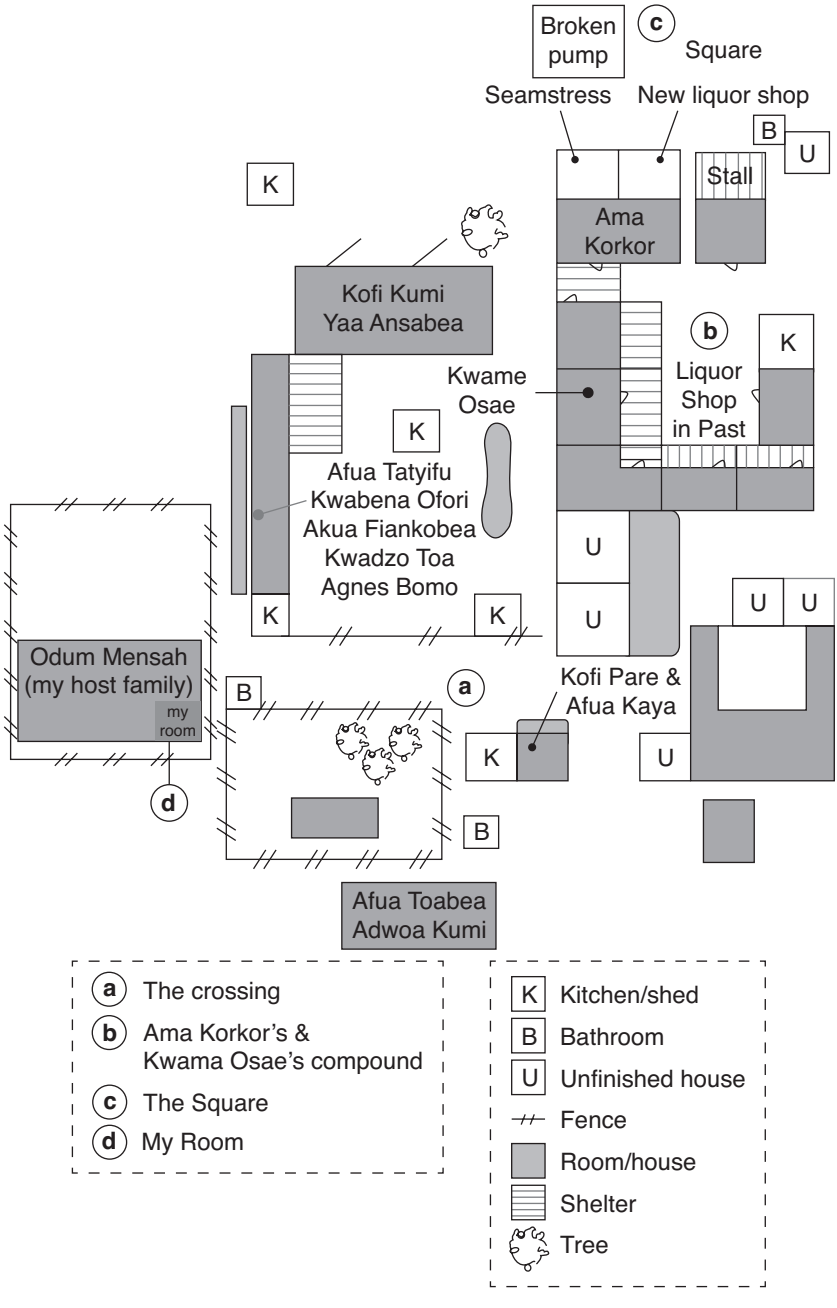

Figure 4.1. The "deaf center."

> He wore only a single cloth wrapped around his waist, as he was on his way to bathe in the river. When he saw us, he stopped by for a small chat. Later, Akua Fiankobea came from her hearing partners' compound where she had passed the night, and joined us. Kwame Osae left to wash himself and Akua Fiankobea left to her home. Afua Kaya returned from greeting her mother and dropping the dirt on the dump heap close to her mother's home. Many hearing people passed by, sending us a short greeting holding their hands and asking if we were well, without stopping by. Two of the hearing passersby stopped for a chat though: a woman who has five deaf siblings and two deaf daughters began a story about a (hearing) person who had deceived her, and Afua Ofosua's husband, who has a few deaf close friends. After a while, everybody left to their farms. (Fieldnotes, 19 June 2009)

See figure 4.2 for an example of a deaf space at the crossing. People passed by this spot, for example, if they came from or went to their farms, if they went to fetch water at the river or pump, or if they were on the way to bathe in the river or in the shared bathroom behind Kofi Pare's house—as Kwame Osae was in the example above and Kwasi Boahene is depicted in figure 4.3. Because many deaf people happened to live in this part of Adamorobe, many of the passersby were deaf, and stopped at the crossing for a short conversation with the people who lived there and whoever else was there. Sometimes deaf people passed through there or went there deliberately, aiming to meet, greet or converse with deaf people. There were also many short interactions (i.e., greetings and short conversations) between deaf people and hearing passersby at this spot.

The size of deaf spaces at the crossing varied all the time but could easily contain up to six people (such as in figure 4.2), whose spatial position and spatial practices depended on the time of day. In the morning before leaving for the farm, people were busy and typically met only briefly, greeting and sharing some news while standing (such as in figure 4.3). In the late afternoon after returning from the farms, people were often relaxed, sitting down on a plastic garden chair, a piece of wood, or the step in front of the house, or just squatting on the ground (such as in figure 4.4). The deaf spaces often remained longer and were bigger—spread out over the whole crossing and reaching to under the trees opposite Afua Tatyifu's house (where Kwadzo Toa is sitting in figure 4.5). Akua Fiankobea often talked with deaf people on the crossing when sitting in front of her kitchen on her own compound, which was about 5 meters away from the path. Sometimes deaf people gave Kofi Pare and Afua Kaya a hand when processing farm products (such as in figure 4.5). In the late evening, deaf

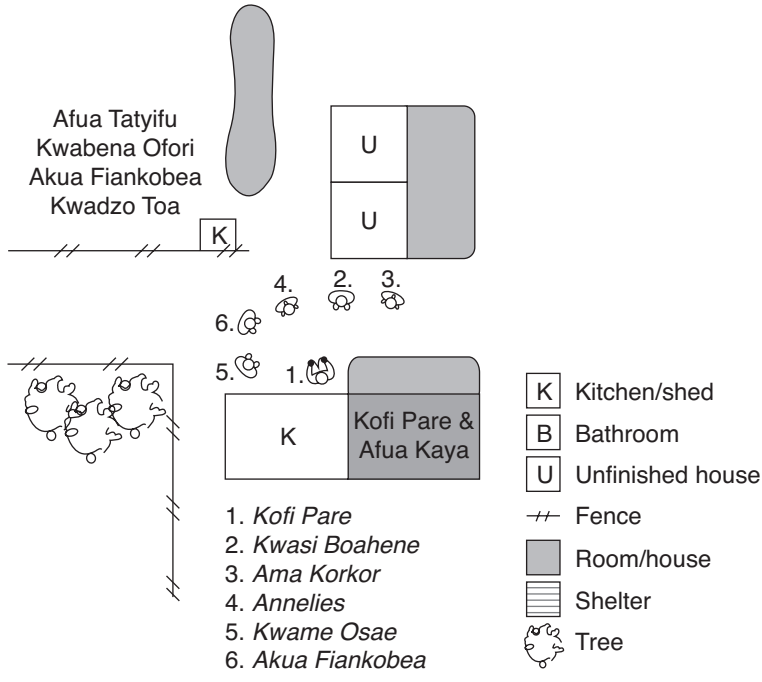

Figure 4.2. A deaf space on "the crossing."

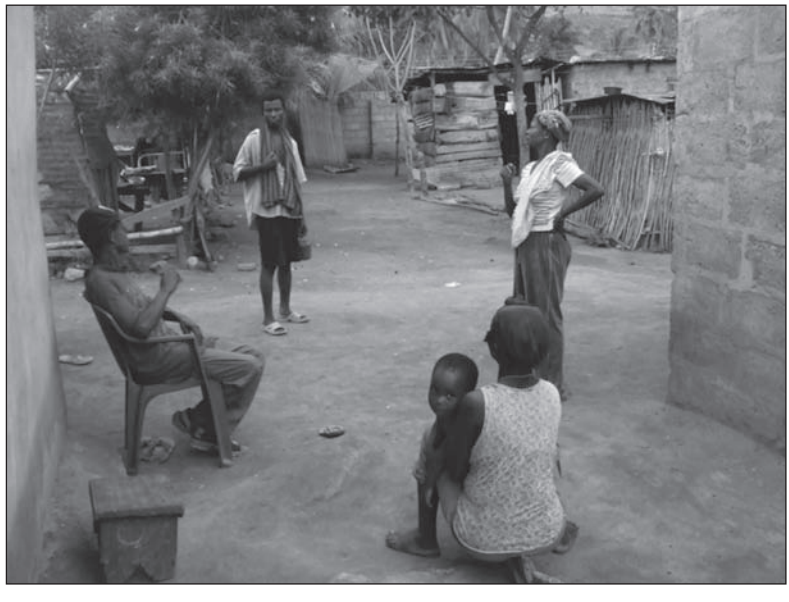

Figure 4.3. Kofi Pare, Kwasi Boahene, Ama Korkor, and Afua Kaya chatting at the crossing. Kwasi Boahene was on his way to the river to wash himself.

Figure 4.4. Kofi Pare, Opare Kwasi, and Kwame Osae chatting at the crossing.

Figure 4.5. Kofi Pare, Kwaku Duodu, Ama Korkor, and Afua Kaya processing corn at the crossing; Kwadzo Toa looking from under the tree.

people at this spot (often only a few, three people or so) stood or sat very close to each other in front of Kofi Pare's house, mostly in a small round deaf space, to be able to see each other in the dark.

Typically, women more often searched out Afua Kaya and men more often searched out Kofi Pare (such as in figure 4.4), but most of the time, deaf people from both sexes freely interacted with each other at this spot. This place was

very "open:" from here, one could see what happened in several compounds, on the paths, and on the square with the broken pump (see point c on figure 4.1), and people on the square also had a good view of the crossing. So, when people wanted to say something private or to gossip, they signed using a very small space or moved behind a wall of the unfinished house (see figure 4.2).

Deaf spaces at the crossing tended to be smaller and shorter in duration than those set up in a nearby compound, the one discussed in the opening of chapter 4 (see point b in figure 4.1), where three deaf people lived: Kofi Pare's older sister Ama Korkor, her partner Kofi Boahene, and her older brother Kwame Osae, along with a number of hearing relatives. This place offered more privacy than the crossing, there were more possibilities to sit down, and people were less often "on the way" to somewhere else. Although both deaf and hearing people were constantly moving in and out of this compound, up to eight or nine deaf people could be found there at any one time, typically organized in several smaller deaf spaces.

Just like on the crossing, these spaces could be gendered for short times (female around Ama Korkor or male around Kwame Osae), but were not fixed. Deaf people were moving all the time and greeting each other and hearing people, sometimes having a long one-to-one conversation with a hearing person, particularly Ama Korkor's sister. Just like at the crossing, the conversations tended to be longer in the late afternoon than in the morning. If it rained, people moved under Kwame's and Ama's shelters; there were no deaf spaces on the crossing during showers. Because there were some lightbulbs in the shelters, there was more light in the evenings here than on the crossing, which allowed for larger deaf spaces.

Ama Korkor's hearing sister had a stall selling rice, vegetables, and tins on a table just outside the compound (see figure 4.1, "stall" near point c). Often, Kwame Osae or Kofi Pare sat there with or without their sister. It was cooler there than inside the compound. Often, a few deaf people could be found there with them, sometimes returning to or going from the adjoining liquor shop (see figure 4.6 for an example). The square where this shop was located was a very open space (more than the crossing) and there was also more movement of people and thus more greetings and short conversations with both deaf and hearing people.

Deaf spaces on this square tended to be short in duration, perhaps because the place was so open. Deaf people mentioned a fear of witchcraft, because more people, thus also witches, can see them in open spaces, and also that they felt more vulnerable for insults from visiting outsiders there

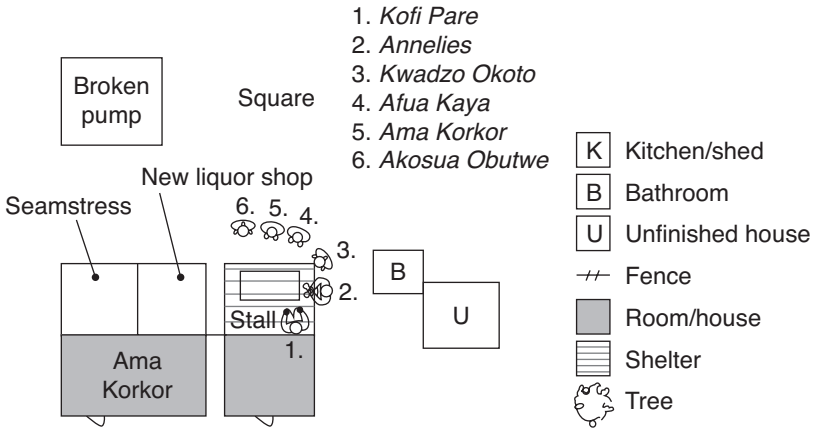

Figure 4.6. Deaf people sitting and standing around Ama Korkor's sister's stall.

(see chapter 6). In the midst of the square was a rectangular stone where there once had been a water pump that had broken down; the stone was used as a sitting place by deaf people who loitered there for longer times when the sun stood low (see figure 4.7). Kwabena Ofori, Adamorobe's oldest deaf man, almost always sat at the edge of this square, and at this spot, mostly in the morning, about two to four deaf men could often be found in conversation there (as demonstrated in figure 3.5 in the previous chapter).

During my research, my room became another place where deaf spaces were frequently produced (see point d in figure 3.6): it offered cover from sun and rain, enough space and light to have conversations inside and much more privacy than the spaces mentioned above, inviting private chats and free gossip. Deaf spaces were mostly small but sometimes grew into a group of five to ten people, men and women, children and adults, typically in the morning and in daytime (see figure 4.8). The turnover of visitors was much less frequent and people often stayed for one or more hours.

The places described above were frequent deaf gathering spots during my research time (and I therefore spent most of my time in these places), but these changed over time as people in Adamorobe regularly moved, went to live with other family members or with partners, or built a room in another place in Adamorobe. For example, in Ama Korkor's compound, the moving of the liquor shop from inside to outside the compound caused a slight decline in deaf visitors and a decrease in deaf–hearing interactions in this compound. During my last visit, in 2012, only three (instead of six) deaf people resided at the crossing.

Figure 4.7. A deaf space on and around the stone of the broken pump.

Figure 4.8. Deaf women visiting me in my room.

More importantly, during Nyst's research in 2001 and 2004, many deaf people met in the compound of Adwoa Atwee, a woman who had five deaf and four hearing adult children. All her deaf offspring still lived at her home at that time, as well as a deaf man who married her hearing daughter, along with their two deaf children. By the time I started my research in 2008, all five had moved out, stayed with their deaf partners, or lived at

a new house. At the time of my research, this family was building more rooms on the edge of Adamorobe, and it was expected that Adwoa Atwee's deaf and hearing children who lived dispersed around Adamorobe would move there, and possibly their deaf partners too. In that case, my descriptive term "deaf center" would no longer fit the situation, although there was a lesser frequency of passersby in that area than on the crossing or the square because of its more remote location.

Hearing People in Deaf Spaces

In chapter 3, I wrote that a space containing both deaf and hearing signers generally did not transform into one big signing space. Similarly, hearing signers generally did not join an existing deaf (and thus signing) space for a long time. As apparent in the situation descriptions of the compound and the crossing, deaf conversations existed as "deaf bubbles" that hearing people typically only joined for greeting, teasing, joking, and relaying news, that is, for short interactions. Another example is the following:

> A few deaf people sat at—or stood around—the stone of the broken pump. One hearing man was distributing flyers for the NPP [a political party] and told the deaf that they had to vote for the NPP, whilst some other men who saw it happen remonstrated: "No, vote for the NDC!" One of them signed to Kwasi Boahene: "Don't vote for the NPP, everything is expensive then, there is no money then, you know!" (Fieldnotes, 6 December 2008)

I also observed longer deaf–hearing one-on-one conversations, such as with trusted individuals such as Ama Korkor's sister. However, I did not observe hearing people participating in deaf spaces in the same way as deaf people in *both* the respects of *long group conversations* as opposed to short interactions, and *participating in the existing conversation* rather than introducing a new topic. I mostly observed situations where either one of these two conditions was fulfilled, but not both. I will give an example of the first one, a longer group conversation:

> There were five men sitting in front of Kwasi Boahene's new house-in-construction, four of them deaf and one of them hearing. The hearing man was one of Kwasi Boahene's best friends and had a deaf wife. They were waiting for someone who would do some measurements, and during this time, the hearing man was signing most often. He was talking about the people in Adamorobe, e.g., about a woman who became pregnant illegitimately, concluding that "women are bad," about someone who had died from drinking too much alcohol, about diseases, conflicts, and about the Ga. He referred to the murder of Kwame Afere [the deaf man who was killed by some Ga when he was cutting

> wood on litigation land] to emphasize that the deaf men should be careful, and should not go to Ga areas alone. The deaf men were mainly listening, confirming, and supplementing the stories, sometimes asking something. For me it was clearly visible that the man was not deaf: he did not always notice that people were signing and he did not always understand immediately if a deaf person signed something. The deaf men modified their signing style in a way that he would understand, but sometimes the deaf men exchanged some quick signs before asking or telling him something, just like the hearing people when a deaf person joins. (Fieldnotes, 13 October 2009)

In this example of a longer group conversation (which only seldomly occurred and was in the above case triggered by waiting together), the hearing man was mostly *introducing* the themes. When a hearing person joins in an already *existing* conversation, this typically happens as a short interaction rather than a longer group conversation:

> Ama Korkor, Afua Kaya, and Akosua Obutwe stood around the stall of Ama Korkor's sister, who sat on the bench behind the table. The three deaf women chatted amongst themselves, and Ama Korkor's sister did not pay attention to the conversation, until the deaf women complained that the fish had become so expensive. She suddenly said that it is because of the NDC, who recently had won the political elections. Under the NPP, the fish was not that expensive. That way she had criticized the deaf because most deaf people had voted for the NDC. (Fieldnotes, 26 September 2009)

A hearing person thus generally did not participate in the same ways as deaf people did, not following the same conversational habits as deaf people: in longer conversations they would either generally initiate (and thus lead) the themes, or shortly react on a detail. In the following, I offer a longer and telling example of how deaf and hearing people organized themselves and communicated in space during the time of my research:

> After we heard the news about Okoto's illness, five of us walked to the doctor: Kwadzo Toa, Kwame Osae, Kwasi Boahene, Kofi Pare, and me. We found Okoto sitting on a bench in front of the doctor's practice. Kwame Osae was not with us anymore: en route he had stopped at the compound of a hearing relative for a chat. Two hearing men (which I understood to be his relatives) stood next to Okoto and signed to him that he should not be silly again when the doctor would come. They explained to Kofi Pare and Kwasi Boahene that Okoto refused to cooperate earlier on the day when the doctor wanted to put him on a drip. Okoto replied that he would only accept an injection, no drip. A third hearing man arrived and greeted us. The three hearing men started chatting with each other, and the deaf men did the same, except for Kwadzo Toa, who (as usual) stood on the side without actively participating. Afua Aketewa, who

> lived next to the doctor, had seen us from her home and came along, at the same time as Akosua Obutwe who also lived nearby and found us en route to another place. The deaf and hearing conversed separately for a while: the deaf stood in a large oval shape and the hearing stood in a small circle next to it. Then one of the hearing men asked Kwadzo Toa if he wanted to go check in the village where the doctor was. Afua Aketewa imitated the doctor's facial expressions, and the hearing men saw it and laughed. Afua Aketewa, now encouraged, started chatting away to two of the three hearing people about doctors and her health, but one of them pulled out and she ended with one conversation partner. Meanwhile, Kwame Osae finally arrived after having stopped by his relative, greeted the hearing men and had a short conversation with one of them, about fights with the Ga. At the end, he wanted to add something else but meanwhile, the hearing man was talking again with another hearing man. Kwame Osae joined the deaf space, just like Afua Aketewa did, and again the deaf and hearing spaces did not interact. Two more hearing persons passed by and one of them talked with Kwasi Boahene before continuing his route. A young hearing girl passed by and Kwame Osae said something to her. Kwadzo Toa came back with the news that the doctor was at a funeral and would not come very soon. One of the hearing men asked Kwame Osae whether the deaf wanted to take the responsibility for Okoto: they were leaving and if the doctor came after all, they would pay the doctor afterwards. The seven deaf people remained where they were, and Kwasi Opare came along on his way to the farm. Before parting, Kwame Osae, Akosua Obutwe, and Afua Aketewa continued chatting at Afua Aketewa's house next to the doctor's office. Kofi Pare, Kwadzo Toa, Kwasi Boahene, Okoto, and me were left over, and the men decided to return later. (Fieldnotes, 26 September 2009)

In this situation, there initially was some interaction between the deaf arriving men and Okoto's hearing relatives to explain and assess the situation. Then, deaf people and hearing people largely maintained their own conversational spaces, but there continued to be interaction between the groups, sometimes in one-on-one conversations, and sometimes more people were involved. Furthermore, there were deaf and hearing men and women who passed by, greeted and sometimes talked a bit. Deaf passersby did not just tag along to the deaf space but greeted and sometimes conversed with the hearing men, and the same was true for hearing passersby. The general pattern that emerged in this situation was true to life in the village: while deaf people maintained their own spaces, these were strongly in flux, and there always was interaction with hearing people as well, more so when something triggered this interaction, such as a deaf person's illness.

There are several possible reasons for the fact that deaf–hearing interactions within deaf spaces were generally short. An obvious one is that, as discussed in the previous chapter, many hearing people did not know how

to sign well; practically none of them signed as fluently as deaf people do. Kofi Pare explained:

> The hearing are scared because they do not know any signs, they only greet. They greet and then they leave again: hearing people pass by us, come from and going to different places in the village, and they greet us, but then they immediately leave and don't join us in the conversation. They do not talk to deaf people because they cannot sign well, it is difficult for them and therefore they don't want to stay, they leave again quickly. (Fieldnotes, 31 July 2009)

In addition, Joseph Okyere remarked that it was often difficult to identify the theme of conversation, and that deaf people did not like interruptions. I found that many deaf people also did not like people to eavesdrop on their conversations. I got the impression that there were other factors in play as well, because even fluently signing hearing people did not participate in deaf conversations in the same way as deaf people did. Both deaf and hearing people seemed to maintain deaf spaces largely as deaf-only. At the end of chapter 3 I reflect on some possibly related historical changes. In addition to the processes of differentiation and immigration, and their influence on the frequency and quality of signed communication between deaf and hearing people, other factors may have influenced the role of hearing people in deaf spaces, such as the highly discriminatory marriage law, separate deaf schooling and worship, and the visits of NGOs and church workers who focused on the deaf. These are discussed in chapters 6 through 9. I am not suggesting, however, that the existence of deaf spaces is merely a result of all those processes or a reaction on those. Instead, I argue that such processes contributed to an increase in frequency, duration, and exclusiveness of deaf spaces (see chapter 10).

Social Practices in Deaf Spaces

There were individual differences in the participation in deaf spaces: not all deaf people were inclined to interact with other deaf people to the same extent. There were about thirty deaf adults who were living in Adamorobe most of the time, and about half of them produced or joined fewer deaf spaces and the other half, more. This number is the same estimate as Nyst's, who suggested that the latter could be seen as members of "a subgroup [that] can be seen as an emergent Deaf community."[126] However, instead of there being a "group" that could be distinguished (or distinguished itself), I observed a *continuum* of interacting more or less with other deaf people, in spaces that were not bounded, nor marked as specific friend groups or networks.

There were several reasons for less actively producing or joining deaf spaces. One deaf person was intellectually disabled and another person had mental health problems and did not have social contact with other deaf people. One elderly deaf woman was becoming blind, could not walk anymore, and remained inside her room. Other people said that deaf people gossip too much, get too angry and make too many problems, which I will discuss further in this chapter. This does not mean that these people were isolated from other deaf people: most of them greeted other deaf people, regularly had a chat with other deaf people, and most of them had at least one deaf sibling or a very close deaf friend or relative with whom they interacted a lot. In other words, they engaged in deaf sociality, too.

When observing social practices in deaf spaces, several patterns became apparent. Greetings between deaf people could be rather elaborate: the initiating person would start the conversation by explaining what he/she had done that day until meeting the interlocutor, or what he/she had done since the last time they met. It could take this form: "I went to the farm and I thought this/that, there I ran into X and X told me this/that news, I did this/that on the farm, I came back and bathed, drank water, felt refreshed. Then I thought this/that, I went to Y and told him/her the news that X told me, and Y told me this/that, then I came here and found you, and now I'm talking with you and now it is your turn." As a reply, the other person would tell his/her story. It was not the case that this manner of greeting was specific to deaf people, as I observed hearing people doing this with deaf people too, but I observed that deaf people among each other often took their time over it.

In Adamorobe, the knowledge of one deaf person often became collective deaf knowledge. As mentioned in chapter 3, deaf people warned each other if something happened, and Joseph Okyere told me how hearing people found it remarkable that the deaf people "manage to know everybody, hear information fast and deliver it fast, are more observant than hearing people and know a lot." The other side of the coin was that, as a result of sharing the news quickly and efficiently with each other, it sometimes happened that the whole deaf group had wrong information about something that had happened.

Deaf people not only shared the kinds of "general" news and gossip that were discussed in village interactions, but they also shared news connected with the experience of being a deaf person in Adamorobe. First, they complained about hearing people who did not treat deaf people well, or who demonstrated behavior that was judged as inappropriate, usually leading to the very frequently uttered comment "HEARING BAD" (i.e., "hearing

people are bad"). Second, they shared news and gossip about other deaf people, such as about each other's social behavior. It was especially criticized if other deaf people (were thought to have) lied, cheated, were greedy, lazy, unconfident, dishonest, too stubborn, or too flexible. They discussed each other's relationships: the choice of partner, loyalty toward the partner, and care for the partner. Another theme of discussion was each other's appearance, including clothes, body, hair, and smell.

When a deaf person fell severely ill or had an accident, the possible cause was discussed: for example, working too hard or too little, drinking too much, having sex with several partners, or perhaps a "bad hearing person" had caused the problems through juju, witchchraft, or poison. Third, themes associated with deaf people as a *group* were discussed: visitors who came for the deaf people, the deaf church, my research, and the business projects I organized (see chapters 7 through 9).

Just like deaf–hearing interactions, deaf–deaf interactions were very often playful. Deaf people in Adamorobe typically teased each other by representing the form of each other's skull, impersonating each other, and imitating people's ways of walking, dancing, and signing, which often inspired deaf people's name signs. Some of the deaf people loved to make short signed songs about events, about each other, and sometimes about hearing people, in a rhythmic and repeating way, to tease each other and sometimes also to lament sorrowful occurences such as Okoto's death. These songs were also noticed by hearing people who were, according to Joseph Okyere, unceasingly amazed "how deaf people manage to sing in sign language."

Because in Adamorobe, teasing, gossip, exchanging news, and long greeting rituals also happened in hearing people's interactions with each other or between hearing and deaf people, we cannot make the distinction between deaf–deaf and deaf–hearing social practices sharply. What was different between them, however, was the *frequency*, the *time and energy* that was invested in these, and the *fluency of the language* used (i.e., AdaSL). In addition, there was a difference in how those spaces were *understood*: deaf people expressed feelings and discourses of deaf sameness and unity and linked those to the existence of deaf spaces.

Discourses about Deaf Spaces: "DEAF SAME" and "DEAF CONNECTED"

When I asked deaf people why they liked to come together for conversation, a very frequently uttered expression was: "DEAF SAME" (i.e., "We are deaf and therefore the same"). Thus just like being family or friends or being from

the same clan, being deaf was one of the bases on which people used the sign "SAME." Kwame Osae, who was in his sixties, told me a story about how as a child, he met a number of adult deaf men in Adamorobe, and learned from them about the shared values that come with being DEAF SAME:

> I was small and I didn't know them yet. I watched them talk. I asked someone else whether they were hearing and he said: "No, they are deaf." I didn't know them. I watched them, humble, ignorant. I greeted them shyly and one of them called me forward but I didn't want to go to him because I thought that he was hearing and that he would slap me. But he said: "No, I am deaf, you and me are connected because of God, we are SAME, we don't fight, so come here. We are connected." I went to him and he embraced me. There were several deaf people there sitting under a tree, they talked to each other and shared drinks. When they became tipsy one of them got hungry and said he would go to his wife. He invited other deaf people to join him, but they didn't want to go with him. The deaf person who would leave scolded them: "Come on, we are SAME, why don't you come with me?" He tried with some other people who didn't want to go either. One of them said he had eaten enough already. So the man slinked off silently. The deaf watched him go. … I was told: "He is deaf, DEAF SAME, that's why he asked us to eat with him." A hearing person told me: "Yes indeed, you are DEAF SAME." I got it. Deaf people should go with him. Just three small bites is enough already, and then you can go. Refusing this so the man has to eat alone is wrong, then you are devilish! (Kwame Osae, Interview, 5 July 2009)

What becomes apparent from this story is that there were certain expectations that the involved people had from each other, such as eating together when invited. Sharing meals is a practice that has diminished throughout the years, but this fragment nonetheless illustrates that there were mutual expectations that deaf people explained as being the result of being "DEAF SAME." When such an expectation was not honored it gave reason to be disappointed or to discuss the morality of the offender's behavior.

In general, I noticed the following practices and expectations: greeting other deaf people even if they were not family or friends, searching out other deaf people for conversations, visiting other deaf people when ill, helping other deaf people on the farm and when processing farm products such as peeling corn, buying from and selling to other deaf people, not fighting with other deaf people, trying to avoid arguments with other deaf people, and not wanting other deaf people to do things that make them feel ashamed of being deaf. Here are three examples to illustrate:

> Kwame Ofori came in Ama Korkor's compound and he greeted Kwasi Opare kind of heartily, patted him on the shoulder amicably, looked at me and said:

> "See, we are DEAF SAME, friends, I do not reject him you know, I am friends with him, God made us deaf, I am friends with him." (Fieldnotes, 13 December 2008)

> On a Thursday morning around 7:30 I went into Ama Korkor's house. Ama Korkor, Kofi Boahene, and Kwaku Duodu were sitting in a small shed peeling corn. I asked: "Whose corn is that?" Ama Korkor replied: "Kofi Boahene's and mine." I asked: "Then why is Kwaku Duodu working too?" Ama Korkor laughed and answered: "Ah, DEAF SAME, you know? He stopped by to say hello, saw us peeling the corn and started helping out." (Fieldnotes, 30 October 2008)

> Together with a group of hearing people, Kwasi Opare went in a pickup truck to pick up a corpse for a funeral. Everyone on that truck wore clothes in the traditional funeral colors red and black, but Kwasi Opare had not bathed yet and wore dirty old clothes. Ama Korkor spotted him on the truck and criticized him, together with several other deaf men and women. Ama Korkor said that hearing people would insult him, but that Kwasi Opare would not hear the insults. She added that Kwasi Opare, as a deaf person, would need to show that deaf people are fine people and that he should not go away when smelling bad and wearing dirty clothes. (Fieldnotes, 25 September 2009)

Again, these practices and expectations were *not deaf specific*: they were all comparable to those in social relationships between family or friends, but with regard to fellow deaf people, these were explained using the "DEAF SAME" discourse. Being DEAF SAME created a bond with expectations similar to those people have of their family and close friends. Because the ways in which people could be SAME could be cumulative, these expectations (such as greeting when ill, or helping when processing farm products) were often followed more conscientiously when deaf people were also close friends or closely related.

Other phrases that deaf people regularly uttered about their bond with each other (but to a far less frequent extent than "DEAF SAME") were "DEAF CONNECTED" and "DEAF ALL TOGETHER ONE," thus describing themselves as unified based on being deaf. This was particularly emphasized when they felt their "connectedness" is/was disturbed or diminished. For example, during the period of intensive cocoa farming, living on the cocoa farm meant that they were cut off from each other. Kofi Pare commented: "Now many many deaf people are back here, now we are all together here and connected." Another example is when deceased deaf people were remembered in deaf–deaf conversations, which frequently happened.

This unity between deaf people was also remarked upon by many hearing people in the interviews that Joseph Okyere conducted. They said that deaf people "group for their own conversations," "have love for each

other," "do everything together," "help each other to farm," that "all will act against you if you offend one of them" (see chapter 6), they "have a union," "they are united." There are also several examples of hearing people emphasizing and utilizing the DEAF SAME discourse to make a point, for example in Kwame Osae's story above, and in funerals of deceased deaf people. Deaf people were expected to dance for the deceased person's soul and to help with digging the grave.

Very often when deaf people said "DEAF SAME" or "DEAF ALL ONE," it was juxtaposed with the earlier mentioned comment "HEARING BAD," such as, "Here . . . all the HEARING BAD and DEAF ALL ONE," or "DEAF SAME, HEARING BAD." The two utterances may be inherently connected to each other, that is, that "us with us" (DEAF SAME) and "us against them" (HEARING BAD) may be inseparable sentiments. However, I suggest that the discourse of DEAF SAME was not merely reactionary and based on negatively experienced differences with hearing people, but also based on deaf–hearing differences that were experienced neutrally or positively. In other words: deaf people shared both positive and negative common experiences. In the sections below I illustrate both: ways in which deaf people positively identified with each other (other than being deaf and using sign language as common characteristics), and reasons why hearing people were often regarded as "bad people": they insult deaf people and have different values.

Deaf People as "HEAD-HARD" and "EYE-STRONG" People

The most obvious difference between deaf and hearing people, the deaf people's primarily visual orientation and their exclusive use of sign language, connected them as SAME, which they expressed in the DEAF SAME discourse. However, it appeared that also *other* deaf–hearing differences (i.e., not immediately related with language or hearing status) were experienced, and that these were further connecting deaf people as DEAF SAME. In chapter 2 I mentioned that deaf people believed that they were stronger than hearing people, better and fiercer fighters, and more hard-working farmers. They (especially the men) were proud about their hard-muscled hands with rough skin and boasted how they impressed hearing people "with weak and soft hands" with their handshake. They told stories about "those bad and lazy hearing people" who stole from deaf people's land rather than going to the farm themselves (for example, because they were stone cutters or had a job in Accra).

A number of deaf people believed that their strength was not just built up through hard work, but was also inherent in deaf people. This was particularly exemplified in stories describing genetic research conducted in 2000 or 2001, when researchers came to investigate the "deaf gene" in Adamorobe. Blood and skin snips were taken from a number of deaf (and a number of hearing) people in Adamorobe. Several deaf people were convinced that these researchers wanted their blood to use it as a medicine for "weak people," because deaf people's blood is "very hard and very red" and therefore "very good, strong and healthy" (see chapter 9).

In the interviews conducted by Joseph Okyere, hearing people were asked if they believed that deaf people were stronger fighters and farmers. Nine out of the nineteen interview respondents agreed with this. Another eight people thought that deaf and hearing people's fighting and farming skills were the same. They either emphasized sameness between deaf and hearing people or interindividual differences rather than a general difference between deaf and hearing people. Two respondents said that deaf people, although better farmers, cannot be stronger fighters because they cannot hear the direction of the opponent, or when someone is calling for assistance. However, one of them added, "That is the only disadvantage, if not they can fight better than hearing people."

Fights were remembered with proud and glistening eyes. When fighting to the Ga, the men from Adamorobe made fake guns from polished wood and used maces, but sometimes they also fought barehanded. Kwame Osae narrated:

> The deaf were standing in front, the hearing behind them. The deaf all in a row in front. The hearing were afraid you know, that's why they were standing behind us. The deaf stood in front because they are strong. They had such thick sturdy arms (…) We were ready to fight and shouted: "Bring it on!" We approached them and militantly thrusted them to the ground. The Ga then got scared quickly and left. We scolded them behind their backs, saying that they should be ashamed. We threw rocks at them, which hit the backs of their heads: that hurt, they bled, they fled. (Kwame Osae, Interview, 29 August 2009)

Deaf elders repeated over and over again that in front of the Ga, deaf and hearing warriors from Adamorobe were one, that they were SAME. As such, fighting together contributed both to deaf pride and to the above-mentioned feelings of deaf–hearing unity:

> Hearing and deaf all went to fight together and the hearing then saw: the deaf are daring, wow! Deaf and hearing were both equally strong. So we were the

> same, connected, not different. We all went together. Hearing told deaf: "We're going, be daring! Understood? Don't be weak, when they come then we fight them, you hear? Be strong!" You see, so we're connected, we talk to each other. And once we were there [Ga territory] the Ga thought: "Adamorobe is bad! Deaf are so daring, they are bad!" They were all afraid! (*laughs*). (Kofi Pare, Interview, 24 September 2009)

Older deaf men lamented the fact that this practice, "when we were all still young," has vanished. Ama Oforiwaa, a hearing elder, commented that "the deaf people had a different mind in the past. Older deaf people were more curt and more serious, and less lazy than now." This was echoed by several other hearing people in interviews: the deaf are not as "lean," strong, or hard anymore. Deaf people seemed to agree with this and reminisced about the strong deaf men from the past, full of admiration and nostalgia.

In hearing interviewees' explanations as to *why* deaf people are better farmers and fighters, deaf people were thought to have certain psychological characteristics: deaf people are not lazy, focus better on what they do, do things "from the bottom of their heart," and react fast. Similarly, in the replies on other interview questions (for example about positive and negative experiences with deaf people), hearing people uttered these and other beliefs. For example, deaf people were said to be unambiguous: they stick to what they say ("No is no and yes is yes") and do not like to change their mind. This means that one could count on a deaf person, but also that deaf people could be very stubborn, inflexible, and difficult to convince. Deaf people were also experienced to be unforgiving: "If you offended him/her, you will not be forgiven. Never on this earth."

These perspectives on deaf people were not only hearing-authored: deaf people themselves told me time and again that deaf people are "HEAD-HARD." According to the context in which the term was used, it meant practical and realistic, focused, unsentimental, self-willed, obstinate, parsimonious, firm, inflexible, unforgiving, or unyielding. Another term deaf people often used to talk about themselves was "EYE-STRONG," which means being confident, brave, not shy, not submissive and unafraid.

Hearing interviewees also stated that deaf people were careful, kind, social, loyal, helpful, respectful, quiet, cool, not criminal, and did not cause trouble. That is, if one did not offend them, they would not cause any trouble, but if offended, they would fight that person vehemently. The

latter was often experienced negatively by hearing respondents: they complained about the deaf people's short-temperedness and truculence and that this "uncontrollable behavior" made them "difficult to discipline," and difficult to separate or stop during a fight.

While the interviewed hearing people felt negative or ambiguous about some of these "deaf-specific characteristics," deaf people mostly put emphasis on the positive virtues of their assertiveness, and also on honesty, sincerity, and consistency. They often criticized hearing people for not aiming for these values as much as they do: hearing people were often said to be weak dishonest cheaters and pretenders. Deaf people also often said that hearing people are more criminal than them, that they smoke, drink, steal, and fight more, that they are insincere and more often dishonest in relationships, and that they are too active in traditional religion and practices such as witchcraft and juju. Their perspectives and frustrations were generalized in the comments "HEARING CHEAT" and "HEARING BAD."

Insults and Fights with Hearing People

Deaf people were especially well known for starting a fight or a heated argument when they (thought that they) were being mocked or insulted for their deafness. Afua Ofosua commented: "It makes me soooooooo aaangry if that happens! At such a moment I do not contain myself, I go straight to that person!" It happened that deaf people were insulted for their deafness during everyday conflicts that escalated. People scolded each other by referring to each other's clothes, smell, nasty habits, shape of body and head, certain ailments and infirmities, and shortcomings or peculiarities. Common insults aimed at deaf people were "HEAR-NOTHING" and "EAR-HARD," signed with an ugly facial expression. During my nine months of research, I learned about three physical fights in Adamorobe resulting from such insults, and I observed one of them:

> X's [anonymous deaf woman]'s deaf brother visited Adamorobe. X saw her brother walking with another deaf woman and me. When X walked toward us, she prevented her deaf brother from greeting a hearing woman from afar, because she had a bad relationship with the woman. The hearing woman got very angry and a fight between her and X started: they shouted and signed mutual insults to each other. X ignored the woman after a while and left the fight but I could see that she was cooking. We went to greet some of their hearing relatives in another compound. On our way back we saw the same

> hearing woman as earlier. Then, the conflict escalated and erupted into a physical fight. The reason was that apparently, during the earlier fight the woman had insulted X by signing "HEAR-NOTHING," and shouting the same in Akan, and X's hearing daughter had heard this and told her mother. X cursed and swore at the woman in sign language and the woman yelled in a mix of Akan with AdaSL. Both stood their ground, both were clearly not planning on giving in. Other women came to the sound and X's daughter started to fight with the offending woman. They pulled each others' hair and hit, pushed, and scratched each other. Four or five women fought and more and more onlookers arrived. The hearing woman really got it good. The fight calmed down and escalated over and over again. X was most angry of them all and people tried to calm her down. (Fieldnotes, 2 July 2009)

People typically became involved in each other's fights, took sides, helped to fight or to separate fighters, and it happened that deaf people came to support each other. Fighting was sometimes supplemented or replaced by another strategy of revenge: cursing the offender to get a deaf child or asking God to punish this person with a deaf child (see next chapter). Hearing interviewees thought that deaf people's fighting was not always justified and that they were too suspicious. For example:

> They don't have sympathy and don't wait for research about matters. They always rush into matters. When a little problem comes, they will not find out why such problem comes, they will just react. For example when you happen to have a leaf in your hands, as soon as they meet you then they fight you.

This person is referring to the earlier mentioned (chapter 3) leaf-insult common in Ghana, comparing deaf people with goats or sheep by putting a leaf in the mouth. Because of the comparison with animals rather than human beings, this insult was regarded as much graver than the "HEAR-NOTHING" or "EAR-HARD" insults that one heard more commonly in Adamorobe. Sometimes it happened that a person had a leaf in his/her hand by accident when a deaf person was in the vicinity, and deaf people would then suspect that this was meant to be an insult. Also if hearing people pointed at deaf people, laughed at them, or did not want to paraphrase or summarize something for them during or after a conversation with another hearing person, deaf people thought that people talked about them and this made them angry.

Deaf people themselves emphasized that were very proud of their being EYE-STRONG and HEAD-HARD in such situations. Ama Korkor explained that

it was a necessity for deaf people in a hearing environment not to let insults pass: "If deaf people are afraid, hearing people will laugh at them."

> A Sunday in the church. Kofi Pare asked Akorful what they should do if people insulted them. In the line of his Christian-inspired philosophy, Akorful replied that if you are insulted, you should do nothing, because God will see it and possible consequences are God's responsibility. You don't need to stand up for yourself. For example: if a hearing person insults a deaf person, then God can make that hearing person deaf. In the back of the church I saw some commotion: Akosua Obutwe, Asabea, and Adwoa Bomo clearly disagreed with what Akorful said (but he did not see it). Adwoa Bomo signed convincedly: "I punish them anyway!" Asabea and Akosua Obutwe agreed that they would hit the person gravely. (Fieldnotes, 23 August 2009)

In another conversation, Akua Fiankobea argued: "You don't have to let Jesus punish them, you have to do it yourself, then the hearing will be instantly scared!" This was also the opinion of Kwame Osae, who commented: "When hearing people see deaf people fighting, they don't even think about offending them. They greet the deaf people anxiously." Kwaku Duodo explained: "Hearing people are scared afterwards and look away, scratch their heads and avoid your glance." Deaf people thus believed that fighting when hearing people insulted them would command respect. Concurring with this opinion, two hearing interviewees thought that God has given the deaf people this special strength "so that no one can bully them."

Deaf people believed the police were on their side, having experienced not being arrested after fights. Kwabena Ofori explained: "Here so many deaf have fought and did not get caught, while hearing do get caught. And that's the case again and again, that they don't get caught." Joseph Okyere explained that the police do not understand sign language, which makes it too difficult to interrogate deaf people. The use of interpreters at police stations was not automatic or systematic. Deaf people themselves gave other reasons: justice and compassion. Deaf people experienced that the police typically chose deaf people's side after they had fought a hearing offender, by scorning or arresting the hearing person.

> The police greeted me and asked me: are you deaf? Deaf? Oooh … They felt sorry for me and took the hearing person with them. I explained that I did not scold the hearing, but that I was insultingly called EAR-HARD. That made me angry and that's why I fought. The police understood, arrested the hearing person and I stayed, I didn't have to go with him (*laughs*). (Kofi Pare and Kwabena Ofori, Interview, 9 August 2009)

Even if a deaf–hearing fight was not linked with insults about deafness, the police were apparently not inclined to arrest deaf people. Kofi Pare described:

> If the police gets you and sees that you're deaf he says: "Never mind, just go." The hearing looks on, full of surprise: the police doesn't take the deaf man? The deaf man walks away, the hearing person follows the deaf person with his eyes and thinks: "That deaf person is right!?" The deaf man walks in a macho way and pumps his fist in the air, laughs, and is gone. The hearing man is silenced. (Kofi Pare, Interview, 3 September 2009)

Apparent in this quote is an air of victory toward hearing opponents. Kofi Pare and Kwame Osae thought that the police were afraid of deaf people, because deaf people are known as fierce fighters, and because deaf people tell the police that God is on the deaf people's side and will kill hearing people who harm them.* Another example:

> Ama Korkor told me about Muslim rebels in the area around Aburi who would catch innocent hearing people, but that deaf people were safe from them: "They are afraid of the punishment of God when they catch deaf people." I asked: "If they kill a hearing person, God doesn't punish them?" She replied: "No, if a hearing person is murdered God doesn't care." I replied: "So God likes deaf and not hearing people?" "God loves deaf people" was her conclusion.

Some deaf people said that because "God loves deaf people" he gave them more rain for their farms, a physically stronger body, and better health: "Hearing people all die easily, but deaf people don't just die like that, deaf people are all strong, God blesses them!"

Thus, on several different occassions, both deaf and hearing people expressed correlations (or even a causal relationship) between discrimination, exclusion, and oppression on the one side, and deaf people's strong body, their being "EYE-STRONG" and "HEAD-HARD," and positive discrimination by the police and God on the other side. Rather than speculate whether there is a correlation or a causal relationship, this leads me to speculate instead that deaf people in Adamorobe believed they shared much more than being deaf and using sign language as their first language; they said they shared certain psychological traits and characteristics as well, as well as experiences of positive and negative discrimination.

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* It is not clear whether and how this argument is influenced by the Christian belief that God is especially concerned with the weak, the sick, and the disabled.

Deaf Gossip: Unity and Frustration

I earlier mentioned that in deaf spaces, deaf people often gossip about each other. Because of this, some deaf people avoid interacting a lot in deaf spaces. I could not compare this with the hearing people's gossiping habits, but during the interviews done by Joseph Okyere, several hearing people remarked that one of the biggest differences between deaf and hearing people is that the former gossip much more: "They are gossipers first class," and "Also hearing talk about people, but deaf do this too much."

We could interpret this in several ways. Gossip could be seen as the result of a sense of unity between the deaf people involved, who maintained this unity by (re-)asserting common morals and values.[127] Deaf people judged each other harshly and extremely, as with the three most common remarks: "X is too HEAD-HARD," "X is bad," "X is a cheater/pretender." When disapproving of another deaf person, they typically behaved in a friendly way toward that person but then insulted the person behind his or her back. They thus avoided direct confrontation with each other, declaring, "I say nothing," "I keep quiet, God will see what he/she does," "I try to be patient," with, as reason: "DEAF SAME." I felt that there was very often a negative tension in deaf spaces. Deaf people pointed out that it was even worse if I was not there: "If you are here, deaf people insult each other much less. If you leave here, everyone will call each other names like foolish and hardheaded."

Some deaf people contrasted the tension in Adamorobe with life in Kokoben, a cocoa farming village located west of the Akwapim ridge. Owusua explained that there was a relatively high number of deaf people in that area, communicating in a way that looked similar to AdaSL when she demonstrated it (but with differences in lexicon). She commented upon the much more positive atmosphere: "If I approach deaf people there, then they're open, they enthusiastically include people in conversations. All of the deaf gather there to have nice chats." In contrast, in Adamorobe one had to be very careful not to get in trouble with other deaf people: "It is hard here … no no no, I don't like it one bit; when I see what's going on here, in fact I do not want to stay here and want to go away."

Deaf people had strategies to cope with this negative tension, gossip, or insults. They avoided other deaf people, by choosing their routes through Adamorobe carefully, avoiding the crossing, the broken pump square, the

market square and main paths, and/or the houses of certain individuals. The (cocoa) farms in particular were regarded as places of escape, where there were no people and no gossip. (Of course, the avoidance did not happen continuously, at least not during my research, otherwise I would not have stumbled upon deaf spaces so often.)

Considering all this, was the strong internal gossip a unifying marker, or rather a factor that was destructive to the unity among deaf people? Gluckman argues that unity does not mean that the people in a group are undifferentiated or that this unity is unproblematic, but that "problems arise from the conflict between an ideology of unity and struggles in practice."[128] While deaf people in Adamorobe emphasized DEAF SAME and DEAF CONNECTED, they struggled with bringing values into practice. For Akosua Abora, the experienced conflict between the DEAF SAME discourse (which she participated in) and deaf gossip ultimately led her to largely avoid producing or joining deaf spaces. Other deaf people did not regard the gossip as reason for avoiding each other, employing the DEAF SAME argument to suppress the complaints about gossip. For example:

> Akosua Obutwe and I visited the sisters Afua Ofosua and Ama Okobea. These sisters have little contact with other deaf people, so after a while of chatting, I asked Afua Ofosua: "Do you like going to the other deaf people to talk to them?" She replied convincedly and with a frowned facial expression: "No, deaf make so many problems… when I stay at home I'm not bothered by it. They get so wound up and gossip too much …!" Akosua Obutwe stepped in abruptly, telling me: "No no! Not true! She likes signing with the deaf! She likes doing that." Akosua Obutwe told Afua Ofosua that she should like it, that she should tell me that she enjoys signing with deaf people. Afua Ofosua laughed wearily and nodded unconvinced: she clearly did not really agree but it was also clear that she did not want to make a big deal out of it. Akosua Obutwe underlined her point again: "DEAF SAME, deaf like to enjoy and sign together. HEARING BAD but deaf people are good." (Fieldnotes, 17 August 2009)

While they disapproved of opinions such as those of Akosua Ofosua, deaf people usually did not discuss who did and who did not participate often in deaf spaces. This is why I earlier described the deaf people in Adamorobe as positioned on "a continuum of producing/joining deaf spaces" rather than define some of them as a deaf "subgroup" or "subcommunity."

Why did deaf people in Adamorobe struggle so much with bringing their ideas of a positive unity into practice? Gluckman observes that gossip

and scandal establish more unity in those who are *oppressed*, as such uniting a minority toward an oppressing majority, by maintaining strong social control.[129] It could be that deaf people in Adamorobe had more negative experiences of discrimination and oppression than deaf people in Kokoben, because of insults to deaf people in particular and to Adamorobe as a whole (see chapter 6), and because of the marriage law (also see chapter 6). These experiences were expressed by the recurring phrase HEARING BAD. In order to situate the information in chapter 6, I first offer an account of the ways deafness in Adamorobe was explained.

Explanations of Deafness in Adamorobe

5

In chapter 2, I summarized how people in Adamorobe explained diverse kinds of misfortune using a range of local explanatory mechanisms and knowledge systems, such as juju, witchcraft, curses, *abosom,* and ancestors. Deaf people employed these mechanisms to explain *individual* cases of deafness in Adamorobe (i.e., "why is he/she deaf?" or "why are you deaf"?). In addition, there were a number of stories told to explain the *village-wide* high prevalence of deafness (i.e., "why are there many deaf people in Adamorobe?"). In this chapter I organize the stories into "historical stories," in which deafness is associated with historical events, and "river stories," in which deities or spirits that live in or around two rivers in Adamorobe are said to have caused the deafness in the village. These historical stories and river stories embed deafness in the time and space of Adamorobe, and therefore imply that the high rate of deafness was inherent to Adamorobe or typical for Adamorobe. In some of these stories, deafness is said to be a punishment, while other stories emphasize positive characteristics that come with deafness (such as strength) or describe deaf babies as a gift.

Several of the stories mentioned below were reported by earlier visitors to Adamorobe (such as audiologists, genetic researchers, and educators for the deaf), but I consulted elders from Adamorobe who provided me with different versions. I discuss these stories as they were published in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and as such they may represent explanations that were most common at those points in time. None of the earlier (hearing) visitors described how deaf people themselves explained their being deaf or the high rate of deafness in Adamorobe. Also, common explanations such as witchcraft and ancestors' deeds were not recognized or acknowledged by the previous researchers who published "the legends of Adamorobe," although representing such explanations is of equal importance to understand how deafness is situated in Adamorobe.

Throughout this chapter, it will become clear that people did not explain deafness in monolithic narratives, but in multiple and often changing stories which were embedded in particular contexts. The stories bore a series of overlapping similarities with no one single similar feature and were maintained in countless different versions, entangled with each other into a highly complex web of explanations. Three types of historical stories emerged that embed deafness in an early stage of Adamorobe's existence: those about a war, those about a deaf farmer, and a story about an ancestor's mistake.

The War, the Handsome Farmer, and the Ancestor's Mistake

In the literature about Adamorobe, I found three different stories about a war. In one of the stories this war was referred to as the war at Akantamansu in 1826 (see chapter 2). In this war, a coalition of several Ghanaian ethnic groups, the Brits, and the Danes fought the Ashanti, and drove them away from the Akwapim area. Dery and Amedofu et al. related that bush animals became human to fight in this war along with the warriors from Adamorobe, and afterwards remained in Adamorobe as deaf/mute human beings.[130] In another version provided by the late Agnes Bomo and recorded by Nyst,[131] warriors from Adamorobe bathed in a special concoction that made them strong, courageous, and violent, but that also rendered most of them deaf.

The deaf people I met did not know these war-related stories. Some hearing elders did not want these stories to be passed to deaf members, for reasons unknown. However, when I questioned Kofi Pare about these stories, he told me a rather similar story about a concoction that deafened people. Only, in his version this concoction was made by the Ga to aggrieve people from Adamorobe:

> At one time in history, the Ga wanted to poison Adamorobe's people with a concoction. They visited Adamorobe with the explanation that the concoction would enable them to fight fiercely. When the Ga left, the potion was researched and they realized that it was a fake potion. One man did not believe that and drank it anyway. He did not die but later his wife brought forth a baby who did not react when clapping the hands [and was thus deaf]. When they found this out, the people from Adamorobe used a concoction that would enable them to fight fiercely, to take revenge on the Ga.

With Joseph Okyere, I asked several hearing elders if they recognized the war stories. Joseph Kwasi, a hearing elder in Adamorobe who has

a deaf mother, reported that he did, but provided me with the "right" version. Contrasting with the stories of the Adamorobe people themselves transforming into animals or using a deafening concoction, Joseph Kwasi's story told of the Ashanti enemies turning animals (i.e., antelopes) into human beings who afterwards were taken into captivity and stayed as such in Adamorobe:

> In the year 1826, the people of Ashanti were engaged in a war with the people of Southern Ghana [i.e., the war at Akantamansu]. The Ashanti had fought and won all battles from Kumasi downwards. They were carrying a god named Pomponsua, which made them powerful to win battles. When the Ashanti were fighting down the coast, they passed through the mountains of Akwapim, descending from Aburi to Adamorobe. They stopped at a small pond at Adamorobe's land, called Parebo. There the Ashanti stayed some days to slaughter a goat to perform customs to purify their god Pomponsua. When the Ashanti were lodged there, the people of Adamorobe (who were mainly hunters) laid arm in the bush watching the Ashanti. They began to follow the Ashanti's footsteps, watching everything they did in the bush, for seven days. The people of Adamorobe learned that when the Ashanti have been involved in a fight and their numbers decrease, they take some leaves from the bush and use them for a concoction for which many antelopes would come from the bush. The Ashanti would pour the concoction on the antelopes and they would all turn into human beings to join the Ashanti people to fight their enemies. That is their "Kum apem a, apem beba" slogan, meaning "When you kill thousand, a thousand more will come." The Ashanti continued to fight toward the coast. There the warriors of Adamorobe, led by Nana Safrotwe Kakradae I, joined the coastal people and met the Ashanti at a place called Katamansu [aka Akantamansu] in a fierce battle. For this battle, the people of Adamorobe prepared a concoction to make powerless the Ashanti's powerful god, in order to defeat them. When the people of Adamorobe conquered the Ashanti, they captured the Ashanti warrior who carries the god Pomponsua and cut off his head. The Ashanti began to run back home and some were taken into captivity to the village of Adamorobe. Among these people taken were the antelopes that had spiritually turned to human beings by the concoction of the Ashanti. These animal people who were taken into captivity stayed with the people of Adamorobe but could not speak, and that is the foundation of deafness at Adamorobe. The deaf people, who were hard workers, started to marry the hearing female ones, hence the growing of the deaf population at Adamorobe.

Common in a number of these war stories is the link of being deaf with formerly being animals. This is reminiscent of the standard Ghanaian leaf-insults that compare deaf people to goats or sheep. Possibly, this comparison happens because animals do not speak (at least not in the sense

that humans do): in the stories it was more often said that these former animals "did not speak" rather than that they "could not hear." As mentioned in chapter 3, I recorded this focus on language modality rather than hearing status as the main difference experienced between deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe.

A second recurring element is the identification of deaf people (as former animals or not) with warriors. This concurs with the view of the deaf people in Adamorobe seen as short-tempered, unyielding, unforgiving, and fierce fighters, which resulted in them being appointed as town guards and warriors in the past, for example to defend Adamorobe against the neighboring ethnic group, the Ga.

Other stories, reported by Osei-Sekyereh, Dery, and Amedofu et al. were about a young strong deaf man whom every woman wanted to marry because of his good looks and/or his hard working nature.[132] Osei-Sekyereh writes that, because deaf people are believed to be stronger and work harder, this man was invited by the first people from Adamorobe to breed deaf people to work on the farms. This belief that deaf people are strong and hard-working was, just like the identification of deaf people as fierce fighters, a common belief in Adamorobe, among both deaf and hearing people. Deafness then, seems to be regarded as a side effect of these skills (or the other way around). Joseph Okyere cited an Akan proverb illustrating this: "An elephant baby cries for everlasting life and not for hugeness. The ancestors did not ask for deaf people to be born but requested strength."

When I confronted Okyeame Appeadu, the chief's spokesperson, with the various stories, he stated that "all the stories are wrong" and provided me with another story, about an ancestor's mistake:

> The fact that we have deaf people in this town is based on only one thing: disobedience. In the past we did not have chiefs to rule towns and villages, we only had shrine priests who were responsible for taking care of any town. At the time that the first priest of Ayisi's shrine died and the family sat together to elect a new priest, they pointed at a woman who was next of kin, to be elected as a priest. The woman refused, thinking of the financial problems she would encounter when accepting the position. She also was afraid of the responsibility for all the family properties and family members that came with the position. The elders swore and cursed the woman's family: "What is not good for a human being will come to you, and you and your family will be deaf." In the past whatever our ancestors said through their mouth became true and real. So this woman and her family became deaf. Afterwards, deaf intermarriage caused more deaf people in Adamorobe.

Ayisi was regarded as Adamorobe's first and ruling god (i.e., the town god), and his role in causing deafness in Adamorobe returns in the river stories. The theme of deafness through curse also recurs.

With the exception of the story about the ancestor's mistake, in the historical stories a man was deaf or became deaf and passed on this deafness to his offspring, which concurs with a local belief that a man's semen or blood is "harder" than a woman's blood and that men therefore pass on deafness. All the historical stories indicate that first, a *seed* has been sown and next, *marriages* caused the deaf population in Adamorobe to proliferate and perpetuate. It is for this reason that the earlier mentioned marriage law was introduced: while deaf–hearing and hearing–hearing marriages in Adamorobe brought forth either deaf or hearing offspring, deaf–deaf marriages were formerly common and had invariably brought forth deaf children.

Ayisi and Temina Rivers

The historical stories were not typically mentioned in Adamorobe's everyday discourses when explaining the cause of deafness, but were recorded when elders located the deafness in a time frame in encounters with visitors and researchers. Instead, one would point to two rivers at the edge of Adamorobe, where the river deities Ayisi and Temina were said to live. River deities are the ancient tutelary deities (*tete abosom* in Akan) who protect villages from any evil.[133] Great care has to be exercised in order not to offend these spirits who can bring fortune as well as misfortune.[134] Stories about Ayisi and Temina depicted deafness as either a gift or a punishment from these deities.

Osei-Sekyereh, Dery, and Amedofu et al. recorded some stories that state that if taboos are broken with regard to a pond or a stream, that is drinking from it, fetching water from it, or coming near it, the offending person will either become deaf or have a deaf baby.[135] These stories do not mention the presence of deities in the water. Similarly, Dery and Amedofu et al. listed some stories about a deaf god who punished with deaf offspring if he was offended, but did not link these to the rivers. Amedofu et al. wrote the name of this deaf god was Kiti and Dery mentioned that he was a ruling god. According to the hearing elders Joseph Okyere and I consulted, the god Kiti existed, but was not deaf, nor caused deafness. The deaf god was called Temina and he was not the god ruling over the village, which was Ayisi (who is hearing). It was said that Temina lives in a pond at the southwestern part of the village and becomes a stream that reaches into

Figure 5.1. Ayisi river at the edge of the football pitch.

Adamorobe when it has rained heavily, which might explain the confusion between a pond and a stream. In the rainy season, the two rivers met each other at the edge of Adamorobe (see map 2).

The river where Ayisi lives had been Adamorobe's main water supply until water pumps were installed, and was still used to bathe and to wash clothes (figure 5.1). The river descends from Aburi as a waterfall in the forest, which is regarded as Ayisi's symbol (figure 5.2). Here I describe a walk with Joseph Okyere and his brother to this place (see "Ayisi's forest" in map 2):

> When we left behind the village center, we almost immediately arrived in an area with jungle vegetation all around, along with corn and banana trees. After about ten minutes walking in the valley along the foothills of the Akwapim ridge we crossed Ayisi's river by foot. We suddenly arrived in a place that was very dark, cool, and with a mysterious touch: Ayisi's forest. Everywhere around us hung vines between ancient trees covered with thick vegetation. I walked barefoot as I left my slippers behind at the river because it was not allowed to enter Ayisi's forest with footwear. I therefore felt each detail of the soft soil with its leaves, insects, plants, thorns, stones and large roots that crawled over the ground. In the air hung a strange sultry odor that I could not identify, but I suspected it was rotting wood. On the left was a high cliff where rituals are performed regularly and on our right was Ayisi's river which flew out of the forest

Figure 5.2. Ayisi's waterfall.

> to the point where we had crossed earlier. Higher up, the river descended in several small cascades, and we climbed up the rocks, clinging to the thick roots that ran over them until we reached a waterfall where the water was spouting from a strangely formed large rock into a deep cool pool. This was the place that held a mythical status in Adamorobe: the waterfall that is Ayisi's home and symbol. (Fieldnotes, 27 June 2009)

According to Abien, Ayisi's priestess, Ayisi is very good and kind, does not commit sins, and gives many children when one is in need, but there were several taboos linked to his river. It was not allowed to go to his forest on Sundays, or anytime when having periods or being pregnant. Many deaf and hearing people told me that the punishment for a pregnant woman is that she will give birth to a deaf baby, emphasizing that a pregnant woman should drink pump water or purified water. Sometimes, however, it was unclear whether people were referring to the entire river, or the part of the river that is located in Ayisi's forest.

I noticed differences in what was said in everyday discourses and what priests and elders said about this river and about Ayisi. Ayisi's priestess explained that Ayisi will make someone deaf when having offended him (instead of giving a deaf baby), and Osadu's (Ayisi's son) priestess said that Ayisi will make someone deaf only when that person goes to the forest on a Sunday and afterwards tells other people what he/she saw. The other hearing elders Joseph Okyere and I consulted were not in agreement about

Figure 5.3. Temina river.

Ayisi causing deafness, most of them saying that only Temina causes deaf births, and as a *gift*, not as a punishment. Temina was said to live in a very small river that runs along a number of farms and was the main source of drinking water for people working there (figure 5.3):

> We walked down a narrow path southwest from Adamorobe, with many plants, weeds, and corn on both sides, occassionally encountering people who returned from their farmlands. We walked on the left side of a hill and Joseph Okyere explained that this was the valley of Temina. He explained that for this reason the forest at our right side was not being weeded, and I saw that indeed the vegetation was very dense there. A little further we saw Temina's stream: a thin stream that ran partly on the path. When we arrived at a somewhat higher point and deviated from the path, I saw an oval shaped small pool, no larger than 3 by 2 meters, with a roof of leaves in order to prevent the pool from drying up: Temina's home [figure 5.4]. (Fieldnotes, 27 June 2009)

Temina was described as a very friendly, social, kind, sympathetic, and loyal male deaf god with a light complexion, who had deaf children himself. It is not so strange in Ghana that a god might be deaf, because the gods are said to have anthropomorphic features, so all kinds of gods exist and deaf gods might exist in other places than Adamorobe too. When a

Figure 5.4. Temina's pond.

god possesses a priest or priestess during ceremonies, the possessed person "becomes" the god; when a god is crippled, the possessed person limps and if possessed by a snake, the person crawls on the ground. So, when Temina possesses someone, that person will use sign language. I was told that Temina is Adamorobe's only deaf god and is believed to cause deafness in the babies of the farmers who drink its water. Other stories state that if someone drops something (such as a bunch of plantains) in Temina when returning from the farm with a load, he rewards that person with a deaf child. Yet another version I learned is that when someone drops something in the river and takes it back, it means that person is cruel to Temina, so he punishes the offender with a deaf child. However, most sources that I consulted gave the "reward" version of the story, that is, a deaf child is a gift from this friendly god who is deaf himself.

Mmoatia in the Forest

One would perhaps expect that deaf people would be attached or attracted to Temina or identify with him, but they seemed not to be interested in him, even though they knew of him. The deaf people's river stories differed from all the other stories mentioned above. In village discourses it was always "the stream" that was referred to, not specifically the deities that live there, and when deaf people said that "the stream" brings forth deaf babies, they mostly meant that this deafness is caused by *mmoatia*, or dwarf spirits who live in caves at Ayisi's waterfall in the forest (figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5. Rocks with small caves in Ayisi forest.

Other names or terms for *mmoatia* (which is the plural form of the term *aboatia*) are spirits of the wild, genies, pixies, spiritual dwarfs, or *nkwatia nkwatia* ("shorties").[136] In AdaSL they are called "small spirits." They are described as little beings with eyes in the back of their heads, long thick hairs and feet that point backwards. If someone breaks certain taboos the *mmoatia* are angry and punish the offender, such as with a serious beating. Mischievous *mmoatia* also like to fool people without any reason, by chasing them, by throwing stones or by beating them while remaining invisible.

Mmoatia tales were very popular among the deaf people in Adamorobe. While deaf people mostly told me stories about *mmoatia* in general, sometimes they specifically narrated about deaf *mmoatia*, with which they clearly identified. According to the deaf people, deaf *mmoatia* were HEAD-HARD just like deaf people in Adamorobe. Owusua told me how her deceased deaf father on his cocoa farm in Kokoben had contact with deaf *mmoatia* who gave him medicines and money and used no AdaSL, but their own sign language with him. She demonstrated to me how the *mmoatia* signed, using a seemingly nonsense mix of GSL and AdaSL hand forms and movements. Hearing *mmoatia* sign with deaf *mmoatia* and alert them of sounds and news just like the hearing people in Adamorobe do. Deaf people said that deaf *mmoatia* would not do them harm and only pester hearing people who tread through their forest, for example, by throwing stones.

In addition to general stories about deaf and hearing *mmoatia*, I was told stories in which the cause of deafness in Adamorobe was attributed to *mmoatia* who are upset when people (deaf and hearing) break the taboos of the forest, such as by arguing in Ayisi's or Temina's forests. Here is an example told by Kofi Pare:

> When there are insults, then a deaf person is born. Kwabena Ofori told me, and the old Afua Tatyifu told me. That is the truth. [...] Imagine you are hearing and I am deaf and we pass each other without insults then the *mmoatia* see that and don't harm anyone. Then you will soon have a hearing child, not a deaf child. But if the hearing woman is a pain and utters insults, then the *mmoatia* see that, and they feel insulted. They keep quiet [instead of harming you immediately] but they make sure that a bit later a deaf person is born who does not hear when you clap. So it was them who did that then, they are HEAD-HARD there! (Kofi Pare, Interview, 24 September 2009)

The theme of hearing people insulting deaf people and therefore getting a deaf child was a recurring one. Most stories about *mmoatia* causing deafness were about Ayisi's river, however: deaf and hearing *mmoatia* in the caves watch people who come to the river and when they see a pregnant woman drinking there, they punish her with a deaf child:

> The *mmoatia* watch: a pregnant woman? And she drinks the water? And she washes herself with the water? Ahhh, that's not good. The *mmoatia* will not say anything, will be silent. But they make sure that the child she has is deaf. (Abena Owusua, Fieldnotes, 24 August 2009)

The similarity with the Ayisi stories here is obvious. There were several variants, for example a version that deafness was not a *punishment* for drinking the water, but something that *just happens* when drinking it, implying a kind of contagiousness of the water. Eating animals such as fish, crabs, crocodiles, or grasscutters that live in the river or drink from it and become deaf accordingly, could make someone deaf. I was also told that babies should not drink this water because they are vulnerable and still can become deaf. It was claimed that some deaf individuals became deaf from drinking this river water when they were (hearing) babies.

Interestingly, a number of deaf people thought that pregnant deaf women with a deaf partner are specifically targeted by the *mmoatia* at the stream. For example, in a conversation about the stream, Akosua Obutwe signed skeptically: "I always drink from the river and got many hearing children," and Ama Korkor replied: "Yes but your partner was hearing..."

They thus combined the stories about breaking taboos with the known fact that mostly deaf–deaf couples get deaf children. However, at the same time, "the stream" was often given as explanation for why also hearing couples can have deaf children.

I asked several hearing elders if they thought that the *mmoatia* in the forest caused deafness in Adamorobe, and while they all confirmed that "these are powerful spirits who can inflict that on you," they did not generally refer to *mmoatia* as cause of deafness. The eloquent and highly descriptive *mmoatia* stories were more real for the deaf people in Adamorobe than were the *abosom*, the gods in traditional religion, such as Ayisi and Temina.

Curses, Contagion, and Witchcraft

A general pattern that now emerges is the following: when hearing elders located Adamorobe's deafness in a time frame, one of the historical stories was told. When generally referring to deafness in Adamorobe, people typically pointed at the streams at the edge of the village, that is, they told a river story. However, people referring to individual cases often located the cause in the immediate social environment of the individual and pointed at deaf–deaf marriages, a witch, or a curse, and often moral attributes were connected with those causes.

I was told several stories about deaf women who were insulted by (typically pregnant) hearing women and punished them by cursing them, resulting in the deafness of several young deaf people with hearing parents. Curses that were described to me were done very early in the morning, by putting salt in a bowl with hot water and pouring this water on the woman's entrance while expressing the curse. When the cursed woman walks over that place, the curse enters her body and she gets a deaf child. When I asked them, these deaf women portrayed this as justice: the wrongdoer was the hearing woman who insulted a deaf woman for her deafness, and the resulting deaf child was more than welcome. This is an example how the attitude toward the birth of a deaf person could be positive even though his/her cause of deafness was regarded as the result of immorality.

As the stories about contagious water suggest, there was also a belief that deafness is contagious. Some deaf and hearing people expressed the belief that deaf people can pass on deafness to their presumably hearing babies through their saliva, for example, by kissing the face of the baby, by drinking from the same cup, or by feeding it with the fingers at the same time as eating themselves. Two deaf children with deaf parents were said

to have become deaf this way (even though passing on deafness through deaf parenthood was usually seen as natural). Also, two young deaf women with babies (from unions with hearing men) were repeatedly told by both deaf and hearing people that they should be careful with their saliva as it could make their presumably hearing baby deaf after all.

There is another way in which deafness was believed to be contagious: when a baby sees too much signing, she/he can become deaf, as if this is kind of a seduction. Hence, when it was apparent that a young deaf woman's baby was possibly deaf, she was not only criticized for presumably having had sex with a deaf man rather than a hearing man (which the marriage law intended to prevent as men were believed to pass on deafness), and for being careless with her saliva, but also for not handing over the baby often enough to hearing people who would speak to it. In these criticisms, explaining deafness was not the *purpose*, but the explanations were an *element* of the arguments that people were making.

Much more common than curses and contagion was the referral to witchcraft. Usually witchcraft was not seen as the cause of deafness when deaf people had deaf parents (as passing on deafness to one's own children was seen as a common way of transmission), so this was one of the ways deaf people with hearing parents explained their deafness: witches became envious because they were pretty children with a fair skin (light skin was seen as the beauty ideal).

Witches are said to steal an organ in the superphysical world: while the organ (such as a uterus) is still there in the person's physical body, it is missing from the spiritual body, and that is how someone can, for example, become barren.[137] In Adamorobe it was said that the witch blocks someone's hearing by putting something in the ear or by taking the sense of hearing from the ear. Sometimes people also said that their deafness was *indirectly* caused by a witch: a witch can for example cause an accident (a fight, falling on the ear) or illness with "convulsions" as the main symptom, which in turn causes deafness.

Deaf people often *combined* different explanations, for example: "Because of a witch . . . the *mmoatia* at the river, I am deaf." I often got the impression *mmoatia* and abosom were subsumed under "witchcraft." One of the ways in which this could be interpreted is that "witchcraft" is a more general term that includes all kinds of supernatural beings and their actions. Another possible explanation is Robert Pool's finding in his research in Cameroon, that witchcraft was in many cases the ultimate

explanation behind illnesses, as witches can for example act through *abosom* and compound elders, and lend their power to jujus.[138]

On yet other occasions, deaf people *changed* their explanation during the conversation. This happened especially when I asked if people were born deaf or not. An example of such a conversation, in Kwame Osae's compound:

Me:	Were you born deaf?
Kwame Osae:	Yes, I was born deaf.
Me:	How come? You have hearing parents, right?
Kwame Osae:	(*slightly confused*) I don't know… maybe because of witches.
Me:	Ama Korkor told me that she was born hearing.
Kwame Osae:	That is not true, we were all born deaf: me, Kofi Pare, Ama Korkor, Yaa Bomo, and Yaa Aketewa [i.e., his four younger deaf siblings].

At this point I called his younger sister Ama Korkor for her attention. She was sitting a bit further in the compound where they live. I reminded her that she once told me that she was born hearing.

Ama Korkor:	Yes, I don't know that myself… but my mother told me that I was hearing as a baby…
Kwame Osae:	(*vividly*) Yes, you see! Witchcraft..! The river!
Me:	Ama, did you become ill when that witch harmed you?
Ama Korkor:	No…
Kwame Osae:	Witches put something in your ear and that's how they make you deaf. (*resentful*) Now there are so many, so many deaf here, the stream is bad! You (*points at me*) have hearing parents and you were born deaf? Well, that is the same, isn't it, we are all the same!

Ama acted out how the witches put something small (she herself did not know what) in your ear. When I asked if the witch also got Kwame she affirmed. Kwame then stated the opposite of a few minutes ago: "Ama, Kofi, me, and so on, we were all hearing." (Fieldnotes, 17 August 2009)

Because it is scientifically proved that the deafness in Adamorobe is hereditary,[139] we can safely assume that most deaf people in Adamorobe are congenitally deaf. However, when I asked deaf people in Adamorobe if they were born deaf (such as in the above example), many automatically replied: "Yes," then gave it a second thought and went back upon their word: "No no, I have become deaf by witchcraft when I was very small."

I got the impression that they would rather put forward a cause (typically witchcraft or having deaf parents) and then match with this cause if the person in question was born deaf or hearing, instead of the other way around. Hence, I concur with Devlieger who states that the biomedical distinction between congenital and acquired disability is not important when searching for the cause in terms of relationships with people, the environment, and the ancestors.[140]

In another conversation, Kofi Pare solved the impasse between acquired and congenital deafness by saying that not everybody in Adamorobe is deaf from the same cause, and that some are born deaf while others acquired their deafness:

Me:	Kofi, were you born deaf?
Kofi Pare:	Yes, born deaf, because of God.
Me:	And Ama Korkor [Kofi Pare's sister]? She told me that she was born hearing.
Kofi Pare:	No, she was born deaf.
Me:	She told me earlier that a witch put something in her ear and that she's deaf because of that.
Kofi Pare:	Ah… yeah right. But we were all born deaf here.

I ask about his partner Afua Kaya who is also present at the conversation: was she born deaf too? They affirm simultaneously. Next I ask about Afua Kaya's brother Bosompra, who had said earlier that he was born hearing and became deaf because of convulsions. Yes, all, says Kofi Pare. I direct myself toward Afua Kaya and—remembering a former conversation with her about this topic—decide to repeat my question to her: "Were you born deaf or hearing?"

Afua Kaya:	Hearing. I had convulsions and then got these ritual scarifications in my face and became deaf because of the illness. Formerly I was a little hearing and I got changed into deaf by a witch.

Kofi Pare affirms her story and I ask him the question again.

Kofi Pare:	No, not me, me because of God. Here there are differences. There are some who are born hearing and changed to deaf.

(Fieldnotes, 25 June 2009)

God as Favorable Cause

Kofi Pare preferred to point to God as the cause of his deafness. God's name was often mentioned along with some of the aforementioned causes of deafness, such as: "The *mmoatia* see a pregnant woman drinking from

the river and the child becomes deaf… God gives you that." In other cases, God was referred to as the sole or main cause of deafness. Maybe this is because the Akans believe that God created everything, including the *abosom* and thus the river gods Ayisi and Temina, *mmoatia*, and witches, and as such, God possesses the ultimate explanation why there are so many deaf people in Adamorobe.

While a number of hearing people in Adamorobe said that "God's hand" was in the deafness in Adamorobe (see chapter 6), I found that this explanation was especially popular among deaf people. Akosua Obutwe signed with a sparkle in her eye: "God made me deaf. God makes deaf people and hearing people. Deaf and hearing people are together one." Some deaf people, including Kofi Pare, emphasized that God's creation encompasses diversity: "God creates both, once a deaf, then again a hearing, then again a deaf: first the one, then the other, and so on." While they felt ambivalent about the stories about the *mmoatia* at the river or witches (i.e., deafness as a punishment), they understood deafness as caused by God or a gift from God to be neutral or positive, hence deaf people sometimes strategically argued that their deafness was caused by God. For example, a number of deaf people told me it would be wrong to want to be hearing or to get cured by a faith healer, because God had created them as a deaf person, as part of the diversity in his Creation (see further in this chapter). Also, they argued that the marriage law was wrong and that they should be allowed to have a deaf child because deafness comes from God (see next chapter).

Sometimes, deafness was described as a punishment from God when someone insults or mistreats a deaf person:

Me:	Does deafness here come from the river?
Afua Aketewa:	Deafness is from God.
Me:	So you do not believe it comes from the river?
Afua Aketewa:	Well, you see so many hearing here, right, so how would that be possible? Deafness is from God. And God punishes people because they insult deaf people.

(Fieldnotes, 26 July 2009)

Kofi Pare explains how this worked:

> For example: I'm sitting quietly, there is a pregnant hearing woman and I'm sitting quietly and I call her. And that hearing person dismisses me and insults me behind my back. I turn around and see it. Ok, well, I do not beat her, I keep quiet.

> God sees it and thinks: "No no that's not right!" So, soon her child will be born and will be crawling around and will grow up and then when you clap it will not hear, you see (*triumphant*) (…) They ring the gong close to the child and it does not hear it. I look at it and nod satisfied. I do not say anything, I keep quiet, and I look away, and walk away. The hearing woman starts to think…She takes the child on the shoulder and ask others: "Why does it not hear?" And someone says: "See: you have insulted a deaf person and thus God gives you that." The hearing woman says: "Oooooh?" The others explain her that you may not insult deaf people, but instead greet and embrace them! The hearing woman keeps quiet…The child grows up and does not hear. Just like you and me, DEAF SAME (*laughs*). (Kofi Pare, Interview, 27 August 2009)

This resembles the stories of deaf people cursing hearing people, with the difference that God was the actor, acting out of himself, or acting upon prayers from deaf people. An example of the latter is: "my deafness is given me by God in heaven, that woman insulted me so I pray God to give her a deaf child too!" Deafness as a punishment *from God* was not regarded as the result of malevolence (like deafness caused by a witch or *mmoatia*), because God was seen as good and his actions as just.

Patterns in Explanations of Deafness

Some researchers tried to find common factors or resemblances between the historical stories and river stories, seeking for a logical consistency. For example, Nyst (who investigated AdaSL) thought that most stories about the origin of deafness in Adamorobe

> can be interpreted as manifestations of the deaf god, Adamorobe Kiti or Ayisi (…). Whether or not Adamorobe Kiti and Adamorobe Ayisi are separate gods and what their relation is with the deafness in Adamorobe needs further clarification. The reference to the war at Katamanso [i.e., Akantamansu] can also be related to a deaf god, as the application of a supernatural protection is normally the work of a priest(ess) serving a particular god, in this case probably the deaf god.[141]

It is clear that she did not have enough conversations about the gods Kiti, Ayisi, and Temina before making these claims. Just like Nyst, I looked for patterns in the stories, but not from the assumption that the discourses were interrelated or that they possessed a single common factor. In table 5.1, I schematize the main elements of the stories, simplifying them somewhat. If I had stayed longer in Adamorobe, or if I or another researcher visits Adamorobe in the future, more stories or variants would be (re)produced, and the table would become more nuanced and complex. While the discourses

Table 5.1.

	parents' hearing status	congenital/ acquired	agent	receiver	mechanism/ intention	source	context/discourse
Akantamansu war	hearing	acquired	concoction	male warriors/ animals	side effect of strength	hearing elders/ previous researchers	locating deafness in time frame
Ga deafening concoction	hearing	acquired	Ga	people of Adamorobe	aggrieve people of Adamorobe	deaf elders	locating deafness in time frame
Cursed ancestor	hearing	acquired	hearing elders	female ancestor	punishment by curse	hearing elder	locating deafness in time frame
Handsome farmer	hearing	congenital	deaf farmer	hearing woman	side effect of strength/marriages	previous researchers	locating deafness in time frame
Ayisi	deaf/hearing	acquired/ congenital	hearing deity	pregnant woman's baby	punishment	hearing people	locating deafness in space
Temina	deaf/hearing	congenital	deaf deity	farmer's baby	reward/gift	hearing people	locating deafness in space
Mmoatia	deaf/hearing	congenital	deaf + hearing dwarf spirits	man/woman/baby	punishment/ contagion	deaf people	telling *mmoatia* stories/ locating deafness in space
Deaf-deaf marriages	deaf	congenital	deaf man	deaf woman's baby	blood/sperm	deaf + hearing people	explaining individual's deafness/discussing marriage law /criticizing sexual relationships/ locating deafness in time frame

Saliva	deaf	acquired	deaf man or woman	hearing baby	contagion	deaf + hearing people	telling young deaf women how to handle hearing babies/explaining individual's deafness
Seeing sign language	deaf	acquired	deaf mother	her hearing baby	contagion	deaf + hearing people	telling young deaf women how to handle hearing babies/explaining individual's deafness
Witch	deaf/hearing	acquired	witch	hearing baby/child	jealousy	deaf + hearing people	explaining individual's deafness
Illness/accident	deaf/hearing	acquired	often a witch	hearing baby/child	bad luck/in case of witch: jealousy	deaf + hearing people	explaining individual's deafness
God	deaf/hearing	congenital	God	baby	gift/diversity	deaf + hearing people	explaining individual's deafness/criticizing marriage law/explaining foolishness of faith healers
God	hearing	congenital	God	hearing woman's baby	punishment	deaf people	discourses on morality
Curse	hearing	congenital	deaf woman	hearing woman's baby	punishment by curse	deaf people	explaining individual's deafness/discourses on morality

explaining deafness in Adamorobe cannot be laid down in a consistent and seamless theory, the table shows that there were particular consistent patterns, themes and elements, which combine and overlap in different ways when focusing on variables such as the parents' hearing status, acquired or congenital deafness, the agent and the receiver, and the mechanism or intentionality behind the cause of deafness. It is striking that when the cause of deafness is linked with men, it is either natural (i.e., passing it on through blood or sperm), or connected with special skills (i.e., fighting and farming) and when deafness is linked with women, it is most of the time a punishment.

The table also lists the source, that is, the person who provided or produced the stories (such as being hearing or deaf) and the context in which they were recorded, i.e., the (purpose of the) discourses in which they appeared. While the purpose of historical stories and river stories was to locate deafness in a general historical or spatial frame, most often explaining deafness was part of conversations, stories, or arguments with *other* purposes (i.e., *not* primarily aimed to explain the cause of deafness): explaining the rationale behind the marriage law; explaining the foolishness of faith healers; telling *mmoatia* stories in general (in which causing deafness was just one example of *mmoatia*'s activities); telling young deaf women whom to have sex with and how to handle hearing babies; complaining about hearing people's immoral behavior (and thus causing deafness through curse or asking God to punish them); and arguing why the marriage law or deaf-related insults are immoral and why they should be allowed to have a deaf child (because God is the cause). In all these discourses, it was not the *primary aim* to explain deafness, but explanations of deafness appeared either as *element* or as *strategy* in these.

The cause of deafness in Adamorobe was therefore situated in multiple ways in Adamorobe's historical, social, geographical, and moral landscape, directly connected with everyday life. The domains of causation and transmission of deafness (the body, the village, the bush) were part of people's everyday movements, their everyday activities; at the same time, these movements entailed risk, particularly for people in liminal positions (such as babies and pregnant women). Furthermore, moral elements were often (but not always) involved: breaking pregnancy taboos, the ancestor's mistake, and breaking rules of courtesy toward deaf people. Also, positive, neutral, or negative characteristics of deaf people appear in stories (such as not speaking or being strong fighters or farmers). The causality discourses thus incorporated and reflected some of the experiences of living in Adamorobe as a deaf or hearing person.

Faith Healers and Attempts to Cure Deafness

As explained in chapter 2, the search for explanations for illness, disabilities, and accidents is typically connected with a cure. It is not clear if and to what extent this happened with regard to deafness in Adamorobe. Trying to cure deafness might be less common in Adamorobe because deafness is a structural and historical phenomenon there. However, apparently such attempts were not absent: one hearing interviewee remarked that the "former chief Nana Kwakwa Asiampong performed so many rites so many years ago but we still have deaf people in our community."

I learned that visiting Christian faith healers had tried to cure deafness. Such healers incorporate the African tradition to heal through religion, but add a capitalistic focus.[142] Deaf people told me many stories about healers who gave them concoctions to drink, dripped lemon juice in their ears, and smeared their saliva on deaf people's throats, in combination with imposition of the hands and dramatic religious declamations with closed eyes, sometimes shaking as if possessed. After their performances, such healers would test deaf people's hearing and speaking. Kwame Osae recalled: "That man preached and when he was done the deaf had to make a sound, to see if we were hearing already. But that wasn't really the case because we just made a sound with our voice." In another conversation, Toabea explained: "They tried do clap when we walked away, to test if we could hear again. And the hearing people [from Adamorobe] were laughing because it was so stupid."

When recalling such events, deaf people seemed awed and impressed by the spectacle and at the same time they appeared to think that it was ridiculous and funny, as these healers did not seem to understand that "Adamorobe is different." There were some vague stories about unknown deaf people in Accra "whose ears opened," but it was generally believed that in Adamorobe, curing deafness was impossible. Ama Korkor said, "They didn't know any signs, so they talked to us through others. I told them I was deaf because of God. Because of something that was put into my ear I'm deaf. I said that there is deafness because of the stream." (Note that this is an example of a context where beliefs about causes of deafness were shared with another purpose than explaining deafness per se.)

Such visits were repeated again and again, obviously without any result, and most deaf people grew highly critical of the faith healers. "It is deception," they said. Kwame Osae commented:

> Can you hear then??? (*rhetorical, ironic, and indignant*). He stomped and sang, with his bible and banged his bible wildly. Can you hear then??? That man smeared his saliva on our throat, can you believe it? I still laugh about it! (Fieldnotes, 6 September 2009)

Kofi Pare recognized the capitalistic aims of the healers: "They just want to get money from it, they want money and that's why they con!" Ama Korkor commented: "I refused to go there and went to the farm (*laughs*)." Others who could not refuse to visit the healers had hearing families who forced or convinced them; some were genuinely interested in becoming hearing (see further). This might sound strange after learning how deaf people and sign language were seen as part of life in Adamorobe, but it is not the only way in which deafness in Adamorobe has been tried to be eradicated, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Conversations about Liking or Not Liking Being Deaf

During my research, deaf people regularly brought up the faith healers when asking each other whether they would like to be hearing: "if a faith healer would be able to make you hearing, would you let him go ahead?" Overall, deaf people said they actually appreciated being deaf and using sign language as their first language. Examples are: "I like being deaf, being deaf is good"; "Hearing like to hear, so be it, I am deaf, I like being deaf, so be it"; "I like to sign"; "Being deaf does not kill you"; "I like being deaf, I live here, I go to the farm and eat off my farm, it's good for me like this." Sometimes, deaf people also gave arguments that were linked to particular *benefits* of being deaf: the deaf-specific attributes such as being strong and hard-working, honest and straightforward, and practical benefits such as not being caught by the police or not having to do communal service.

Additionally, many deaf people made the argument that their deafness was caused by God, a good cause, and was thus not a problem: "I like being deaf, God gave it to me." Kofi Pare even thought that if he wanted to become hearing, God would be angry and punish him, because He created him as a deaf person: "God thinks I'm good like that and then I would want to change something about it…? That would be something to be ashamed about!" What was confusing then, for many deaf people, is the story in which Jesus makes a deaf man hearing, which they learned during church services.

> In the church, Akorful told the story about Jesus who "opens the ears" of a deaf person. He was preaching and thus not asking the deaf people for their thoughts. When he was not looking I asked the deaf people in my view: "Do

you want that? That your ears open?" Kwasi Boahene answered that it would be right, if it comes from God, and Asare Kwabena and Kwame Osae agreed with him. Akorful gave the example that faith healers try to make deaf people hearing again but that they cannot do that: only God can. A discussion did not really take place: it was already about 12 pm and it was really burning hot.

Two days later I asked Kofi Pare for his thoughts.

Kofi Pare: I don't want that. I prefer to stay deaf. When I'm hearing and argue or fight then I'm caught by the police.

Me: And if Jesus would come here and want to make you hearing?

Kofi Pare: Even then not. I wouldn't ask Jesus so it wouldn't happen, I have to keep quiet and not ask him.

Me: And what if Jesus would come up to you and propose to do it?

Kofi Pare: I would refuse and ask Jesus to please not make me hearing because I like being deaf, and Jesus would accept that with a slightly disappointed face and leave again.

Me: Sunday in church a few deaf people did want it to happen.

Kofi Pare: Well then let them, maybe Jesus comes here and makes them all hearing but I wouldn't want that.

I ask Akosua Obutwe, who's listening along, what she thinks.

Akosua Obutwe: I wouldn't want it either! I have five hearing children and one deaf; God decides who's born hearing and who's born deaf. And if God would offer me to become hearing then I would not want that.

(Fieldnotes, 4 and 6 October 2009)

There were also deaf people who said that they wanted to be hearing rather than deaf, arguing that they suffered insults for their deafness or were not able to hear insults people could make behind their back. Adamorobe as a whole was also stigmatized by people outside because of its high number of deaf people (an issue that will be further discussed in the next chapter). I illustrate this with two examples:

Me: Would you like to be hearing?

Owusua: No I like to be deaf and I like signing, I wouldn't like to be hearing, no no. Deafness is from God.

Ama Korkor: (*interrupts vigorously*) They talk about us in Aburi! They talk about Adamorobe there. They say that there are many deaf here and that that means it's bad here. (…)

Me (*to Owusua*): So, you want to stay deaf?

Owusua: Yes

Me: Why?

Owusua: Deaf sign, it is pleasant to have conversations with people in signs. Hearing people speak, I don't want it like that.

Ama Korkor: But you don't hear when hearing people call you names. In your family they're all deaf: Akosua Abora, Bosompra, you, Kofi Afere, so when hearing relatives are calling you names you all don't hear that. When you're pounding *fufu* and they call you names behind your back you don't hear that.

Owusua*:* (*smiling*) You can hear those insults when you're hearing again, and let me know about them. (*both laugh at this*)

(Fieldnotes, 25 June 2009)

On the crossing, I asked Afua Kaya if she thinks it's okay to be deaf. Afua Kaya said she does, and started talking about faith healers. She told me that her mother encouraged her to go, but she did not go because lack of money.

Me: If you had a lot of money, then would you go?

Afua Kaya: In that case, yes! Then you hear the insults! As a deaf person you're insulted behind your back.

Me: So you'd like to be hearing and don't like being deaf?

Afua Kaya: I like to be hearing and like to be deaf.

Kwasi Opare: Wait, listen: you are deaf, God gave that to you.

Afua Kaya: I like being deaf but I also like when the deafness is taken away. When I'm walking (*she demonstrates*) and they call me names behind my back, do I know it then?

(Fieldnotes, 25 June 2009)

The fact that insults could happen was thus recognized by all deaf people, but not all of them saw this as a real concern, such as Owusua and Kwasi Opare in the examples above. Another example is the following utterance by Afua Aketewa who signed: "I prefer to stay deaf. Let them insult me, I don't care. If you're deaf, does that kill you? (*rhetorical, defiant, recalcitrant*). There are old deaf people here you see, deafness does not kill you." Other (less common) arguments for wanting to be hearing were that deaf people are more vulnerable for thieves in their home or for attackers on the farms because they do not hear them. Kwame Afere's story (he was a deaf man who was abused and killed by some Ga on litigation land death) was given as the classic example.

Also, since the implementation of the marriage law, it had been very difficult for deaf men to find a marriage partner (see next chapter), so some of them said they wanted to be hearing to be able to marry. A few times too,

deaf people said that they wanted to be hearing to be able to talk. Kwame Osae explained that he felt limited by being monolingual in AdaSL: "I would like to switch between the two. I do not want only sign language and only deaf people. I want to speak for a moment, and then sign again."

Nevertheless, only a minority of the deaf people consistently maintained that they would like to be hearing. Most deaf people who expressed that they wanted to be hearing said this as a "one-off," at other times stating that they liked being deaf. As such, they expressed ambiguity: being deaf encompasses both positive and negative experiences and it's a personal choice (or depending of mood) which perspective weighs heavier. In general, most deaf people said they were content or happy to be deaf most of the time, and it even proved to be controversial to want to be hearing. This controversy is clear in the following conversation:

Asare Kwabena:	Suppose there's a kind of [Christian] pastor, and when you go there then he lays a hand upon your head and mumbles something and then you hear again. Do you want that?
Me:	No.
Asare Kwabena	(*surprised*) So you like being deaf?
Me:	Yes.
Asare Kwabena:	Well, I would like to hear.
Me (*to Kofi Pare*):	And you?
Kofi Pare:	No, I'm deaf because of God.
Asare Kwabena:	People with a weak leg and so on, is that all because of God, do we have to accept that?
Kofi Pare:	I cannot read but I am strong, I can fight and hearing people are afraid of me. So, do I want to be hearing? When I think about it… I really like being deaf! Deaf are strong, hearing are weak, I can kill hearing people, so they run away from me! You go to a faith healer, fine, but I won't.
Asare Kwabena:	You don't hear the hearing people, you don't hear them talk, you don't understand them. Deaf people can write something down and then they understand but a hearing person just has to say something and already has communication.
Kofi Pare:	When hearing people fight, the police catches them and puts them in jail! (…)
Me (*to Kwasi Boahene*):	And you, what do you want?
Kwasi Boahene:	I want to hear to be able to talk to hearing women and to be able to get married. Then I can talk to several women and marry one of them.

Kofi Pare: When Kwasi Boahene is hearing and Asare Kwabena is hearing, then they talk. I use signs, I am deaf. (…)

Kwasi Boahene: What, if I'm hearing and Asare Kwabena is hearing, and I meet you I wouldn't start a conversation? No no, I would still sign with you. (…)

Kofi Pare: I can still have a nice chat with deaf people, I can meet them and talk to them. When Asare Kwabena becomes hearing then he would be the same as the hearing people, then he would begin to lie like the hearing. He would be too lazy and tired to go to the farm. Kwasi Boahene too. Deaf people aren't tired quickly, and hearing people see that they are strong. And I'm not afraid, I greet people and am not afraid. And so when I would talk to other deaf people and I would learn that the now hearing Asare Kwabena had been caught by the police because he was fighting.

(Fieldnotes, 27 October 2008)

What stands out in this fragment is that Kofi Pare suggests that if someone becomes hearing, he or she loses the connection with the deaf people. He criticizes his best friend Kwasi Boahene who often expresses that he wants to be hearing:

> I would say: "So you're hearing now? Then we are not connected anymore, so we do not talk. Go away, go and talk with HEARING SAME, go away." And I would sit together with the deaf and sign." Hearing Kwasi Boahene would look on and talk to hearing people (*enacts*). The other deaf people would look at him doing that and say: "Kwasi Boahene is wrong! Talking and hearing because of having become hearing, that is wrong. Being deaf is right." Kwasi Boahene himself would say: "Being hearing is good." Then I would say: "Ok (*disapproving*), is that the way you want it? Then you go, go talk to them [hearing people]." I would sit together with the deaf and they would ask: "Kwasi Boahene is gone? Why? He's speaking? Ok, that's the way he wants it, so let it be that way, just let him go" (*disapproving*). (Kofi Pare, Interview, 3 September 2009)

Several deaf people, like Asare Kwabena and Owusua in the fragments above, replied that if one of them would become hearing, he or she could still talk with deaf people and support them, and inform deaf people if they are insulted. This argument was sometimes accepted, sometimes countered by pointing out that this would not make a difference, because when someone becomes hearing, he/she is not one of them, not DEAF SAME anymore. This all means that while there was pressure from hearing family to go to healers, there was a considerable counter-pressure among deaf

people not to go, with Kofi Pare as one of the main protagonists. It also means that DEAF SAME was sometimes treated as an exclusive marker of identity rather than as a descriptive term to express commonalities.

I thus recorded multiple stories and explanations to situate deafness in Adamorobe and most deaf people expressed being happy with their deafness. However, even though deafness has been given a place in Adamorobe, in everyday practices as described in chapters 3 and 4, and in discourses as described in chapter 5, attempts were made to eradicate deafness in Adamorobe, or at least to decrease the number of deaf people born in the village.

6 The Marriage Prohibition and Deaf–Deaf Relationships

> Everywhere [in Adamorobe] the gong gong was beaten [to announce and spread some news]. I wondered: what happened? Did something get stolen? Did someone get killed? But that wasn't the case: the message was that deaf people cannot marry each other. The gong gong was beaten and it was said that deaf people have to marry hearing people. The gong gong was beaten, "Because deaf with deaf get children who can't hear, can't hear, can't hear." Ooohh we were stunned. Such a shame . . . The gong gong was beaten: marry hearing, marry hearing. With hearing, not with deaf. Everywhere the gong gong was rung: "Marry hearing, then hearing children are born, hearing are born, hearing are born. That is good, that is right. Deaf deaf deaf people everywhere, no that is not good." The gong gong was beaten . . . Such a shame . . . (*regret*) (Yaa Awurabea, Interview, 29 August 2009)

In this quote, Adamorobe's oldest deaf woman laments a historical moment. In 1975, during the first year of his chieftaincy, Nana Kwakwa Asiampong introduced a law—promulgated in the village by a gong gong beater—that the deaf people in Adamorobe were not allowed to marry each other anymore, because this would lead to more deaf births in the village, and deaf–hearing unions were much less likely to bring forth children who are deaf. Deaf–hearing or hearing–hearing couples in Adamorobe brought forth either deaf or hearing children (see chapter 2). In contrast, deaf–deaf couples invariably brought forth deaf offspring, because both partners passed on the connexin gene mutation to their offspring. Therefore, the chief decreed that deaf–deaf unions, which had been common in the past, were illegal. Hence, the number of deaf people with deaf children had been much higher before 1975; after the promulgation of the law that year, only very few deaf couples had children.

In chapter 3 I mentioned that the deaf people felt respected by chief Nana Kwakwa Asiampong because he paid special attention to them during festivals. I could not understand why it was this chief who introduced the law, bearing in mind that he was recalled positively in other ways, especially when compared with his successor. And more generally, I wondered why people wanted to eradicate deafness from Adamorobe, where the use of

sign language was pervasive and where people believed that "deaf can do anything that hearing people can." In this chapter, I look into these issues.

"Deaf Village": Adamorobe's Courtesy Stigma

A few hearing elders explained the introduction of the law by pointing out the "inconvenience" of having deaf people in the family. For example, Ama Oforiwaa explained: "Deaf people do not hear if you call them, so we decided to get all children hearing to avoid any trouble; so that our living will be okay for us." Most of all, however, the introduction of the law seemed to be motivated by Adamorobe's reputation as "deaf village." Because the number of people in Adamorobe who know sign language was high, it was said that outsiders could not automatically identify who was deaf and who was hearing, and therefore thought that everyone in Adamorobe was deaf.

Ingstad states that "the presence of a disabled person in a family may influence the way the whole family is looked upon by others. This is what Erving Goffman (. . .) calls 'courtesy stigma.'"[143] In the case of Adamorobe, it was not just one family, but a whole village that became a victim of courtesy stigma. Joseph Okyere explained that in places like Accra, he was brushed away with comments such as: "Oh don't mind him, he is from deaf village" (*mumfo krow* in Akan), implying that he was stupid. Naming can link places to discourses surrounding these places, and, thus, naming is power.[144] The people from Adamorobe experienced problems as a result of the "deaf village" label, which was misleading, restricting, and derogatory.

First, the label was misleading because the majority of people in the village were hearing, at the time of my research and in the past. Deaf people emphasized that they were a small minority in Adamorobe: "In the deaf school in Mampong and in Accra there are many more deaf, right, you saw that yourself! Here are only a few deaf people and a lot of hearing people." The rumors that everyone in Adamorobe is deaf sounded particularly odd to me, because the pervasive use of sign language in Adamorobe was not clearly discernible on first sight, as the language was used mostly by and with the deaf minority. However, evidently this belief had taken shape when there were fewer hearing people, the overall percentage of deaf people in the population was higher, more hearing people knew how to sign, and there was more interaction between deaf and hearing people.

It was a very persistent rumor, however: an article titled "Deaf Persons Majority at Adamrobe" appeared in the *Ghanaian Chronicle* in 2003.[145]

In 1998, a journalist decided to check out the story that over 95% of the people in Adamorobe were deaf; his article, "We Are Not Deaf and Dumb," was published in the *Mirror*.[146] This journalist learned from some elders that there were "only a few cases of hearing impairment some years ago," which was, of course, an understatement, probably because these elders were not pleased that Adamorobe was known as "the deaf village."

Second, the term "deaf village" was experienced as reductionist and restricting because Adamorobe was known for several other things. For example, the clans that founded Adamorobe possessed many lands in the areas surrounding the village (leading to the current problems with land litigation); Adamorobe was once a commander of all the surrounding villages when they went to war; and the gods of Adamorobe were known as strong. Having many deaf people was not Adamorobe's only remarkable feature.

Third, the term was intended to be derogatory. Because of its high number of deaf inhabitants, the "deaf village" was regarded as dirty, as a place of contagion, curses, and witchcraft. For this reason the deaf people were particularly upset when recalling a particular incidence of the chief on the radio. For one or the other reason, the current chief reinforced the rumors of Adamorobe being the "deaf village." In November 2005, Nana Osei Boakye announced on radio station Adom FM (at Tema, near Accra) that in Adamorobe, the people are all deaf and one only sees hands in the air. The deaf people claimed that the chief had bad intentions with her announcement, that she did not respect them, and that she did not like deaf people at all.

According to Joseph Okyere, it was especially the Ga, the neighboring ethnic group, who called Adamorobe "deaf village" (*mumu maame* in Ga language). Kofi Pare explained:

> (*frustrated*) The Ga spread the word: "Say, in Adamorobe, there are a lot of deaf, they do silly signs. There are many deaf." All of them say: "YEAH? Is that so? So then they sneakily come here with the car and walk around and they see signs here and there and say: "Ah, look, a deaf person." Then they go away again and spread the word: "It is true, there are a lot of deaf! It is true! It is true!" Then they all insult us because there are a lot of deaf people here (*ugly face*). (Kofi Pare, Interview, 3 September 2009)

Kofi Pare even thought that deaf people were not involved in guarding and fighting anymore because outsiders afterwards take revenge by talking scandal about the presence of deaf people in Adamorobe. Gossip about Adamorobe was another reason not to use sign language at funerals, in addition

to the "leaf insults." Kofi Pare explained, "When those people [visitors from other places] see deaf people signing, they go talking around everywhere that Adamorobe has many deaf people, in a malicious way, and laugh about this. I do not want them to think that deaf people are less than hearing people!"

Also as visitors to Adamorobe walked around, as happened often, some deaf people would remark that unfamiliar people were staring in a peculiar way, and become anxious. They would stop signing and resume later, leave, re-arrange the deaf space (for example move behind a wall), sign smaller, or sign only when necessary. An example:

> I was sitting at the crossing with Afua Kaya and Afua Aketewa. We were having a conversation. A few hearing people came, walked up after each other on one of the paths. Afua Kaya, who was signing at that moment, was seated with her back in that direction, but she saw me looking in that direction. She looked behind her and stopped in the middle of her sentence. She waited until the people had walked by. When they were gone, I asked her why she silenced so abruptly and she reasoned: "They will go and spread the word in other places that there are a lot of deaf people here and that thus, this is a bad place!" Afua Aketewa chuckled when she saw Afua Kaya's explanation. Another woman passed by and we exchanged greetings. Afua Kaya told me then: "You see, I know Adamorobe's people, I greet them warmly, that's all alright." I asked Afua Aketewa why she laughed earlier. First she did not want to reply but when I persisted she replied that she disagreed with Afua Kaya: the Muslims, Ga, Ewe, all have deaf people. Adamorobe is not unique in having deaf people, so it is not necessary to keep quiet if outsiders pass by. (Fieldnotes, 14 June 2009)

There were thus individual differences in deaf people's reactions: several deaf people (male and female) told me that they did not mind if outsiders were present, because "there are deaf people everywhere," and emphasized that there is no real difference between deaf and hearing people: "Just let them laugh or talk, we are all one!" "We all have the same blood." I could not see a clear pattern in these differences in attitude. The deaf people who were more often active in deaf spaces were not particularly more or particularly less confident to sign in the vicinity of outsiders than other deaf people.

The Reasons for the Marriage Law

The 1975 law emerged amid this climate of anxiousness toward Adamorobe. The late Agnes Bomo explained:

> This law came through the way Adamorobe's name has been spread and broadcasted through the whole world: Adamorobe people are deaf. When visitors come, they say to others that Adamorobe is a deaf town: there are no hearing people here. So the chief was worried and made a law that no deaf should marry

> deaf, to see if the deaf will reduce or not. (. . .) It was said that if you come here you can't get any hearing people to talk with. This became a major problem for the town: people don't want to come here because we are deaf. (Interview, Agnes Bomo, 9 August 2009)

One hearing interview respondent gave a telling example:

> I once had a chance to talk with somebody at Tema. She was almost 60 years old and a native of Adamorobe. She says she will never come to Adamorobe, let alone allow her child to come. Her reason is that her late father told her if she comes to Adamorobe she will produce deaf children.

These arguments do not provide any clues as to why such beliefs became prominent in the 1970s, after the hearing people in Adamorobe had been living with deaf people since the eighteenth century. I researched to find such clues, and identified four possible explanations for the introduction of the law in 1975.

First, Nana Gyasehene (who is Adamorobe's administrator chief) narrated: "We discovered that it is not advisable for a male and female deaf and dumb to marry, so we put a stop to that practice and it has reduced their number drastically." It is not clear if and how people indeed suddenly "discovered" that while deaf–deaf marriages in Adamorobe always have brought forth deaf offspring, this was not automatically the case for deaf–hearing marriages. In the past, deaf–deaf marriages were common, and deaf–hearing marriages were exceptional, so perhaps people's attention was caught by the marriage history of two deaf women: Yaa Awurabea and the late Afua Tatyifu. They married a hearing person with whom they had hearing children, then both divorced and remarried each with a deaf man with whom they had deaf children. While the timing (i.e., early 1970s) corresponds, it is not clear if it was really new information that deaf–hearing marriages bring forth hearing offspring; these were not the first such marriages in Adamorobe.

Second, in the period that the law was implemented, there were many deaf children, perhaps a deaf "baby boom." Third, Agnes speaks about the way Adamorobe had been "broadcasted around the world." In the early 1970s, several teams of researchers had visited Adamorobe (David et al. and Osei-Sekyereh [147]). Fourth, Amedofu et al. suggest that "genetic counseling [not based on blood research but probably on family trees] given by the medical team to discourage intermarriages among the affected families have proved effective in controlling the spread of the disease [*sic*] in the village."[148]

Although the elders whom I consulted did not seem to remember the counseling, again the time frame fits more or less (i.e., 1970–1975), so it could be that the counseling informed or stimulated the decision to introduce the law.

Hearing People's Views on the Presence of Deaf People

The fact that the accommodating perspectives in Adamorobe were outweighed by the courtesy stigma and/or some practical inconveniences might be surprising. Through the interviews done by Joseph Okyere, I tried to get more insight into hearing people's opinions and prepared the following questions: "Do you think it is wrong if deaf people are born? Does this have to be avoided? Do you think Adamorobe should have (no) deaf people in the future?" Only one-third of the replies reflected the opinion that it is better to avoid more deaf people in Adamorobe, or that it is "wrong" for deaf people to be born. The reasons given were that deaf people cannot speak, cannot hear it if someone or something is coming, cannot do everything for the family like hearing people, are not respected, are quick-tempered, are unschooled or lowly educated, are useless in society outside Adamorobe, and are the cause that Adamorobe is called a "deaf village."

However, two-thirds of the replies implied that the birth of deaf people should not be avoided, incorporating other arguments: that deaf people are part of Adamorobe from generation to generation, that they are ancestors and therefore also part of its future, and that deafness in Adamorobe is natural and/or created by God and that both are uncontrollable. God was referred to in three different ways. Some people said that God created people to be hearing, and that the deafness happened because an ancestor made a mistake or because people venerate the *abosom*, the small gods such as Ayisi and Temina. But most often, it was said that God's Creation intentionally contained deaf people. A few of the respondents said they would pray to God to change this aspect of his Creation or hoped that God will accept to have no new deaf people in Adamorobe. Most others, however, implied that deafness as part of the Creation means that it is not wrong, as such using an argument for diversity that was also used by the deaf people themselves.

The majority of these replies seem to imply that the marriage law does not reflect the ideas that generally prevailed in the village. I wondered if the marriage prohibition was a top-down intervention that had limited impact on what was happening on the ground. Had there been a change throughout the years, and were people feeling different about this than in 1975?

However, these replies could be interpreted another way: that the respondents accepted the deaf people who were already there as part of Adamorobe, but that no new deaf people should be "produced" if it could be stopped or avoided. I see that the respondents were only accepting of those cases of deaf offspring from hearing parents, which are regarded as uncontrollable, natural, and from God. Deaf–deaf marriages, on the other hand, believed to bring forth deaf children anyway/only, are controllable after all, and thus should be prohibited.

In 2002, Rue asked various hearing people's views on the loss of cultural and linguistic diversity in Adamorobe following the law: "whether or not they were scared of losing an important part of their culture" when there would be no deaf people in Adamorobe anymore. She reported that the answers were negative, concluding that "Since there is no real separation between the deaf and the hearing they feel that life will continue much as it always has."[149] The presence of deaf people may have been accepted because the people believed there was nothing to do about it; hearing inhabitants did not seem to value deaf–hearing diversity in itself.

Although interview respondents recognized AdaSL as a language in which everything can be communicated, they did not express concern about its loss if deaf people were to become extinct from the village. Perhaps they regarded AdaSL as a way to communicate with and between deaf people when they are present, but felt that the language had no value in and of itself outside of its practical use in everyday life situations.

Deaf People's Problems in Finding Hearing Partners

The law left all but one of the deaf men unmarried. While the law prescribed that deaf people should marry hearing rather than deaf partners, it turned out that hearing women generally were not eager to marry a deaf man, because of the belief that deafness is passed on by men rather than by women. It was believed that a man's semen or blood is "harder" than a woman's blood and that men therefore pass on deafness.* (This has not been confirmed by genetic research.) In the interviews with hearing people,

* When I was in Adamorobe, two young deaf women recently got a baby from a hearing man. Their babies were very small and it was not clear yet if they were deaf or hearing, and at moments that people suspected that the children could be deaf they reproached the women for having intercourse with a deaf man instead of with the hearing men who they pointed out as the father.

the majority of the women said they would therefore never marry a deaf man, while the majority of the men said they did not see any problem in marrying a deaf woman. Those who said they would marry a deaf person came with the above-mentioned arguments that "deaf can do anything," "are human beings," "we understand each other through sign language," and so on. The three (of the ten) men who said they would not marry a deaf woman explained that they did not know sign language well enough to have good communication in the marriage.

Thus, the result of the law was not that deaf and hearing people married freely, but that deaf women married hearing men and had children with them, and that most of the deaf men remained single and childless. Only one deaf man was married to a hearing woman and had a hearing daughter with her.

Finding a hearing wife became especially problematic for the deaf men after the late Kofi Adin's marriage in the late eighties, to the hearing sister of five deaf siblings. Because Kofi Adin was said to have been born hearing and became deaf as a child, people expected that he would bring forth hearing children, but contrarily to the expectations, he had a deaf daughter with this woman. When his second daughter appeared to be deaf too, he was ordered by his father (but according to Rue, by chief Nana Kwakwa Asiampong)[150] to separate from his wife, who remarried a hearing man with whom she got several hearing children. Apparently, it became even harder for deaf men to find a hearing wife after this incident. Kofi Pare and Kwasi Boahene described how they had courted hearing women who became interested in them, but others discouraged the women from marrying them.

In this context, deaf people told me the story of Kofi Tuo, a deaf young man in his late twenties or early thirties, who a few years before my research "became mad because of the law." The story went as follows: Kofi Tuo was a strong young man and a good farmer with his own house who had decided that it was time to find a wife. He was interested in a hearing woman who also liked him, but she was advised against marrying him. When Kofi Tuo found out that she did not want him anymore, he was very upset and went to someone who prepared a juju to make her willing to marry him. He put it under his pillow and waited for the woman for many nights. She did not come and he became mad from the juju. Now he stays at home in his bed and ignores people.

Not only did deaf men have problems with finding a hearing partner, but also most of the deaf people complained that they were not happy in current or previous relationships and marriages with hearing people.

One of the reasons they gave was a lack of communication, but most of them pointed at a lack of commitment. The majority of the deaf women complained that their hearing (ex)partner did not provide/had not provided her with the things she needs, such as sufficient food, traditional clothes, and household items, or left as soon as she became pregnant. During conflicts, hearing partners directed deaf-related insults, such as "HEAR-NOTHING" and "EAR-HARD," at their partners. The deaf men gave similar arguments. Based on earlier experiences in "free marriages" (see next section) with hearing women, they argued that hearing women did not accept their responsibilities in the home and cheated on them, did not take the relationship seriously, and "played around."

Poverty-related problems thus mixed with discrimination, the latter related to the ambiguity around the acceptance of deaf people in Adamorobe. Although divorce was not at all unusual or exceptional in Akan culture (as explained in chapter 2), the rate of divorce in deaf–hearing marriages may have been higher than average. Joseph Okyere said he had the impression that deaf people divorced more easily than hearing people, and according to him this was because of their short-temperedness, intolerance, inflexibility, and impatience—behavior that could be in response to oppression.

There were a few exceptions of deaf women who said they were generally satisfied with their hearing partners. Some deaf women reasoned that there were benefits in marrying a hearing man because he would know when a car was approaching. (This struck me as odd, because there were few cars in Adamorobe, and partners generally did not move around together in the village.) Kwasi Opare, the only deaf man with a hearing wife, said that his wife could warn him when there was a sound in the night or when someone knocked on the door of the room. Some deaf women came with the argument that deaf people gossiped and fought too much and that having a hearing partner was more peaceful.

Nevertheless, such opinions seemed to be the exception: deaf–deaf marriages were typically portrayed as ideal marriages in which the partners were committed, caring, respecting and honest. Most deaf people also believed that communication would be better and more frequent with a deaf partner as both would have sign language as their first language, and that a deaf partner would not easily leave them behind, talk behind their back, or have secret relationships, in other words, that deaf people could be trusted. Yaa Awurabea, the old woman who provided the quote in the

beginning of this chapter, was married to a deaf man (when it was still allowed) and claimed that deaf people made good partners who generally lived together in peace:

> Marrying a hearing person means fighting, fighting, fighting, fighting. I don't want that. Marrying a deaf person means calmly being together, which is good. Going to the farm together, cultivating peppers, cultivating tomatoes, cultivating corn, to be able to eat from it, it's good like that… If you marry a hearing person they talk insultingly and scold: "HEAR-NOTHING, HEAR-NOTHING." I didn't want to be with a hearing person, because they say: "HEAR-NOTHING, HEAR-NOTHING." They insult, insult, insult. I didn't want that. Marrying a deaf person means no fighting. Fighting, that I don't like. Marrying a deaf person, that I liked (*now smiling*).(…) I like a deaf person. Hearing? No no, I do NOT like that. Marrying a deaf person is the RIGHT thing to do! (Yaa Awurabea, Interview, 29 August 2009)

I did not take this to mean that deaf people would marry each other only "because hearing people treat them badly." They did this always, possibly because of the feeling of sameness and connectedness and the ease of communication in sign language. Kwame Osae, a confirmed bachelor, asked me: "We are all deaf, deaf people are the same and play and have fun, so how can it be wrong to marry each other???"

Deaf–Deaf Free Marriages

While a number of deaf people in the village engaged in relationships or marriages with hearing people, not all of them followed the law strictly. More specifically, there were four deaf–deaf "free marriages" in Adamorobe during my research (as explained in chapter 2, these are open relationships between people who do not follow the traditional customs to marry, but typically eat and/or sleep together). There were countless stories about other (shorter or longer) deaf–deaf relationships in the previous years.

The deaf people involved in deaf–deaf free marriages by the end of my research were between approximately thirty and fifty-five years old. Two of the relationships were long lasting, at least between five and ten years, while the other two lasted between one and five years. Two couples lived together: one in the woman's room and the other in the man's room. The partners of the two other couples lived in their maternal compounds, but sometimes ate or slept at their partner's compound. During my research, one of the deaf couples in a shorter relationship separated and one new deaf couple started a relationship, so one-third of the deaf adults were in deaf–deaf relationships during my fieldwork.

Because of the marriage law, one needed to be daring and brave to have a relationship with another deaf person openly, because of resistance from the family and other people in the environment. This is illustrated by the above-mentioned beginning relationship between two deaf people. A deaf woman in her forties had recently broken up with her hearing partner (also a "free marriage") and became interested in a deaf man in his thirties who courted her. She felt reluctant to become his partner, however, because of comments and insults that she received from a number of hearing people who learned about it. The deaf people who were already in a deaf–deaf relationship exerted considerable counterpressure on the woman to engage in a free marriage and to move into the deaf man's room. Eventually she accepted him as her partner and moved to his place. They were still together when I visited Adamorobe two and a half years later.

Even if one was brave enough to defy the marriage law, Akan marriage rules posed other obstacles: one was not allowed to marry someone in the same lineage or clan or a parallel cousin; and two women from the same lineage could not marry the same man or two brothers or two parallel cousins. In AdaSL, such marriages are called "goat marriages," because goats have intercourse with their relatives. At least three of the relationships between deaf people that I was aware of were breaking Akan marriage rules, for which they were highly criticized by *both* deaf and hearing people who used this as an insult: "You are a goat!" In most deaf people's eyes, engaging in a "goat marriage" was much more problematic than disobeying the deaf marriage law. Some single deaf people wanted a deaf partner but did not want a "goat marriage" and did not want to start a relationship with one of the very few available possible deaf partners because of grudges from the past or because of finding each other unattractive.

Two of the deaf–deaf relationships were also condemned because of the vast age difference between the partners: in both cases, a divorced deaf woman over fifty and with children was together with a young childless deaf man in his thirties. About these relationships it was said that the women "only eat a lot" and will not provide their childless partner with offspring anymore. As such, some deaf–deaf free marriages were criticized for three reasons: they broke the deaf marriage law, they broke the Akan marriage laws, and they did not respond to other cultural expectations about the choice of partners.

Typically, the deaf couples argued that they were planning to marry customarily in the future when they had money to slaughter a sheep to wash away the "sin" of breaking Akan marriage rules. I often had the

impression, however, that these promises were (at least partially) a way to appease people who criticized them for being together without completing the customs. It was conceivable that each of the couples could separate in the future, not only because Akan free marriages were often temporary, but also because the social pressure to break up the unaccepted relationship could become extended and unbearable.

The latter idea was expressed especially in conversations about housing. The lineage of a number of deaf siblings who have deaf partners was in the process of having new rooms built at the edge of Adamorobe, including a number of rooms for these deaf siblings. When I asked these people's deaf partners whether they would move into their partner's new room, they felt ambivalent. On the one hand, the idea of a new room was attractive, but moving there would make them more vulnerable for comments. It was sometimes argued that it might be more comfortable for each to live in their own room and visit each other (i.e., duolocality, which was common too), or even to break up altogether, using the occasion to make a decision about their controversial relationships.

To avoid the problems of both "goat marriages" and the unavailability of attractive deaf partners, one could marry a deaf person from outside Adamorobe. Three previous and current marriages between deaf people from Adamorobe and Accra had produced hearing children, in contrast to marriages with deaf people from (villages surrounding) Adamorobe. However, deaf people felt they could not realistically solve their marriage problems by seeking a deaf partner in Accra or elsewhere.

I questioned especially the men as they were experiencing the most problems. These men wanted to stay in Adamorobe, where they had built up their life as farmers with their heart and souls, so moving to Accra was something they did not imagine as desirable or achievable. (Sometimes the men expressed this as a dream: living in Accra, having a big beautiful house and a car, or even marrying a white woman and moving to a white country.) Trying to convince a deaf woman from Accra to move to Adamorobe was not regarded as an attractive option either, as Adamorobe men thought that city women were lazy, feeble, and inexperienced on the land. Of course there were other ways for (deaf) women to make a living, such as tailoring or petty trading, but the deaf men from Adamorobe wanted a farm woman. They also believed that only if the couple lived in Accra could such a marriage provide hearing children: when staying in Adamorobe, the child would possibly still be deaf. In addition, the men equated

marrying a person from Accra with a Christian marriage, which was seen as beautiful (with a ring, a white dress, a church ceremony, and a big party) but unaffordable. Hearing people condemned deaf–deaf marriage in general, and knowing the exceptions of Accra–Adamorobe deaf–deaf relationships with hearing offspring could not convince them to do otherwise.

Abortions and the Wish for Just One Deaf Child

While a number of deaf people resisted and thus broke the marriage law by engaging in relationships (even though they were not customarily married, this was experienced and described as a break of the law), the majority of these relationships remained childless. Here we see that the underlying motivation of the law, that is, avoiding deaf offspring, was seldom challenged and can thus be interpreted as subjection to the law. More specifically, three of the four deaf–deaf couples did not have children together, while the fourth couple had one deaf child. Also, the high number of other deaf–deaf relationships and free marriages in the past had almost never resulted in (deaf) offspring.

Deaf people told me about several strategies that could provide someone with a hearing child even when his/her partner is deaf: not drinking from Ayisi's stream when pregnant, praying to God to give a hearing child, and not contaminating the child with deafness through saliva. However, naturally the only ways to control the birth of deaf children in Adamorobe were abstinence, contraception, and abortion. Contraceptive methods were hardly used, however, and unwanted pregnancies ended in abortions.

A deaf woman's motivation for having an abortion was typically not straightforward; it was not only to avoid deaf children. I identified five different reasons, often, some were combined: (1) the pregnancy was the product of a "goat marriage"; (2) the pregnancy was the product of a secret relationship that nobody knew about; (3) the man was not intending to provide for the child financially; (4) the mother wanted to complete her school education; and (5) the couple wanted to prevent the birth of a deaf child. The first four reasons correspond with possible reasons for abortions identified by Bleek during his research in an Akan village in the 1970s, and his findings remain relevant.[151]

Bleek identified 79 different methods used in that village to perform an abortion, most of them herbal, although not all of them effective and many of them are dangerous for the women who use them. People typically strongly disapproved of abortion, not because it was seen as unlawful

or as murder, but because one could become infertile or die from it.[152] When someone died as the result of an abortion, this was strongly condemned and seen as highly shameful.[153] However, when an abortion was successful, without medical complications, and remained hidden, it was silently approved of.[154] Because of the required secrecy, it was very difficult to investigate the theme.[155] Information was concealed, so only after six months of research did I start to realize the scope of the phenomenon.

The deaf people (mostly women) who confided in me, told me stories about what happened to *other* deaf women, sometimes explaining how they helped with their abortions. Because of contradicting information, I suspected that these informants were lying about their own abortion histories, using arguments like: "I have no idea how to do it," "I am menopausal," or "I lost that child due to a miscarriage." Bleek framed this lying as a "cultural phenomenon," stating that "it is a strategy for survival, a code to preserve one's own and other people's self-respect."[156] Hence, I had no precise indications as to how common abortions were in general, nor how common they were for deaf–deaf relationships, although the stories gave me the impression that abortions took place fairly often. Some of these stories dated at least up to 20 years; a number of deaf women apparently aborted pregnancies from different deaf men at different points in time, or more than one time in a relationship.

Having learned that deaf women had abortions and that this was at least in a number of cases (partially) motivated by the wish to avoid deaf offspring, I wondered how they actually would feel about bearing deaf children. When I asked deaf people (both men and women) if they would like to have deaf children or not, a few of them gave (practical) reasons to prefer a hearing child: a hearing child can tell it if a car approaches, can pass on information, and can let it know if hearing people insult you. Most other people replied positively on the question whether they would like a deaf child. A number of deaf people referred to a "good cause" of deafness (rather than witchcraft or other causes with a negative feel): "A deaf child comes from God." They also remark that deaf people can be educated: "I can send it to school," that is, the residential deaf school in Mampong. Here is an example from Kofi Pare:

> (*love-filled facial expression*) I'd like a deaf child: I would take good care of it! I would help it and take care of it, I would welcome a deaf child with open arms. It is a gift of God, I like it. (…) I would take care of it and send it to school. I would like that. Yes. (Kofi Pare, Interview, 3 September 2009)

The reference to school is important, because deaf people felt frustrated about their own lack of schooling and contrasted this with the opportunities that were available to the deaf children from Adamorobe as they attended the school in Mampong (see chapter 7). In addition to the "God" and "school" arguments, some deaf people argued that the idea of sameness between themselves as deaf parent and their child was attractive to them. For example, Afua Kaya said a hearing child could insult its deaf parents in spoken language, which would leave them in an asymmetric position. She concluded: "I want a deaf child, like myself, deaf people are the same, we have the same way of communicating."

Most of the time, however, deaf people gave the evasive answer that having deaf children "is not allowed by law." A typical example is this telling conversation with Adwoa Bomo:

Me:	Have you already been with deaf men?
Adwoa Bomo:	Three hearing men.
Me:	Why no deaf?
Adwoa Bomo:	I don't want a deaf partner because that's not allowed by law because then I'll have a deaf child.
Me:	But what do you like, is it okay for you to have a deaf child?
Adwoa Bomo:	It's not allowed by law.
Me:	But what do you *like*?
Adwoa:	It's *not allowed* by law.
Me:	But what do *you* yourself really want, would you like a deaf child?
Adwoa Bomo:	(*softer, confessing look*): Yes I would like…
	(Fieldnotes, 2 October 2009)

This and other similar conversations revealed that the deaf people in Adamorobe regarded what they wanted or liked as of secondary importance, which explains the practice of abortions. In Akan collective culture, individual decisions can have significant social consequences; one reason for deaf couples to avoid having children is that their family and wider social environment would not behave in an accepting and supportive way. This could affect the quality of their life and that of their children significantly, as well as their relationships with their deaf partners, which would no longer be tolerated.

For example, between ten and twenty years prior to my fieldwork, a deaf man had a relationship with a deaf woman and she became pregnant. Her family got very angry and took her out of Adamorobe to a cocoa farm, where she delivered their deaf daughter. The girl stayed there when her mother

eventually came back to Adamorobe, and the couple was forced to break up. Another example is the story of a pregnant young deaf woman who narrated the reaction of her relatives when they found out that she was pregnant:

> I made a round through the village to sell food and at a certain moment I had to throw up somewhere. A male family member of mine saw me, and he got angry because he understood that I was pregnant. He already wanted to start hitting me with a stick, because he thought I was together with a deaf man. When I told him the child was from a hearing man, he calmed down. (Fieldnotes, 21 December 2008)

When the baby was born and it turned out that he was indeed hearing, this woman was happy to have avoided big problems with her family. She said that if the baby had been deaf, everybody would have been convinced that a deaf man was the father. She admitted that she actually would love to have a deaf child, but regarded the potential consequences as unacceptable:

> I'm glad that my child is hearing, because of the insults I would have to endure. And they would all tell me off if I would marry a deaf person. If I would have a deaf child then they wouldn't even want to help take care of it. (Fieldnotes, 29 June 2009)

In Adamorobe, where people typically live with the extended family, breaking away from the family was a very unattractive and ultimately undesirable option. A way for a number of deaf men to compromise between the marriage law and their feelings of resistance toward the law was to argue that they would like to have just one child. They argued that this was their right as a couple even if the child would be deaf, especially if they did not have children yet. In Akan culture, to have children is more important than being married, which is true for both men and women.

I was told a few stories about childless deaf men who learned about the abortions of their deaf partners and were angry because they wanted "just one child." A man of appropriate age who was not a father was seen as defective or incomplete, so remaining childless was seen as the greatest tragedy or humiliation.[157] The "just one child" argument was also sometimes uttered by hearing people. It had been thirty-five years since the law was announced, and it was clear that this had heavily affected the deaf people's lives, especially those of the deaf men who remained unmarried and childless. The hearing sister of several deaf siblings signed:

> My three deaf brothers are good, handsome men and all three of them do not have a child, I have been thinking about that and having heart ache, that really doesn't feel good, so it's better that they have one child, a girl, and that will be deaf but that is from God. (Fieldnotes, 3 September 2009)

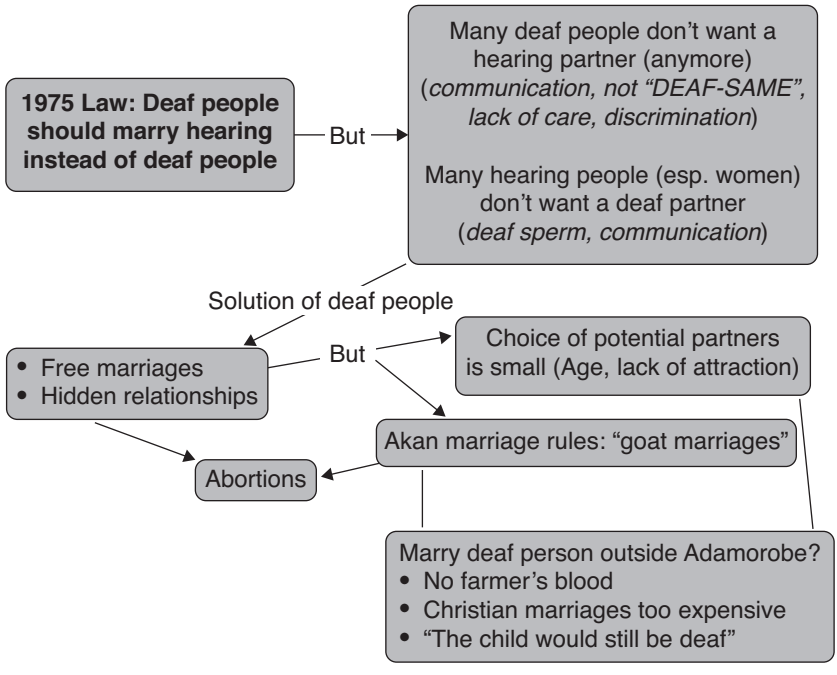

Figure 6.1. Deaf people's marriage problems.

Children are important not only for one's social identity, but also for the future: children are expected to provide their parents with money and food and help them when they need it. Interestingly, I never saw deaf people say: "I want a whole bunch of deaf children." Having more than one deaf child would definitely make someone more vulnerable for disapproval: one deaf woman told me that she had wished that her youngest deaf son was hearing, because she already had two deaf teenage daughters and was insulted gravely for having another deaf child. Having just one deaf child was also presented as being more natural. If a family had many deaf children, it was less readily regarded as "natural diversity" devised by God, but there could have been some other cause.

To represent the complexity of the deaf people's marriage issues, I summarized them in a diagram (figure 6.1).

The Impact of the Marriage Law

In 1992, Nana Kwakwa Asiampong died in a car crash, and many deaf people described his death as a punishment from God for introducing the marriage law. According to them, justice had been done. I was also

told other stories about his death, but this one was the explanation that was most often given and repeated by deaf people. Also the gongbeater was blamed for their misfortune. This is because he was the one who announced the law in the village, while (according to the deaf people) he should have refused that (which is like "shooting the messenger").

The marriage prohibition had a triple effect in Adamorobe: not only were the deaf people denied deaf partners and the deaf couples denied children, but the deaf people were also made to feel unwanted in society. Implicit in the law is the assumption that deaf people have less of a right to live and marry freely than hearing people:

> They said: "Listen up: marry hearing people, get hearing children. Not with deaf deaf deaf deaf deaf (*angry look*)!" Because deaf people cannot speak. For example I go somewhere and buy slippers, peppers, or this … or that … You can write it all down. That's good like that! But they say (*indignant*): "Deaf don't hear people talking. Being hearing, that is fine!" The gong gong was beaten: "Have hearing children, hearing children." "Because when you take a bus to different places, such as to the sea, and people talk to you, then you don't hear that. A hearing person can hear, that is good, being deaf isn't." That's the way it is, it's a shame … (*sorry look*). (Yaa Awurabea, Interview, 29 August 2009)

The deaf people struggled with the tension between their inclusion in Adamorobe and stigmatizing and discriminating practices and ideologies. In combination with occasional insults and discrimination of deaf people in Adamorobe (such as "EAR-HARD" and "HEAR-NOTHING,") and the courtesy stigma, the triple impact of the law gave rise to very bitter feelings. Kwabena Ofori, Adamorobe's oldest deaf man, often contrasted the situation in Adamorobe with life in the environment of Kokoben, where he had lived with family for a large part of his life:

Kwabena Ofori:	In the surroundings behind Aburi there are also many deaf.
Kofi Pare:	Yes there are many deaf there.
Kwabena Ofori:	And they just have sex with each other. They meet each other, greet each other, chat with each other. The chief greets them when he sees them. Deaf go to the farm. There's no mentioning [of a marriage law]. But here …
Kofi Pare:	They don't get insulted there.
Kwabena Ofori:	Indeed. There, deaf and hearing all mix, are connected and greet each other. (…)
Kofi Pare:	Here the deaf are insulted, there they are not. There they talk together with the deaf, there it's good. Here it's bad: the people of Adamorobe are HEAD-HARD!

> Kwabena Ofori: There they don't insult, there's no gossiping, there they are connected and the people mix and there's no mentioning [of marriages].
>
> (Kwabena Ofori and Kofi Pare, Interview, 9 August 2009)

I saw other examples of the tension between the acceptance of deaf people and the wish to have no deaf people in Adamorobe anymore: one hearing interview respondent explained that some hearing people had in the past suggested that all the deaf people should be relocated. I also heard deaf people telling some fantastic stories about hearing people wanting to do away with the deaf by throwing them all in the water. However, most stories were about poisonings and witchcraft: deaf people repeatedly told me that they believed that hearing people (often witches) were removing the deaf people from Adamorobe one by one, over the course of years: "The witches killed a lot of deaf, a lot of deaf died, died, died, now there are only a few here."

With the late Kwadzo Okoto's untimely death during the last week of my research, in October 2009, some deaf people thought that hearing people had killed him with poison or magic. Many deaf people in Adamorobe died when they were not yet old (such as in their thirties or forties). While it is common practice in Akan culture to explain untimely deaths as the result of witchcraft, magic, and so on, deaf people thought they were specifically targeted because of their deafness.

This belief sometimes motivated suspicious behavior among the deaf people: they would not want to accept a drink that a hearing person offered, or to eat food that a hearing person had prepared, for fear that they would be accepting a poisoned gift. Hearing people's supposed wish to poison deaf people was sometimes explained as the result of alleged jealousy about deaf-specific positive characteristics, such as being EYE-STRONG or having a strong body. Other times deaf people bitterly remarked that the hearing people would just be happier without them.

I regularly saw them sign: "What if … the gong gong had never been beaten? What if that marriage law had never been enforced?" In their ideal world, they would be happily married with a deaf person, and both deaf and hearing offspring would be welcomed as part of natural diversity or diversity created by God. As a number of them said to me: "How can it be wrong to marry each other, and how can it be wrong to want children together, even though they might be deaf?"

Deaf Education, the Deaf Church Group, Literacy, and Ghanaian Sign Language

7

This chapter traces deaf–hearing segregation in religious and educational contexts. Such segregation did not occur in traditional Akan religion (in which deaf people participated; see chapter 2) and traditional family-based "oral" education (the latter happened through sign language by/for deaf people). In chapter 4 I explained how deaf sociality was a matter of course in Adamorobe: deaf people met each other very frequently, created deaf spaces in several places, and expressed deaf-related values and commonalities. However, while they regarded themselves as having unity, in Adamorobe they would not organize themselves (or be organized) as one large deaf space containing *all or most* deaf people from Adamorobe.

Structural deaf–hearing segregation in the institutional contexts of education and religion was thus a phenomenon introduced by outsiders, probably in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Deaf people's encounters with these institutions also meant an introduction to another sign language and another modality of language (i.e., writing). Churches and schools in Ghana use Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL), written English, and Signed English (i.e., signs used in English syntax, with some additional signs to fill up "gaps"). GSL and Signed English are largely based on American Sign Language (ASL), as are a number of other West African sign languages. [158] The key figure in the initiation of both deaf education and the deaf church in Adamorobe (and large parts of sub-Saharan Africa) is the late Rev. Andrew Jackson Foster.

Rev. Andrew Foster and Mampong

The late Rev. Andrew Jackson Foster, a deaf African American man, known as the "Father of Deaf Education in Africa," established thirty-one schools for the deaf in thirteen countries in West, East, and Central Africa. After obtaining degrees in education, Christian missions, and special education

in the United States, Foster left to Africa to build on deaf education in the continent.[159] He selected Ghana to work in initially, on account of its early independence. Foster arrived in Ghana in 1957 and established a staunchly religious day school in Osu (Accra), the Ghana Mission School for the Deaf. In 1959 the school relocated to Mampong, where it became a residential school. In 1962, the government took over the management and funding of the school, but Foster remained headmaster.[160] Foster "went from town to town and from village to village seeking out the deaf,"[161] including Adamorobe. Kwame Osae from Adamorobe accompanied him on a number of his trips (after Foster met him in Adamorobe), and narrated:

> After arrival, he asked the chief if there were any deaf children, and told him he wanted to send them to school. We searched and didn't immediately find any. We were pointed in a direction to find deaf children and we walked there. They were called. A girl and a boy, two. I didn't know them. They did not hear. Foster was told: "They are deaf, they do not hear." Then Foster said: "Come, I do not hear either, we are the same." They didn't know signs. They didn't get it. So Foster took them to school with him.(…) In the olden days there was no school for the deaf! (*Vigorous*) No school! Foster was the first one! (Kwame Osae, Interview, 29 August 2009)

Kwame Osae was not the only one who had been in regular touch with Foster: two deaf women from Adamorobe, the late Yaa Aketewa and Yaa Oparebea, worked as servants in his house in Accra. In 1963, Foster brought about fifteen deaf children from Adamorobe to his school in Mampong, which provided free schooling and boarding:

> Foster went to the chief of Adamorobe. I was there as well. He went to greet and he said that he wanted to take the deaf children to school. The chief said that there were several deaf children and had them called. Deaf of different ages and heights came.(…) Foster said that he wanted to take these children to school with him. The chief agreed: that is good, they can go.(…) Foster spoke to the deaf children, he said: "Come go to school, come along to school. It's good there, you will get pretty clothes and will learn to write there." He wrote down something and showed the chief. The chief saw it and ahhhhh, he was so surprised! "He does not hear but is able to write! Oooo!" He paid his respect to Foster. (Kwame Osae, Interview, 29 August 2009)

However, after only a few months time, all the children ceased to attend for different reasons such as illness, parental deaths, conflict and theft at the school, fear of headhunters,* and because a lion was shot in the vicinity of the

* In the past, the elders used human heads to drink water or alcohol in the chief palace, and human blood to perform rituals for the chief's position.

Figure 7.1. Adamorobe's former Unit School for the Deaf.

school. It emerged that the deaf children and their parents never really liked the idea of an education outside of Adamorobe. Osei-Sekyereh, who visited Adamorobe with a team from the recently established Mampong's teacher training college, indicated that these deaf children "presented social, educational and psychological differences," (it is not clear what is meant by this statement) and suggested deaf schooling in Adamorobe rather than outside.[162]

The Deaf School in Adamorobe

When Sir Alexander Drummond visited Adamorobe in 1961, the then chief offered him 80 acres of land for a deaf school. "Then, owing to sudden political change, all the British officers, including General Alexander, were sacked (. . .) so the project lapsed."[163] Finally, in 1974, the Ministry of Eduation established a unit for the deaf that was connected to the Anglican primary school in Adamorobe (see map 2 and figure 7.1), a tiny building with two small classrooms. The deaf people in Adamorobe called this school "Foster-school-here"; as the school in Mampong was "Foster-school-over-there." Many people, including Nyst,[164] link the founding of this government-funded school to Foster, despite Foster's having left the country before the Ministry of Education opened the school.

At the unit school, Godfried Akufo Ofori, who was trained in deaf education in the teacher-training institute in Mampong, taught about

15 deaf pupils aged between six and fourteen years old. During my research he still lived in Aburi, from where he had commuted to Adamorobe to teach. He described his teaching method as a combination of lipreading, fingerspelling, speech training, and some (American) sign language (which was the language spread by Foster). The deaf people in their forties and fifties vividly remembered his lessons. For example:

> The teacher came from Aburi and wrote on the blackboard, and we watched it. We had to watch well. If it was written ugly then we were beaten on our hands with a little stick and the others laughed then. (*laughs*)(. . .) We all had an exercise book open in front of us, and had to watch the blackboard carefully and copy. Everyone had an exercise book, and we had to write pretty. I had to write my name and the teacher said: good job. He came to look and he put checks and said: "Ama, you did a good job!" (Ama Korkor, Interview, 6 October 2009)

The unit closed in 1980. According to the deaf people, the reason was a conflict between Ama Korkor and the teacher that erupted into a fight in which other pupils became involved as well. That day, Ama Korkor had to stay home from school because she had an itchy rash on her body. However, she wanted to go to school because of the food that was distributed there for lunch. The other deaf children would bring her this food in the village, but Ama Korkor walked to the school, taking a knife with her.

When she arrived, a fight developed with the teacher, which escalated when Ama stabbed the knife in his direction (without injuring him). The teacher broke a branch from a tree outside the school and used it to beat her. The other children mingled themselves in the fight, fighting the teacher. The police were called. The deaf children had to go to Chief Nana Kwakwa Asiampong, who decided to close the school, although they all kneeled and begged in tears.

Ama Korkor's own version of the story adds the following elements: she went to school to fetch a food bowl that she forgot there and to ask her friend Afua Kaya to bring food to her later in the day. She took the knife with her because she anticipated the possibility of a conflict with the teacher. The teacher got angry upon her arrival because she was not supposed to be there, and that is why she tried to attack him. According to Ama Korkor, the chief was very upset with the teacher's behavior and that is why he closed the school, to protect the deaf children.

This story—without Ama Korkor's added elements—was repeated again and again by the deaf people, and it clearly constitutes a central element

of Adamorobe's deaf history. The school building was being used by the nursery class of the Anglican school, but deaf people still saw it as theirs:

> I sat under the trees in front of the Anglican school with nine deaf people. Someone pointed at a small building behind us, saying that it was the former deaf school, something they do almost invariably when we pass there, in a regretting or frustrated tone. It was still early in the morning, about eight o'clock, and the sun was still low. The school was already open, there were some small children and there was a female teacher sitting outside. I told Ama Korkor that I would like to see it a bit more up close and would like to go inside. So we went there and stepped into the small classroom on the right, a tiny room of maybe 5 by 3 or 4 metres. The teacher who had been outside at first, started signaling us to go outside, with a vexed face. Ama Korkor started to get worked up towards that teacher: "That is the deaf school, I have been to school there, that school is from the deaf, she (*points at me*) wants a chance to see it." She repeatedly said: "That is ours!" "That was the deaf school a long time ago!" (Fieldnotes, 16 December 2008)

Godfried Ofori, the teacher, however, indicated the incident involving Ama Korkor was only "a minor case," declaring that "the chief was engineering the whole problem,(…) leading my bright promoting to zero degree." He explained:

> I went to Denmark [in 1971–1972] and studied more about integration of normal children and deaf/hard of hearing children. But the chief who was not an educated person did not allow that plan, to combine the deaf and hearing children together for education.(…) They should mix with the hearing children and I should supervise them and teach them speech training. I should head the whole school because the rest of the teachers were not trained.(…) The people and chief were wasting my time. (Godfried Ofori, Interview, 24 September 2009)

Ironically, Ofori wanted to apply a purely oral method to deaf people living in a village where the use of sign language is omnipresent. The chief did not support this plan (for reasons I do not know), hence the closure of the school. While the deaf people mostly blamed Ama Korkor, some (especially Ama Korkor herself) believed that the fight led to the teacher losing his leg—it had been amputated due to diabetes complications—as a kind of justice, comparable to their explanation of the former chief's death.

Since 2000, deaf children from Adamorobe had been attending a residential deaf school in Mampong (not the school founded by Foster; there are several schools for the deaf in Mampong), with about 300 other deaf pupils. During my research in 2009, all of the school-age deaf children (ten in total) from Adamorobe were in school. They were taught through signed

English and written English and used GSL among themselves. The students returned to their home only four times a year, during Christmas, spring, summer and mid-term holidays.

Vocational Training and Literacy Course

Some years later, in the early eighties, the hearing-led Ghana Society for the Deaf brought around ten young deaf adults from Adamorobe to Accra for vocational training. The deaf students were to be trained for a profession such as tailor, seamstress, or carpenter, but after a short time (a few weeks or months), they together sneaked back to their village. They said the teacher was too harsh, the work was hard, they got only very little money to buy food, and only had one full meal a day. While the deaf people I met sometimes expressed frustration when looking back at this missed chance, the ending of the training was not as big an issue for them as was the discontinuation of Adamorobe's school unit for the deaf. They, their parents, and the chief apparently still were not fully comfortable with education (or training) outside of Adamorobe.

In or around 1995, Samuel Adjei taught a literacy and numeracy course to deaf adults in Adamorobe. Samuel was a self-educated GSL-using deaf person from Accra who moved to Adamorobe in 1988 to start a farm. He had been tutored by a man called Odame in Accra on how to teach literacy and numeracy to deaf adults. The idea was that, should his attempts at teaching be successful, his students would once again move on to a vocational training project. Twice a week, about 10 or 15 deaf people went to his classes in a classroom of the Anglican school, but after a number of months the classes were discontinued.

According to Samuel, the deaf people lacked motivation: they came very late or did not come at all and complained that they were hungry and that they had been working hard on their farms. Kwasi Boahene felt that it was difficult for them to learn to write later in life, and Ama Korkor explained that their priorities laid elsewhere: life revolved around the farms and the household: "If I'm hungry after the farm, I have to prepare food instead of being occupied with writing, right?" Apart from Kofi Pare's deep dissatisfaction with the discontinuation of the course, other deaf people didn't talk about it much.

Illiteracy and Feeling Stuck with Farming

Due to these stints of formal schooling, a small minority of the deaf adults could write their name; some of them could also write (parts of) place

names such as Accra, Adamorobe, Madina, or Oyibi, and numbers from 1 to 10. Typically, the people who had attended the school in Adamorobe for several years had a better recollection of how to write, although they pointed out that their schooling was so long ago that most of their learned but unused skills and knowledge had vanished. These (small) differences between deaf people were sometimes a reason for teasing; pointing out the prestige of (minimal) literacy and numeracy; and for confronting people who faked literacy and numeracy. An example:

> In the late afternoon I was sitting at the stall of Ama Korkor's hearing sister. She had left the stall to Kofi Pare and Ama Korkor for a while. Several deaf people came, stayed to chat for a while, and left. Okoto stayed a rather long while. Kofi Pare winked at me to say I had to hush because he was going to fool Okoto, and waved to Okoto to get his attention. He asked Okoto what the time was at that moment. It was a bit past five thirty, but Okoto immediately said: 4 o'clock. Kofi Pare asked me: "Is that right? Is that correct?" I looked at my watch and told the time. Indignantly, Kofi Pare said to Okoto: "See! Well!" He asked why Okoto wore a watch if it was set wrong. Okoto looked at his watch sheepishly. I picked up his arm to look at his watch and saw it was running the same as mine. When I told Kofi Pare that, he told Okoto: "Well, then why do you say 4 o'clock!" and directed himself to me while he added: "I actually can do that! I have a watch myself as well!" (Fieldnotes, 26 May 2009)

Literacy and numeracy were equated with prestige and with opportunity. Therefore, many of the deaf people regarded their lack of formal education and literacy as a failure that limited their array of possible life choices to farming (even though there were other possibilities for unschooled people, such as stone cutting or petty trading). Most deaf adults thought that their life in Adamorobe would have been wealthier and more varied if they had finished their education and/or vocational training, and that they would have had to go to the farm less, or not at all. "To the land, again and again, every single day," was a complaint I saw quite often there. The closure of the school in Adamorobe (whereof the building was a vivid reminder) was still an especially painful and sensitive issue for the deaf village residents. The atmosphere in deaf spaces in Adamorobe noticeably deteriorated if the topic surfaced, and deaf people often said: "Because Ama Korkor fought, we have to go to farm, again and again."

Deaf people thus not only felt enabled (as strong and hardworking farmers) on their farms and proud on their land, but they also felt limited to working the land. The deaf adults perceived hearing people and

deaf schoolchildren as having more opportunities and more employment options than they had had, creating a deep divide between them. While employment opportunities were increasing, the deaf adults were (still) subsistence farmers, largely unschooled and illiterate. Several projects had been organized for/by them to create other sources of income, but these failed for various reasons (see chapter 8), hence they regarded the farm as the base they always (could) fall back on.

Tattoos and Independence

The deaf people largely associated being largely illiterate not only with being "stuck" with farming, but also with being limited to staying in Adamorobe: occassional trips to Accra or Madina market were cherished, but it was expensive to travel outside the village, let alone to buy things with the meagre profits they made from farming. Negotiating space outside Adamorobe was also related to schooling and literacy. Hearing illiterate people were less restrained than deaf illiterate people: when they could not read signboards, they still could communicate through spoken language at markets and stations. Deaf people who wanted to go somewhere alone had to memorize visual cues to help them get around.

Sometimes things go wrong: I registered several stories of deaf people from Adamorobe who got lost outside Adamorobe. Apparently, in the 1970s this led to a village-wide request that deaf people not go far from Adamorobe on their own if they do not know the route well enough. There were considerable differences among deaf individuals in this respect: some of them had accumulated enough experiential knowledge to travel alone, having been instructed by deaf or hearing relatives or by Samuel Adjei, or having lived or traded in Madina or Accra.

As explained in chapter 3, when going outside Adamorobe, deaf people gesture their way through everything such as market interactions, bargaining, and trivial conversations. What they could not communicate through gesture, however, was the name of their village or their own name. As such, eight deaf villagers had a large tattoo on their right underarm with their name and "Adamorobe" (figure 7.2). A few hearing people have a similar tattoo on their arm, for identification purposes: it enables people to transport a corpse back to the right village after an accident, as there are often fatal car accidents in Ghana.

The deaf people who had a tattoo had other or additional motivations. For example, they would show their tattoo to people to direct them onto

Figure 7.2. Kofi Pare's tattoo.

the right *trotro* to Adamorobe on the huge, seemingly chaotic lorry stations filled with minibuses. There were no formal signs and travelers would rely on asking others to find the right bus. Having your home destination tattooed on your arm was deemed preferrable to asking a hearing person in Adamorobe to write it down on a piece of paper in advance—primarily because it could not be lost but also because it makes one independent from hearing people to go whenever one wants. I was told that this tattoo could prevent a lot of trouble. When getting lost somewhere deaf people would show their tattoo to a passerby or to the police who would then show them the way home, keeping them from wandering around aimlessly "to be robbed and murdered."

Not only did some deaf tattoo-less people get lost outside Adamorobe (and were not found until days or weeks later); it also happened that two tattoo-less deaf men from Adamorobe were recruited to beg involuntarily in Cape Coast, and had difficulty in escaping and returning to Adamorobe because they could not write the name of the village. Illiterate deaf people in Ghana are vulnerable to being picked by deaf literate recruiters, often coming from Nigeria. They recruit deaf people to hand out fake letters to solicit for financial support for nonexistent deaf-related (development) projects. In this case, a Ghanaian literate deaf man came to Adamorobe and invited the two above-mentioned deaf men to come with him, telling them that he would give them work and they would earn lots of money and receive shoes, clothes, and watches. He convinced them by saying that it was for a

very short period of time and insisted that they should not tell their families where they were going, to minimize the risk that they would be stopped.

The two men told Samuel Adjei that they would be back in a few days and left sneakily. One of them described how they got a bunch with leaflets and handed these out, for example, to yam, fish, and rice vendors: "So I showed such a paper to a hearing person, I respectfully looked away with my eyes averted until they had read it, with my hands folded over each other. And then I looked again and I got money." One day he showed me some examples of such flyers. One was from the "Tema Deaf Christian Church," claiming to collect money for a new chapel; another, from "National Technical Deaf Old Student Association" in Brong-Ahafo, decorated with a stamp, explaining that they were looking for support for former students to set up their own businesses.

The two men described how the recruiter used to follow them and spy on them during their activities, and how nervous they felt when policemen approached. They were fed by this man and had to live in uncomfortable conditions, sleeping outside on a terrace, without having the opportunity to bathe themselves in evenings. They soon found out that they had to hand in their income, and they never saw this money again. When they realized that they had been conned, they wanted to escape back to Adamorobe on their own, but were not able to, because they did not know the area where they were, could not read or write to ask for directions back to Adamorobe, and they had no identification tattoo on their arm. Samuel Adjei had, on request of the two men's families, reported to Ghana National Association of the Deaf (GNAD) that they were lost. One of the former GNAD presidents found them on the road between Cape Coast and Accra and put them on a *trotro* (minibus) to Oyibi, from where they walked to Adamorobe. After this incident, the two men decided to have their arms tattood.

Thus, for the deaf adults, deaf education and particularly the lack of it, made evident their barriers and limitations, both within and outside of Adamorobe. At the same time, being unschooled did not mean being utterly dependent on hearing people. In markets and food places they communicated through gesture, their tattoos, or a piece of paper on which Samuel or a hearing person wrote a destination, to reach certain places. Being unschooled also did not mean not having the knowledge they need in their everyday lives: their family and elders have educated them in all the practical and theoretical issues they need to know for daily life in Adamorobe and for succesful farming.

Therefore, being illiterate did not impact too strongly on practical everyday life in Adamorobe, as writing was usually not used (much) in everyday contexts. Illiteracy was also not limited to deaf people (in the 2000 census, 47% of 812 respondents aged over 15 were illiterate[165]). Still, deaf people very much experienced and described not being able to read or write as a painful limitation, perhaps because in their eyes, they had been so close to completing their formal education.

Deaf Preachers and the Deaf Lutheran Church

Just as they were segregated for education, deaf and hearing people were also segregated for religious services. The first Christian deaf person who preached to deaf people in Adamorobe was Foster. In addition to his educational activities, Foster organized bible meetings and Sunday schools in many African countries. He established a church for deaf people in Accra and he regularly preached to the deaf people in Adamorobe in the late 1950s and/or early 1960s. Until then, a number of deaf people in Adamorobe had attended the Anglican church with their families and had been baptized there, but there was no translation to AdaSL. Deaf people in Adamorobe depicted their communication with Foster as an exchange: they taught AdaSL signs to Foster while Foster taught them ASL signs.

In addition to preaching, Foster organized charitable donations: he regularly came to Adamorobe with a van with products such as rice, clothes, sandals, toothbrushes, oil, chocolate powder, soap, bread, sugar, milk, onions, groundnuts, corn, towels, caps, and watches. These donations were the most substantial (and probably the first) example of (Christian) charity aimed at the deaf people in Adamorobe, and initiated a pattern that created notions of neediness, as well as an association between church attendance and access to resources. According to Kwame Osae, a deaf man in his sixties, "Foster said: Do you come to church? You want me to stop distributing rice and clothes? No? Well then…"

After Foster left Ghana in 1965, a man called Odame, who was the caretaker of the deaf church group in Accra established by Foster and instructed Samuel Adjei for the above-mentioned literacy training in Adamorobe, regularly came to Adamorobe, accompanied by Grace Amoa, a teacher trained by Foster, and a woman from Larteh. The latter succeeded in getting support from a church in Accra and the deaf people from Adamorobe were promised funds for a deaf-centered project of the cultivation of snails and mushrooms. Following this, those deaf people who were not

yet Christian converted. As such, the association between the church and resources was consolidated, which was visible at the time of my research.

In the 1970s and 1980s, deaf people from Accra, representing several different denominations (including the Presbyterian church in Osu, the Methodists, the Assembly of God, and Pentecostalists), started to come to Adamorobe weekly, taking turns to preach to the deaf people in the Anglican church building. One of these deaf people from Accra was Samuel Adjei, who later moved to Adamorobe. They preached in GSL, although Samuel emphasized that there was mutual exchange of signs. The frequency of their visits diminished, and from 1988, when Samuel moved to Adamorobe, it was mostly he who preached. He told me that the deaf people only wanted to attend church when resources were made available and donations, such as rice, were offered. Samuel promoted GSL use in the community, using it in church services and teaching the language (in connection with written English) in private to three deaf Adamorobean men: the late Kofi Adin, Kofi Pare, and Kwasi Boahene.

Samuel preached regularly for between fifteen and twenty years until he handed the torch on to the Lutheran church, because they were able to provide financial support, which Samuel's Presbyterian church could not. Hence the link between church and financial assistance was further congealed. A hearing white Lutheran couple had visited Adamorobe around 1996, organized church services, distributed a catecism to all the deaf people, and decided to support them. Samuel was invited to join the Lutheran church, but he chose to remain Presbyterian. There was Lutheran training for deaf pastors based in Kumasi taught by the hearing Rev. Noack, and four deaf men from this group took turns preaching in Adamorobe. One of them (Kofi Akorful) remained, and had been coming to Adamorobe weekly since 1998, preaching in Signed English and/or GSL with the addition of some AdaSL signs. The fact that the deaf children in Adamorobe were not going to school concerned Kofi Akorful, and he approached Rev. Noack to ask for support. He told me that this is how it happened that in 2000, deaf children were sent to the school for the deaf in Mampong, funded by the Lutheran church.

Thus, although representatives from other churches came and still come to visit Adamorobe, the Lutheran church has played an important role for the deaf people of Adamorobe for fifteen years. It regularly happened that representatives from other churches visited though. During my research, hearing disciples from the Jehovah's Witnesses came a few times,

pretending that they were deaf. Most deaf people were apprehensive about the Witnesses and Akorful advised them not to interact with them, explaining that they had many strict rules. When a deaf person from the Church of Christ came another time, deaf people were initially suspicious because they thought that he was a hearing Jehovah's Witness. When this man visited one of Akorful's church services and preached to the deaf, Akorful tolerated him.

While relatively tolerant toward other Christian churches, Akorful was very strict about the deaf people's involvement in traditional religion, more strict than Samuel had been. Under the influence of Christian ideas, most deaf people (while describing traditional ceremonies with joy) said that deities, spirits, and witches were "devils" who wanted to do them harm. They feared that God would punish people who got involved with them. For example:

> When I didn't go to church yet, I liked traditional religion. But God is hard so I am afraid. That's why I stopped with that, it's over now. Akorful speaks the truth and everyone is listening, he calls everyone to church. That's the way it is now. It's fear for God's punishment, that he will kill all of us. God is strong, unbelievable! (Kofi Pare and Kwabena Ofori, Interview, 9 August 2009)

Despite the fear of God, the deaf people demonstrated different degrees of obligation to Akorful. Some people avoided traditional ceremonies almost altogether, but most of them said: "You can go to watch the ceremonies and dances, but only for a very short while, and you should not dance nor eat the food they prepare or the alcoholic drinks that they offer." I noticed that deaf people were invited (or urged) by family members (who were mostly Christian too, but were not against all aspects of traditional religion), to attend certain family-based traditional religion ceremonies. Deaf people often refused, but they sometimes did attend ceremonies such as the inauguration of a new home, or small ceremonies for recently deceased family members and ancestors. Three deaf men, who were close friends aged between forty-five and sixty-five, were apparently not concerned about the condemnations of Akorful and the other deaf people, and rather actively participated in traditional ceremonies in the "forbidden" ways explained above, although they also went to Akorful's church services during my presence in Adamorobe.

The Services and Aims of the Deaf Lutheran Church

Typically, Akorful's church services for the deaf started around 10 or 11 am on Sundays and lasted until 12 or 1 pm, in a classroom of the

Anglican school (see map 2). Before and after the church services, there was a lot of social interaction among the deaf people who attended. Services provided the only regular opportunity for all the deaf people (including the schoolchildren during their holidays) to come together as one big group, including those deaf people who interacted less actively with other deaf people in the village. It is important to note, however, that the size of the deaf gatherings outside of the church was influenced by the attendance of a visitor. The average attendance during my research was twenty deaf people, indicating a severe researcher's effect, because when I was not present in Adamorobe only a few deaf people attended. I saw the higher attendance when visitors were present as connected to the expectation of donations (see next chapter).

The deaf people who came to the church positioned themselves on school benches and plastic chairs arranged rather randomly in roughly three rows. The men sat on the left and the women on the right, a pattern apparently adopted from Ghanaian schools. The classroom where the services were conducted was very hot around noontime, especially because the roof was made of iron sheets, and deaf people often dozed until another deaf person woke them. During the services, Akorful followed common practice from Ghanaian deaf churches from different denominations: short songs signed by individual deaf people who were called forward to be copied by the audience, signed prayers that the deaf people had to copy simultaneously from Akorful, and then a bible story and a sermon.

The morals of the sermons were usually "Don't kill, hate, or steal" and "Do help and love each other." I noticed that most of the time, Akorful eyed the men. Women were often dozing or talking to each other without him noticing it. He also focused on the schoolchildren when they were in the church during school holidays, asking them questions about Bible stories and asking them to perform songs in Signed English, which they rattled off so fast that the adults could not keep "in tune" with them. After the sermon there was an offertory round with songs. The offers were meant for deaf people from the church group needing financial support, for example, in case of illness, but the amount of money gathered was usually very small.

A service typically lasted between 30 and 60 minutes; afterwards, there were lectures and conversations that were not church-related that could last up to one hour. During this time, Akorful passed on news, often along with moral messages ("Research has found that alcohol is really bad for

you, so do not drink," "Hitting children is forbidden in America, so do not hit children"); political information ("Obama was elected, he is black just like us"); political opinions ("Vote for the NDC") or religious opinions and judgments ("Muslims got in a plane with a bomb somewhere, so Muslims are bad").

Akorful also shared deaf-related stories and news from around the world and tried to relate them to the lives of deaf people in Adamorobe. He told one story about hearing people who cheated to be able to participate in the Deaflympics, comparing them to hearing people in Adamorobe who faked deafness in order to get donations from visitors. Interpersonal problems, such as quarrels among the deaf people from Adamorobe, were also discussed.

During his sermons and during the more mundane sessions after the sermon, Akorful emphasized deaf-related values: that deaf people need to be strong, also when they are discriminated against; that they should not fight with each other because they need each other; and that they need to help each other because hearing people cannot be trusted. He also emphasized that deaf people should be proud, take care of themselves well, dress well, and not drink too much, otherwise their reputation in the hearing majority could become affected.

When deaf people explained why they thought it was important to attend church, they did not lay the same emphasis as Akorful. They did not talk about the importance of learning Bible stories, receiving news, and solving quarrels; instead, they usually said they went to keep off the devil and to avoid misfortune. Some declared, "If I don't attend I will get sick/die." Akorful indeed regularly told the deaf people that if they did not attend the church services, they would get ill more quickly, and they would not get moral and financial support from him and the Lutheran church when they became severely ill, nor would they have a good funeral when they died. After fear, there was social control and social pressure: "Akorful and/or the other deaf people will insult me if I do not go."

Thus, deaf people regarded church going as a duty and were not enthusiastic attendees. It upset Akorful that although the deaf people had to walk only a small distance while he traveled all the way from Accra, they still managed to arrive later than him. Often, deaf people did not feel like going at all, and used excuses such as feeling too tired, feeling unwell, having to cook, having too much work in the household, having to care for a sick relative, having to finish some work at the farm, having do to some paid

work for someone else, and having no money for the offerings. They complained about Akorful's reprimands, and about arguments between deaf people during the conversations after the services. They also complained about the perceived lack of donations (see next chapter) and that attending church every week was too much, that it was boring, and that they did not fully understand Akorful's signing.

Language Use and Proficiency in the Church and Beyond

That the deaf people were not able to fully comprehend Akorful's signing brings us to the issue of language proficiency, language practices, and language ideologies with regard to AdaSL and GSL. Most of the time, Akorful used a mixture of GSL and Signed English, at different speeds and with different degrees of difficulty, also adding varying amounts of AdaSL signs. When communicating with Akorful, deaf people mostly used basic GSL with a heavy AdaSL accent, or AdaSL with some GSL signs. They had picked up the GSL signs during the short stints of deaf education they had received, and during the church services organized by Samuel and Akorful. The deaf church attendees devotedly copied the songs and prayers in Signed English as if on autopilot, getting the majority of the signs wrong. They apparently had no problem with the copying, though, probably because these were seen as "fixed" texts.

They were more annoyed that the explanations of the Bible stories and the sermons were not in full AdaSL. They explained that they could not understand Akorful fully except when he used slow and plain GSL (with or without AdaSL), which he mostly did not. This led to comments such as "Akorful is wrong! That he teaches over there in Accra in GSL is ok, but here it is AdaSL!" "If it would be in AdaSL the deaf won't fall asleep anymore!" "We all don't understand him, what I'm doing is to sit still and accept it." With only a piecemeal understanding, deaf people often could not reply when Akorful asked them a question or asked them to paraphrase the Bible stories he had narrated.

Upon Akorful's request, the late Agnes Bomo became a member of the church group in order to help Akorful to explain Bible stories in AdaSL. She did not know GSL any better than the deaf people, thus could not interpret Akorful's GSL into AdaSL, but she brought a Bible to the church and read the stories herself before helping to explain them. I did not see her doing this often, however, apparently she had grown tired of doing this and became less active over the years.

When the late Kofi Adin was still alive, he interpreted the church services, having learned GSL from Samuel. After his death in 2003, Akorful wanted Kofi Pare and Kwasi Boahene (who also had learned GSL from Samuel but to a lesser extent) to replace Kofi Adin, but this did not happen on a regular basis. Kofi Pare only translated a few times (typically when there were visitors). Akorful said, "I do pure GSL for the visitors, so that they can understand me," and Kofi Pare told me that he translated to AdaSL for the visitors so that they could see AdaSL and be impressed that there was translation.

If interpretation happened, it happened sequentially (not simultaneously) and only the sermons were interpreted, not the songs, prayers, or the conversation after the service. I noticed that Akorful used clearer GSL when Kofi Pare was translating, ironically making himself not only more understandable for Kofi Pare but also for the other deaf attendees. Kofi Pare translated (what he could gather) into an abbreviated and clear (but sometimes wrong and often incomplete) version in AdaSL; for example, he translated "gold, frankincence, and myrrh" from the story of the Epiphany as "soap and deodorant powder." He looked at the women's half of the church remarkably more often than Akorful did, admonishing women when they talked to each other or dozed off. Sometimes Agnes Bomo added or corrected something. A few times Akorful asked a schoolchild to interpret, but it turned out that Kofi Pare was better at it.

During the church services, Akorful often wrote words on the blackboard, regardless of the fact that the deaf adults could not read. Before each service, Akorful wrote the number and name of the Bible verse on the blackboard, which the deaf people had to sign along with him in Signed English. He also wrote names of countries and persons (Belgium, USA, Obama), dates (instead of simply signing for example "within two weeks"), and explained the definition of terms like "salvation" and the difference between bleeding and blood, father and Father, god and God, and Saul and Paul. Once, Ama Korkor showed me a notebook in which she had copied such words, and even an e-mail address, but she clearly did not know what she was writing: many letters were incompletely formed.

By pursuing this method of preaching, Akorful brought the need for literacy into deaf spaces in Adamorobe, and the need to know GSL fluently. Hence, the church group was a place where the difference between the deaf schoolchildren and adults became much more apparent than in everyday village life. Even though the schoolchildren often could not make full sense either of what Akorful wrote and signed, they were believed to be on the path to understanding, which was enough to highlight the difference.

Schoolchildren and Language Proficiency

While the deaf schoolchildren used GSL at school, most of them had learned AdaSL from hearing or deaf parents or grandparents or from each other, and communicated using AdaSL until they started school between age eight and ten. Deaf adults outside of their families did not automatically have an active role in teaching sign language during the children's early years (thus DEAF SAME does not lead to a concern for deaf children's sign language acquisition) and even between the deaf children there was no automatic contact in Adamorobe. I learned that a few deaf children from Adamorobe met each other for the first time at the school for the deaf in Mampong, perhaps because small children were generally less mobile in Adamorobe than were teenagers or adults.

Following my own observations and the judgments of deaf adults, most of the schoolchildren had some fluency in AdaSL; they did not falter or stammer when using the language and were able to express most of what they wanted to say. The lexicon they used seemed to be less varied than that of the deaf adults, however, and they signed more slowly. Probably due to the fact that the schoolchildren were at school most of the year, there were clear variations in proficiency among them (unlike the deaf adults who were uniformly fluent). About half of the Adamorobe deaf children attending school in Mampong had one or two deaf parents, and they were generally more fluent in AdaSL than the others. The AdaSL of the older schoolchildren who were aged between fourteen and eighteen looked less lax and more robust than that of the adults, and they used a smaller signing space than was generally the case when using AdaSL, but comparable to GSL.

When the schoolchildren were in Adamorobe during the holidays, I noticed that they were inclined to use GSL with each other and with me, probably because GSL was the language they used with their peers at school during most of the year. The deaf schoolchildren in Adamorobe also pointed out that the use of this language has an additional benefit: in Adamorobe, where so many people, both deaf and hearing, know AdaSL, using GSL offered them privacy in their conversations.

When deaf schoolchildren and deaf adults communicated with each other, they used either AdaSL or GSL or, in the majority of cases, a mixture of both. The adults did not understand all of the GSL that the children used with each other, and the children did not always understand the way a group of adults would use AdaSL. However, both parties could and

would easily adapt to each other. A few weeks into the summer holiday (which lasts six weeks), I noticed that the schoolchildren's language use became less exclusively GSL: they started to use AdaSL with me, used more AdaSL with the deaf adults than previously, and also inserted expressions in AdaSL in their signing to each other.

I also noticed a difference between the schoolchildren's AdaSL use and proficiency and those of three particular young people who had stopped or completed their schooling (I call them "homecomers" in the remainder of the chapter). The homecomers had become significantly more fluent in AdaSL since moving back to Adamorobe full time. Two of them had moved back just before my research, and I saw their language use change during my time in the field.

AdaSL as a "Hard Language," and the Value of Sign Bilingualism

When deaf people in Adamorobe commented on the difference between AdaSL and GSL and between AdaSL and spoken Akan, they signed that AdaSL is a "HARD" language, harder than spoken Akan and GSL, which are "SOFT." It was clear that "HARD" held a positive connotation for them when they were talking about their language, and in different contexts, this expression took different meanings.

First, to call AdaSL hard is to say that it is a language unique to Adamorobe and thus difficult to understand for outsiders: "Elsewhere, they do not have this. Only in Adamorobe. The signs here are HARD," declared Kofi Pare. Even hearing people and deaf GSL-using schoolchildren in Adamorobe do not have as fluent a command of AdaSL as the deaf adults, whose proficiency was a source of pride for them. Second, "HARD" also means clear, firm, and expressive, not blurry, flabby, or muddled. For example, Akua Fiankobea explained, "I don't understand GSL well, but I do understand the signs that are used here [i.e., AdaSL], here my eyes are wide open. It is HARD here." Kwame Osae commented, "Signing in AdaSL is HARD! For example signing, 'Hey, are you doing well?' (*signed strongly*) and then giving a heavy handshake." Kofi Pare demonstrated how people who primarily use GSL or spoken languages such as Akan use the body in a lax way, with feeble and weak hand movements when they sign or gesture.

The three homecomers said that because of its expressivity, AdaSL was more pleasant to use than GSL. One of them gave the example of the signs for the days of the week in GSL, which are based on fingerspelling, as opposed to the AdaSL weekday signs, which are based on Akan events,

history, and customs. Deaf people were proud of their sign language, seeing it either as better than GSL or Akan because it was harder and more pleasant, or as good as these languages, because—they emphasized—anything can be said in either language and they are thus equivalent. Hearing interview respondents also made this point when they compared AdaSL and Akan (as discussed in chapter 3). However, while hearing people unified the two languages as *the same*, deaf people didn't do this. When deaf people signed that the languages were the same they meant that the languages are of equal value, not that they have the same (or an overlapping or related) structure. They did not have access to Akan and perhaps this is why they have a different perspective on this language than hearing people who, in principle, have access to both Akan and AdaSL.

While valuing their own "hard" sign language, deaf adults in Adamorobe also indicated that there were practical benefits, prestige, and pleasure associated with knowing GSL, and they emphasized the value of bilingualism in the two sign languages. It is important to acknowledge that they do not distinguish the ASL/Signed English used by Foster from modern GSL/Signed English. Ghanaian deaf people outside Adamorobe called their language "Ghanaian Sign Language," and at the same time they were aware of the language's roots in ASL. Deaf people in Adamorobe, in contrast, regard GSL and ASL as one and the same language, often calling it "FINGERSPELLING," "ENGLISH," or "AMERICAN," probably because of the most obvious characteristics that distinguished them from AdaSL: the use of fingerspelling to spell English words, the integration of fingerspelling in the handshapes of many signs, and the connection between the use of GSL/ASL and English literacy. Other times, GSL was just called "SIGNS," using the ASL sign for sign language (two d-hands turning around each other), as opposed to the AdaSL sign for "signs," which I can best describe as hands twirling around each other in the air. Sometimes this sign was accompanied with the sign for "ADAMOROBE."

Hence, for the deaf adults, GSL was not merely the school and church sign language in Ghana, but the sign language used everywhere outside of Adamorobe, and the sign language of the land of white people. This is why deaf people from Adamorobe were generally inclined to use GSL (with a heavy AdaSL accent) with foreign visitors. In the United Kingdom, I met a deaf man who had visited Adamorobe a few years prior, and he most strongly remembered being disappointed by the degree of ASL influence on the language used in this village. He clearly did not realize that the deaf

people were adapting their language use for him, using what they saw as a universal sign language.

In fact, when deaf people from different nationalities meet for the first time, they often make use of International Sign or ASL instead of their own sign language, sometimes as a temporary bridge. In that respect, Kwame Osae told me that one of the benefits of knowing GSL, is that "If a white person is coming, then you can try to communicate by using those signs and to teach them AdaSL until they know AdaSL." As explained in the introduction of this book, I experienced this myself during the initial stage of my research.

I found that some deaf people found it pleasant, in addition to practical, to be able to use a language other than AdaSL. Among the deaf adults, Kofi Pare and Kwasi Boahene had the best command of GSL (because of Samuel Adjei's private lessons) and often signed in GSL with the schoolchildren, commenting that "If you know them both and can switch between them, that's nice, that's fun." Knowing the basics of a language that hearing people in Adamorobe did not know brought a little bit more balance to the aforementioned (chapter 3) asymmetric language situation in Adamorobe. Deaf adults took advantage of this fact and used GSL for short remarks, for example, when gossiping about hearing people in the vicinity ("He is bad!" "She's a thief!"). (The deaf schoolchildren, in contrast, used GSL for full conversations and not just short remarks.) They also occasionally switched to GSL when talking to me, declaring that "I like to use it, it is different, but the same [i.e., equivalent to AdaSL]." Many of the deaf adults regretted that they did not know GSL better and blamed their lack of formal schooling.

The deaf adults valued bilingualism in AdaSL and GSL not only for themselves but also for the deaf schoolchildren. While they did not seem to have negative feelings about the fact that the children used GSL most of the time, they did criticize children who could not sign in AdaSL without a heavy GSL accent. (In contrast, deaf adults were seldom criticized by the children for not knowing GSL better.) Kofi Pare demonstrated how the schoolchildren should sign more forcefully and use a larger signing space, and expected that their AdaSL knowledge will "become hard" when the children grow older (as it did in the homecomers' language use). The schoolchildren themselves also valued the knowledge of AdaSL; not only did they see it as necessary for communicating with deaf adults and hearing people in Adamorobe, but as mentioned above, they also found it pleasant to use because of its expressivity.

What I noticed however, was some uncertainty among some of the schoolchildren about whether it really was possible to say all of the same things in AdaSL as in GSL (an uncertainty that could be caused by the very different spheres of primary usage: school versus village), whereas deaf adults did not seem to question this. Such doubts were countered by other deaf schoolchildren such as homecomer Owusua: one day I saw her having a lively conversation with a schoolgirl from Adamorobe, demonstrating that it was perfectly possible to translate a sentence from GSL into AdaSL, giving several examples.

AdaSL and GSL: Status and Prestige

There seemed to be a contrast between language ideologies with regard to AdaSL shared by deaf people in Adamorobe, and ideologies in the wider Ghanaian deaf community outside Adamorobe. Although people in Adamorobe saw AdaSL as a language equal to GSL, others perceived GSL as having higher status.

When I asked Akorful why he did not try to sign in AdaSL during the church services, he argued that the schoolchildren did not know AdaSL well enough to understand him and would forget GSL should he use AdaSL. When I countered both facts and suggested that he not use a sign language that only a minority could understand, a minority that attended the church services only a few times a year, he explained that it was difficult for him to learn to sign AdaSL fluently. However, I got the impression that there was another, deeper rooted reluctance too: he laughed when he saw people using AdaSL when he did not expect it (such as the schoolchildren) and sometimes disapproved of AdaSL lexicon (for example, the AdaSL sign for "DEFECATE"), reflecting the idea that deaf adults from Adamorobe cannot help it that they are illiterate and use AdaSL. This needs to be situated in a wider context.

Deaf people in Africa, as elsewhere, who are not in a shared signing community or a deaf school, often use gestures and home signs with people in their environment. Nyst mentioned that signers in West Africa tend to perceive ASL-based sign languages as superior to such local sign languages and gestures.[166] The movements and handshapes of AdaSL are reminiscent of movements and handshapes in gestures, and as explained in chapter 2, many conventional gestures are incorporated into AdaSL. This is much less the case with GSL.

The use of AdaSL not only was associated with gesturing and illiteracy, but also was associated with residence in a village. Deaf people in Ghana's

capital Accra typically reacted with horror and incomprehension when I explained that I resided in Adamorobe—"You stay in a *village*?"—and I saw a deaf teacher at a small primary school for the deaf tell his pupils that I stayed in an "illiterate village where they use illiterate signs instead of good signs." Hence deaf people from Accra were not necessarily impressed when I told them that many hearing people in Adamorobe know how to sign: in their eyes, these were not "good" or "real" signs, in contrast to GSL, and certainly not of the same status.

Nyst suggests that GSL had a higher status than AdaSL in Adamorobe too, although she emphasizes that she did not encounter negative judgments about AdaSL.[167] She argues that an example of the status of GSL is that deaf adults have adopted GSL-style name signs. The deaf people indeed insisted that I used their GSL-style name signs (which they had received at school or in the church) instead of their AdaSL name signs, although they typically used their AdaSL name signs among themselves. Most AdaSL names, which usually consist of two parts—the AdaSL sign for "deaf" and a characteristic of the person involved—are seen as insulting nicknames, and GSL names are seen as neutral and polite. GSL names are little more than a gender marker: as explained in the introduction, all but one of the women's day names start with an A, and all but one of the men's day names start with a K. Most GSL name signs are—inspired by ASL name signs and by the Akan day names—based on an initialized hand shape, usually K for a man and A for a woman.

Because of the association with respect, the GSL name signs were preferred over the AdaSL name signs, but I suggest that this conclusion should not be extended to the languages as wholes. It certainly was prestigious to be bilingual in AdaSL and GSL. However, prestige that comes with knowing more than one language should not be confused with the status of each language. When I asked the deaf adults which sign language they preferred to use, the answer was never "GSL" but either "AdaSL," or "both AdaSL and GSL." They never said (nor showed behavior that illustrated) that GSL had high status and AdaSL low status, but indicated instead that they are "SAME" (meaning "equal"), or that AdaSL is "higher" because it is "HARD."

Foreigners' interest in AdaSL may have had an influence on this ideology. Nyst and I stayed in/near Adamorobe for months and learned to use the language; in addition, day visitors had come to film deaf people using AdaSL. Kofi Pare explained, "If white people came and I used GSL to communicate with them, they didn't want that! They wanted AdaSL! That surprised me."

The schoolchildren's experience of AdaSL was contrasted with the earlier discussed ideologies with regard to "illiterate signs" in the wider Ghanaian deaf community, as these were also reflected on the Mampong school. According to Asare Kwabena (one of the homecomers), teachers and students at school regarded AdaSL as a low-status language. Hence, when a girl from school visited a Sunday church service in Adamorobe, he worried that she would tell the other pupils at school that the signs used in Adamorobe are "silly and illiterate." During my visits to Mampong, however, I found that the schoolchildren from Adamorobe used AdaSL with me without shame and seemingly even with pride that they (and I) knew the language, even though other children were staring and laughing. Some of them tried to copy AdaSL and to use some signs they had learned from the children from Adamorobe.

The deaf schoolgirls (who were in the majority) were more concerned that the visitor in Adamorobe would occupy herself with "deaf village" gossip, that is, spread gossip that Adamorobe is dirty and that that is the reason that so many deaf people live there. Adwoa Kumi explained, "When Yaa Ansabea and Akua Afaribea [the two youngest deaf girls from Adamorobe] went to school for the first time they said, 'Aaaah, so many deaf coming from there! So there are filthy houses in that village, that's why so many deaf come from there, so many deaf children!'" When we brought Kofi Afere to school to commence his schooling in the fall of 2009, a member of the residential care staff indeed complained about how it was possible that so many deaf children came from Adamorobe.

Deaf Children and Adults: Short Interactions and the Problem of Greeting

While deaf schoolchildren and deaf adults differed in their respective rates of fluency in AdaSL, GSL, and written English, these differences were typically not regarded as problematic in their relationships. There were other problems, however: during the holidays when the schoolchildren came to Adamorobe, I noticed significant intergenerational gaps.

During those holidays, the schoolchildren helped at their parents' farm(s) and around the house, especially the older ones. In their spare time, the four eldest schoolgirls aged fifteen to eighteen mainly interacted with each other and with Owusua and Toabea, who had recently left school and were of similar age, mostly setting up deaf spaces in the compounds where Owusua and her sister Agyiriwa lived and where Toabea

and her sister Adwoa Kumi lived. The three younger deaf girls (aged nine to thirteen) often played with each other. As for the boys, Kofi Afere (eight years old), who only started school at the end of my research, had many small hearing friends and Kofi Kumi (fourteen years old) liked to interact with Asare Kwabena (twenty years old).

I noticed that interactions between deaf schoolchildren and deaf adults were mostly short in duration. Homecomers Toabea, Owusua, and Asare Kwabena sometimes had a kind of bridging function between deaf schoolchildren and adults: deaf schoolchildren were more tempted to join a conversation with adults when one of them was participating. Often, the short deaf adults-with-schoolchildren interactions consisted of one-way advice, for example on avoiding sexual abuse, careful choice of preferably deaf partner, and care for themselves. Ama Korkor was one of those who was most active in giving such advice, saying that it was her duty "because we are DEAF SAME." Sometimes the advice was well received, but it was also often ignored and sometimes directly challenged.

Sometimes I found deaf schoolchildren watching deaf adults when they were talking to me about politics, witchcraft, the Ga, and so on. Deaf adults such as Kofi Pare criticized the children for only watching and not speaking up; the adults felt that the deaf schoolchildren were too shy, introverted, and nervous. Despite the traditional Ghanaian custom in which young people listen to their elders rather than speak themselves, the adults did not accept it if the deaf children were "just staring and peeping at what they said." Deaf adults thus were attempting to pass on to the children the deaf value of being EYE-STRONG and confident in talking to people. Deaf adults teaching the children to stand up against hearing people emphasized the same value. For example, once when we were in Madina, Ama Korkor was repeatedly telling Owusua that she should behave confidently, not hide her deafness, and ask people questions through gesturing rather than avoid contact.

The deaf adults were also not happy about the schoolchildren's failure or refusal to comply with traditional greeting practices: not greeting, or greeting in the wrong way or not often enough. Small Kofi Afere (who had not yet started schooling during most of my research) and homecomers Asare Kwabena, Owusua, and Toabea, in contrast, greeted correctly. Here are two examples of conflicts related to greeting between deaf adults and teenagers:

> I was sitting at the crossing with Afua Kaya, Kofi Pare, and Akua Fiankobea. Naomi had just visited Toabea who lives in the compound behind Kofi Pare's,

> and passed us with two young hearing women. When she saw us, she quickly made a small bow in the way schoolgirls do and wanted to continue her way. Afua Kaya became cross, stopped her and explained that she should greet all of us separately and ask: "Hello, how are you?" Naomi replied in a rebellious way that she had just greeted us all at the same time and left quickly. From the two hearing girls who were with Naomi, Afua Kaya did not expect a proper greeting. (Fieldnotes, 19 December 2008)

> Afua Kaya, Ama Korkor, and I were sitting at the broken pump stone with Ama's grandchild and Toabea's baby. Afua saw that Kofi Kumi, who was standing at the side of his nearby compound, was watching us. She waved to him to get his attention and said he was wrong just to stand there peeping at us and that he should come to us, greet us, and talk with us. Kofi Kumi ignored her, and watched some small children who were playing football. Afua Kaya then got up, bound Toabea's child at her back, and walked to Kofi Kumi. She started signing in a fierce way that he is deaf and we are deaf and that he should come and greet us, we are not hearing but DEAF SAME and thus he should come to greet and talk. In the end he complied with her expectation, joining us, but clearly feeling embarrassed and not knowing what to say, while adults spontaneously start telling what they did that day if they do not know a conversation topic. (Fieldnotes, 14 August 2009)

The importance of greeting correctly cannot be underestimated: much mediation is needed in conflicts that arise from the offence of incorrect greeting.[168] Van der Geest writes that young people in Ghana are more careless and easy-going regarding greetings.[169] In the case of Adamorobe's schoolchildren, it goes deeper than mere carelessness, however, and these deaf children's reluctance to "speak up" was more than mere shyness.

When I asked the deaf adults for the reason for the above issues, they sometimes mentioned the schoolchildren's lack of fluency in AdaSL (i.e., not being able to sign "HARD"). Some deaf men suggested that there might be a gender issue: most schoolchildren were girls who assumedly were afraid of deaf men in mixed or male deaf spaces. Kofi Pare explained, "They say they are afraid because we are men. So I tell them, 'Ah? Am I catching you to marry you? No? Well then, we are both deaf, so we are the same and friends, see!'" Thus, the deaf men stated that DEAF SAME should in these cases prevail on gender identity, especially since among the deaf adults mixed gender conversations were very normal. However, even in women-only deaf spaces, the interaction between deaf girls and women was not substantial, mainly short, and often initiated by women rather than girls. It appeared that the fact that schoolgirls were not always comfortable with the deaf adults, was caused by a generation conflict.

The Intergenerational Conflict

In Akan culture, an older person has right to ask a younger person to do something for him/her, and the younger person has to pay respect to the older person by greeting and by obeying instructions.[170] Usually, people mainly have these expectations toward their own (grand)children; children who are otherwise under their direct care; and to a lesser extent younger people who are closely related to them and/or live with them in the same compound. The intergenerational conflict between deaf adults and schoolchildren arose because deaf adults had these expectations toward deaf children (especially the girls aged fifteen to eighteen) whether they were related or not, and the deaf schoolgirls did not readily comply with these expectations.

It upset the deaf adults (mainly those who were more actively setting up deaf spaces) that these deaf children did not bring them water from the pump, nor helped them with washing clothes, although they usually agreed to deliver messages to others in the village. In some cases the adults seemed to expect that the schoolchildren would do these things for free, other times it was said that they would receive some pocket money in return (a promise that was, according to the children, not always fulfilled). The deaf girls told me it was not the case that they never brought water to these deaf adults, but that they did not do it as often as was wanted.

Deaf adults typically uttered their expectations and frustrations toward the deaf children and teenagers immediately upon meeting them. The most common reproaches were: "Hey, you don't give me water, and you don't come to greet me?!" "You don't wash clothes for me?!" "You are so HEAD-HARD!" The girls explained that they were afraid to be snarled at and therefore tended to avoid (involvement in) deaf spaces. Thus, it was a vicious circle. I also noticed that adults sometimes just ignored the children, looked uninterested, and signed with their backs to them. The deaf adults also had difficulties accepting me interacting a lot with the children and became suspicious, thinking that I was giving the children money and food.

I wondered where the deaf adults' strong expectations of and deep frustrations toward the deaf children and teenagers came from. I got the impression that these expectations at least partially stemmed from problems caused by the marriage prohibition. Most deaf men had no children, and several deaf women were divorced and had no young (grand)children. For example, in the case of an unmarried older deaf man, related children from

his compound brought him water, but his family was fed up with caring for him, saying that he should marry and get children and grandchildren of his own. Based on the DEAF SAME philosophy, deaf women sometimes brought him water, and he also expected this from the deaf schoolchildren when they were back for their holidays.

A few deaf men had done favors for the schoolchildren (again, because of being DEAF SAME) and expected something in return. Van der Geest wrote about the relationship between the old and young in an Akan town in the Eastern region and concluded: "The quality of relationships between young and old depends on what the older generation long ago invested in the younger. Life is a bank account; you receive what you put into it."[171] In fact Van der Geest wrote about intra-familial relationships, but these words apply to deaf sociality in Adamorobe.

Kofi Pare told me how he, Kwasi Boahene, and the late Kofi Adin (who had two deaf children himself) brought the deaf children to school at the end of holidays (on Akorful's request—see next chapter): first walking uphill to Aburi with them and then taking a *trotro* to Mampong. Kofi Pare told me how the schoolchildren were reluctant to go, and because he was persistent about their schooling, they were "well educated," in contrast to himself. He felt that the schoolchildren were ungrateful and disrespectful toward him because they did not regularly bring him water in return. His reaction included bitter feelings and jealousy, also related to schooling:

> Adwoa Kumi and Naomi and the others are all doing so well now: they go to school, see! (*fierce*) While Ama Korkor, Afua Kaya etc. all stayed here (*regret*). (…) It all looks so good for them. But I'm just sitting here, silent and passive (*frustration*). If someone hands me a paper I can't read it, they say I'm silly, that I must be ashamed.(…) I can't write, no deaf adult here can write. Naomi, Toabea, Kofi Kumi, Asare are all doing good: they could go to school. Yes, school is good (*looks away now*). (Kofi Pare, Interview, 27 August 2009)

The schoolchildren typically imagined a future for themselves outside the village (for example, in Accra): marrying a deaf schoolmate, doing a vocational job such as being a seamstress, a hairdresser, or having a store, and growing fat because of not having a farming job and having plenty of food. On one occasion, when I asked Adwoa Kumi why she thought that the deaf adults were not inclined to interact in a nice way with them, she simply replied, "Well, they haven't been to school." She referred to the fact that the adults were deeply frustrated because they largely missed out on

education, and that it frustrated them to interact with the children who were, on top of this, seen as impolite, unhelpful, and ungrateful.

As explained earlier in this chapter, the deaf adults' frustrations that came with being unschooled were manifold. They were illiterate, they did not know GSL well, they did not have the prospect of betterment in the future. They felt confronted by their limits, particularly in the deaf church, and in their interactions with the deaf children. They felt stuck to farming and stuck to staying in Adamorobe, and thought they would have had a better life if they had completed their primary and secondary education. They also related being unschooled farmers to being poor and in need of charity and resources. I explore deaf-focused charity and the organization of development projects in the following chapter.

8 Charitable Aid, Development Projects, and Group Leadership

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Foster was the first to secure donations for the deaf people in Adamorobe. After Foster, several churches, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and wealthy individuals (some of them foreign, some of them Ghanaian), donated items like corn, wheat, rice, oil, and secondhand clothes to the deaf people. A church called Kristo Asafo (Christ Reformed Church) had as its slogan "In aid of the needy of the society" and regularly donated subsistence products to schools for children with disabilities, children's homes, prisons, disability organizations (including the Ghana Association of the Deaf), and also to Adamorobe. Another church from Accra came "to help the people in Adamorobe" but decided to concentrate on the deaf people. Yet other non-Ghanaian people came to visit the village because they were acquaintances of Chief Nana Osei Boakye who lived part time in America, learned that there were many deaf people in Adamorobe, and decided to support them. I also learned about a man from America who married a woman from Adamorobe and requested that people in America join him "to help the deaf."

Traditionally, people who visited Adamorobe had to meet the chief first, but it also happened that visitors with donations were guests received by Akorful in the deaf church group on Sundays. Most of the benefactors came to Adamorobe to bring the items; sometimes, selected deaf people traveled to Accra or Kumasi, accompanied by Samuel or Akorful, to collect donations.

Foster's donations came biweekly, for years, and it was said that none of the later donations matched them neither in frequency nor amount. It was often said that "Foster was the *first*": not only in time, but also in the hierarchy of generosity. Foster's sudden death in 1987 was often depicted as the end of a golden era in which the deaf people had never been hungry, although it appeared that his donations had actually stopped more than ten years before his death. The late Agnes Bomo explained how a white man had come to announce the cessation of Foster's donations and

explained the principle of "feed yourself": "Everybody should work hard themselves to get food to eat."

Not only did the deaf people no longer benefit from Foster's donations, they also received fewer donations from churches, NGOs, and individuals than in the past. It was believed that a number of donations that Chief Nana Osei Boakye received after "announcing in America that there are lots of deaf people in her village" were not passed on to the village. I assume that the decrease in donations might (also) be a consequence of the fact that international discourses about charity have gradually shifted from a focus on aid to a focus on development cooperation and microfinancing. Aid flows to Africa were at their peak in 1970 and 1998.[172]

Since 2007, the American organization Signs of Hope International has been sending volunteers to schools for the deaf in Ghana and has tried to gather sponsorship money for the education of Adamorobe's deaf children. They uploaded video to the home page of their website (http://www.signsofhopeinternational.org) that shows Adamorobe as a poor village where the deaf people do not get any opportunity to go to school. In fact, almost all the deaf children were in school at the time the film was recorded. The film focuses on the poorest deaf family of the village, in which one deaf child was not receiving schooling yet. In some scenes, deaf people's signing hands are cut off from view and the camera zooms in on their faces, implying that their way of communication consisted merely of facial expressions. Deaf villagers thus appear to have no means of communication in their daily life, thus lacking a language—which is manifestly untrue.

For their film, Signs of Hope chose not to subtitle deaf people's signing, but to provide the lyrics of the song playing in the background: a melancholy song about "people sitting in the darkness" and "changing the world for them." They show happy school children in contrast to sad villagers. This "shock-effect appeal," demonstrating deep suffering, disregards the social and historical context of Adamorobe. While there certainly were sad moments, feelings of frustration, and bitterness in Adamorobe, the sadness in the film was performed and edited to achieve a particular purpose, receiving sponsorship. The movie reinforces paternalistic binaries such as donor/recipient and generous/needy, misrepresents life in the village, and spreads misinformation. Films like this one "distribute images not only of impaired bodies in need, but also of a crippled, ignorant Africa and its benevolent knowledgeable Northern rescuers."[173]

The Impact of Donations on Church Attendance and Discourses of Poverty

Pastors and their services were foremostly perceived as a direct or indirect source of donations whose value was concretely assessed by the deaf Adamorobeans they intended to enroll in their services. Akorful often complained that church attendance was very low when I was not in the village. The deaf people in turn complained: "Why go to church? Does Akorful give money? No? Well! If you pray, you should get money," "We have to sing and pray and we get nothing."

Akorful's church services were much better attended when I was in Adamorobe: from an average of a few people per service to an average of twenty—because the deaf people thought they otherwise would not receive my gifts of reciprocity. A number of deaf people expressed that "The church is not fun, but if you're here we go, because you do distributions." Gifts requested by the deaf people from Adamorobe and their leaders in return for permission to conduct my research were of the kind they were used to from previous visitors and researchers, such as clothes, rice, or a big piece of laundry soap. During my nine months of fieldwork I provided every deaf person with a gift every two or three weeks, and a packet of several gifts at the end of each of the two research periods. The deaf people were convinced of the connection between my distributions and their church attendance, despite my countless explanations that these were unrelated to each other, and despite the fact that I did not distribute in the church nor on Sundays at all.

As explained in chapter 7, this pattern was already firmly established: the Christian church and the promise of resources have always been related to each other for deaf people in Adamorobe. As a result, Akorful complained: "If you give them something, they will come. But they won't come only to be taught about God." He said that it was typical that if white people were expected, most deaf people would go to wash themselves hurriedly, put on their best clothes, and attend en masse. Just like his predecessors such as Foster, Akorful actually reinforced the connection, regularly repeating that deaf people who did not attend church did not deserve my (or other people's) distributions. He had occasionally even used the promise of donations to lure people to the church. For example, Kwasi Boahene narrated:

> Akorful once told me to fool the deaf people: I had to announce that there was lots of rice and white people, clothes, biscuits, and so on, in the church. So I cheated, I fooled them. Many deaf people came, they all came and when they

> saw I fooled them they put on a face and were angry with me. Akorful tried to calm them. [Why did you fool them?] Because deaf people all refuse to go to church! So I told them: "Lots of rice! Beautiful white people!" and then they go to church. (Kwasi Boahene, Fieldnotes, 30 November 2008)

Receiving donations was thus connected with the space of the church. In contrast, it was inversely associated with the space of the farm: deaf people associated receiving large donations with *not* having to go to the farm. Some deaf people told me that after a big donation they would not go to their land for a number of days, but remain in the village to chat with each other and to consume and celebrate the donation. When they consumed the donation or did not receive donations (anymore), they felt obliged to go to the farm. For example, in a conversation, Kwame Osae commented: "Foster is dead, he does not come anymore . . . so now I have to go to the farm again and again and again." This does not mean that deaf people did not work their land in the time of Foster's visits, though. The connection between lack of donations and working the land was the prevailing discourse. They associated their work on the farm not only with being strong, but also with being poor, needy, and thin from all the hard work.

Throughout the years, deaf people had learned to actively employ discourses of neediness in order to gain access to donations. They never used the argument "I am deaf" to express their entitlement to support, but instead used the fact that they were largely uneducated and therefore poor farmers. The history of deaf education in Adamorobe (chapter 7) has demonstrated that deaf people's own actions, such as sneaking away from the vocational training in Accra and not attending Samuel's literacy lessons, were also among the elements that led to the "failure" of the several attempts to provide them with formal or vocational education. However in the context of aid, the deaf people described the failure of their education as a harm done to them; they did not describe themselves as active agents.

While they acknowledged the value of self-sufficiency and hard work (emphasizing how being hardworking farmers was a source of pride), without donations a number of deaf people felt disappointed and abandoned, and even sometimes blamed white people or the church for their current poverty. Kwame Osae regularly complained that "In the past, white people came here so often and they distributed money and food and clothes and now that's all over. White people haven't been coming for such a long time now." Compared with Foster's generosity, my gifts of

reciprocity were apparently meager. When Kwame Osae told me his Foster stories, he often lashed out: "And you, do you do that? Think about it, now that you know about him!" These deaf people thus did not tend to regard donations as merely a nice extra but as substantial support they were entitled to. In this regard, deaf people often recalled how those who lived on cocoa farms felt disappointed to miss donations. During my research, a deaf woman from Adamorobe who lived on a cocoa farm came to Adamorobe for a funeral and did not want to leave until I gave her rice. While for me the rice was a gift of reciprocity for the deaf people who resided in Adamorobe and participated in my research, for her, the gift was her right.

The Corn Mill Project

In addition to providing charitable donations, visitors to Adamorobe and pastors have also organized small (development) projects. For example, a number of years before my research, an American man bought seven sheep and goats for the deaf people to breed, and to make money by selling goats. The animals were apparently not well cared for: some of them were stolen, some of the animals became ill and died, and their meat was sold or eaten. Nyst, the linguist who researched AdaSL, organized a small project to teach deaf people to make soap, to sell in Adamorobe, but the effort was unsuccessful. Deaf people seemed unenthusiastic about making soap, which they experienced as a tiring process. Ama Korkor narrated: "I decided to stop with it. I like to go to the farm." In this context, the farm was presented as a better alternative than doing other physical labor. Deaf people often contrasted such activities with farming, although it was common in Adamorobe to combine farming and a trade.

Akorful co-organized a larger project that aimed to provide the deaf people with a self-contained financial buffer and safety net. The Wisconsin Lutheran Church Mission in America financed a piece of land for the deaf people that was called the "deaf land" (see map 2). The church supplied materials for building a corn mill, for the deaf people themselves to build (see figures 8.1 and 8.2). The long term aim was to also place a deaf owned church on the "deaf land," because the deaf church services currently take place in a classroom of the Anglican school.

The aim of the corn mill project was to attract customers to bring corn from their farms to be processed into flour, to be able to prepare *banku* and *kenkey* with it. The profits would be used for the expensive hospital costs of severely ill deaf people and financial support in case a deaf person

Figure 8.1. The building in which the corn mill is located.

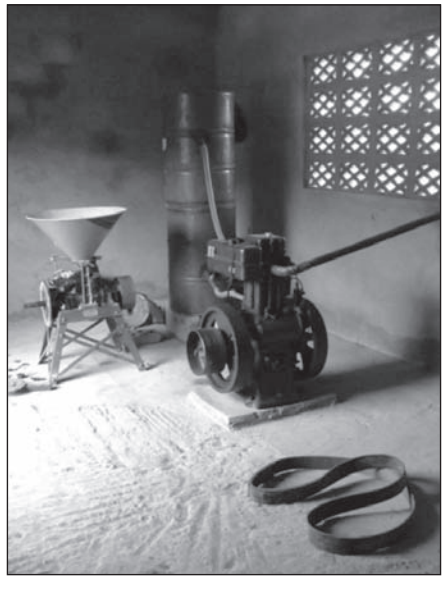

Figure 8.2. The deaf people's corn mill.

encountered serious financial distress, to pay for the schooling of deaf children, and to finance Akorful's wages and weekly transport to Adamorobe.

The idea was thus to establish a deaf support network, in contrast with the tradition in which people who are needy or short of cash are supported

by their lineage: the traditional social security system in Ghana is that people raise funds among their relatives if they need money for medical treatments.[174] Sometimes financial or familial problems prevent such support, and there are local mutual insurance networks in the Akwapim area (where Adamorobe is located) that might provide a solution in such cases.[175] Akorful had unsuccesfully tried to set up such a network among the deaf people, devising a system with regular payments; the corn mill project was another such attempt. Akorful narrated:

> Rev. Reinke [of the Wisconsin Lutheran Mission] came here, he asked if there were any problems. Kofi Pare and Kwasi Boahene said they wanted rice. Well, you just can't say that. Reinke doesn't know AdaSL so I translated: They want a piece of land and a corn mill.

So while deaf people had been inclined to ask for resources they were used to receiving in the past, Akorful tried to push them in a more "productive" direction, to be active in a group project that would make them independent from outside funding. Today, NGOs and other agencies in Ghana see such group projects as a route to development. These, in the eyes of donors, are in practical terms relatively simple to finance and organize. However, such collective projects in Ghana often ignore the contextual and cultural specifics of the locations where they are organized, and as a result, local people are not unanimously enthusiastic and harbor concerns about quarrels.[176]

The group-based corn mill project developed for the deaf people in Adamorobe did not entirely suit the local dynamics. In 2006, everything had been established, but in 2008, when I arrived, I was told that the mill had not been used for a year or so. Some deaf people expected that Rev. Reinke would come from America to repair a broken grinding disk. When the disk was finally repaired with the church offerings from the deaf people themselves and an addition of my own, they said they would start again after Christmas 2008. However, when the mill was not used again throughout the whole of 2009, I realized that the problem was deeper rooted: there was reluctance to work the corn mill at all.

The corn mill was located outside of the village center, and was therefore less attractive for customers, because there were at least two or three other corn mills in the center of Adamorobe, and this one was located uphill. The corn mill had been initially planned for the center of Adamorobe, but there was a mistake in the paperwork regarding that location; apparently

the land had already been sold to someone else. In the future, the mill could become more profitable, as I saw more houses being built in the area where it was located. (There had been some discussion of moving the mill to the center of Adamorobe, but nothing happened.)

There seemed to have been some management conflicts too, due to a lack of clarity about project leadership. Another problem was inequality in the division of work: Kofi Pare and Kwasi Boahene did most of the work although they did not get paid for it and could not tend their farms during the hours they spent at the corn mill. Because the project did not make enough to achieve its financial aims, funding for the children's schooling was endangered, as the Lutheran church had ceased to sponsor them in the hopes that the corn mill would enable the deaf people to finance the schooling themselves. In 2007, the dependency shifted to another sponsor, the previously mentioned Signs of Hope International.

Although several deaf people obviously felt frustrated by the problems with the project, they did not show initiative to solve them, and they gave the impression that they did not feel responsible for it. For example, when work had to be done (such as weeding the piece of land or moving spare bricks from somewhere in the village to the "deaf land") they refused to do it, arguing, for example, that "if we do that work, we don't get no food for it in return!" One woman stated: "I already go to the farm every day, if I also have to work on my day off then I will become ill, and is Akorful going to pay for the hospital?"

Most importantly, the rationale of the corn mill project was not supported: the deaf people from Adamorobe did not want to work for each other's health costs or for the deaf children's schooling (arguing "they are not my children"), regarding such things as a family responsibility, not a deaf responsibility. Rather than a collective project, many deaf people expressed that they wanted individual employment or microbusinesses, just like hearing people. I received several requests from a number of deaf people and their pastor to support the deaf people in Adamorobe in setting up such individual businesses, which are described in the next section.

Microbusinesses and Their Influence on My Research

Prior to my arrival in Adamorobe, a Finnish woman had applied to the Finnish Lutheran mission to finance vocational training (such as tailoring and hairdressing) and a few individual business projects for the deaf people in Adamorobe. This application failed, and Akorful and a number of deaf

people asked me to take it on. More specifically, I was asked to invest in microbusinesses for the deaf adults. Many people in Ghana go to the city to buy bulk supplies of products (such as soap, okra, tin tomatoes, salt, fish, etc.) and return home to sell them by the piece for profit in a stall or small shop, or by hawking with a dish on their heads. Also, women prepare Ghanaian dishes such as *jollof* (a rice dish), *kenkey,* and *banku* to sell per plate. Men invest in machines such as grinding machines or weedicide sprayers to provide services. But only two or three deaf people in Adamorobe were maintaining such businesses.

In the light of the value of reciprocity (indeed more far-reaching than first agreed) and because I subscribed to the philosophy of the projects, I promised to do my best to find a budget. I succeeded in obtaining funding for these projects in Belgium and the UK. A Ghanaian elderly woman who was an NGO expert in microfinance and revolving loan projects with experience throughout Ghana, came to Adamorobe to explain the philosophy behind the projects and to advise the deaf people on their choice of businesses. After the expert's visit, I went to Accra several times to get her advice.

This project was not a microfinance project per se, as the equipment was a gift rather than bought with the help of a revolving loan. Most deaf people did not accept the idea of paying off a loan even though the logic of "revolving loans" meant that the money would flow back to them through future investments or during crises. Perhaps the reluctance to pay was due to the easier access to money and other resources they had enjoyed through charity in the past.

I supported the start of almost twenty-five businesses: services such as weedicide spraying, tomato blending, and cutlass grinding; a breeding program for goats; selling cutlasses, kerosene, frozen chicken, smoked fish, and soap; and selling prepared dishes such as chicken soup, African doughnuts, *kenkey,* and "red red." Joseph Okyere helped with the practical side of the projects: we drove to Madina, Accra, and Nsawam with the deaf people in small groups to purchase what they needed.

When the projects were started up, they initially thrived, and almost all the deaf people involved seemed enthusiastic, but the businesses proved difficult to continue. After a few weeks, some people became indolent, putting off the visits to buy supplies in Madina, although deaf people put pressure on each other and told each other off if their motivation for their business appeared to be waning. Some of them started to request more, such as a table to sell their products on, a shed for the goats, or a loan

if they had spent too much of their profits. Also, some of them sold too many items on credit, which was a known problem in the village, also for hearing sellers.

When I left, Akorful agreed to do the follow-up and Joseph Okyere would support them practically if needed. For the first few months after my research I got positive SMS messages from Akorful and Okyere that a number of the deaf people were continuing their work, but half a year later I was told that most of the deaf people had discontinued their businesses for various reasons. When I visited Adamorobe again in 2012, none of them had continued, and they had a number of different explanations, going from "we are just taking a break" to "this hearing person blocked our business." When explaining the failure of *other* people's projects, though, deaf people often said, "He/she has eaten from his money." This is a known problem for microfinance projects, too: rather than investing in the business (a machine, a new goat, etc.), the recipient of the funds buys a TV or the money goes to general consumption.[177]

I also think there might be a connection with the ingrained pattern of getting donations and thus being accustomed to an easier access to resources. I surmised that this pattern served as an additional difficulty in maintaining or succeeding with these business projects. In this respect, Maathai questioned "how much good aid does versus how much damage it may do to the capacity of the African peoples to engineer their own solutions to their many problems."[178]

Maathai also argued that "donors' money can further corrode responsibility. … An attitude exists that one doesn't have to be as responsible with, or accountable for, the use of funds or materials that have originated outside the country from a donor agency or private philanthropist."[179] Maathai argued that it is not necessary for people to have to pay for something to care for it: individuals and communities need to understand and recognize the value of items offered for free. Perhaps it was the case that in the light of easy access to donations in the past, deaf people in Adamorobe did not really think that the projects had value for them. Maathai further states that people "completely misunderstand or subvert the donors' intention in providing the money in the first place."[180] For illustration purposes I provide a few examples below.

When the above-mentioned Finnish woman learned that a few second-hand sewing machines would be shipped from Finland, she wanted to

lend these to young deaf people in Adamorobe who wanted to sew to make a living (they would be taught by a private teacher in Adamorobe), and planned to donate the remaining machines to other deaf vocational training programs in Ghana. We agreed that I would support the non-sewers to set up a business project. This decision caused an enormous and long-lasting commotion among most deaf people; they thought the Finnish woman had betrayed them and that I was associated with her, having bad intentions toward them.

First, they were angry that they did not get the other things that they had asked for from the Finnish woman, and second, they all wanted a sewing machine *and* a business project. They argued that the Finnish woman and I were separate benefactors, so they were entitled to get something from both of us, rather than accepting our common endeavor to provide the deaf people with a means to make some extra money. Most of them planned to give the sewing machine to family members, to have some fun with it in their free time, or they said they would work with it while it was clear that they were not really planning on doing so.

When I returned to Adamorobe for the second fieldwork period I announced that I had gathered money to spend it on education for two deaf children, (who were just about to start or resume schooling and did not have a sponsor yet), one year of medical insurance for deaf people, and the aforementioned businesses. There was significant dissatisfaction about the fact that I was not planning to distribute (a part of) "their money" to them in cash, to "eat from it." I explained that the sponsors never would have given the money if it was just for distributing, because the sponsors had followed the rationale that "if you give someone money for food, tomorrow he's hungry again, but if you financially support him with setting up an own business he can provide for himself." Their reply was typically, "but we are hungry NOW," and they demanded for me to give in to them, convinced that the suitcase I had brought (for my clothes) was a box full of money. When the businesses were started up, I was told that many deaf people were "keeping up appearances" when I was still around and would just "eat from their money [i.e., the profits] and go back to the farm" after my departure.

There was thus a disconnect between expectations in the village, which were based on previous experiences, and the intentions of the donors and sponsors, who were inspired by the "help yourself to get out of poverty" principle. Looking back, I still feel ambivalent about the business projects.

I did not regard these projects as "helping the needy deaf from Adamorobe" but rather as a meaningful way of giving back for the data that I was collecting, data that I would use to advance my personal career (i.e., getting a PhD). But of course, in their eyes it *was* "helping the deaf." On the other hand, frustration would probably have lingered and escalated if I had ignored the requests for donations and support, which increased exponentially with the length of my stay there and became more insistent.

Such a situation can lead to severe ethical and methodological problems, such as to how to be sincere, and how to conduct research among people who mistrust and are suspicious of your intentions.[181] I was told that as the months of research went by, people increasingly insulted me behind my back for not giving them more than I already did, such as wanting "a lot of money," and "a TV." I learned that the very same people who were the most annoyed with me for "being greedy," were concealing or quickly spending money they received from land sales and cassava harvests. Several deaf people started to become unwilling to have conversations with me that would provide me with data, configuring the relationship only as an exchange, expecting support in return for cooperation in my research. They were strategically using our shared deafness to claim (financial) commitment from my side: "You are deaf, deaf help each other." "DEAF SAME, you can stay and you give us things. But others …"

Then, when I started the business projects and arranged for the medical insurance, a number of the deaf people's behavior changed; they became more open and more friendly again, almost like in the first research period when their cordiality and hospitality was at its highest. Yet, they found it difficult to digest that I had gathered "a lot of money" but did not want to give it directly to them, as explained above.

These frustrations were latent, not always visible in everyday interactions (i.e., they never refused to talk to me outright) but they were there, simmering, and surfacing now and then. On the other hand, we had many nice moments, real pleasure and good laughs, which could not be feigned. In the last two weeks of my stay, many of the deaf people repeated over and over again that it was a shame that I was leaving, and my biggest critic told me that he had actually appreciated my sincerity and consistency during my stay in Adamorobe. Hence, the relationship between me and deaf people from Adamorobe was characterized by ambiguity, likely partially caused by our differences in access to financial capital and influenced by expectations arising from the history of donations in Adamorobe.

Effects on Deaf–Hearing Relationships

Aid and development projects had influence on deaf–hearing relationships within Adamorobe. While people in Adamorobe emphasized that deaf and hearing people do the same things and lead the same lives, it was the deaf (and not the hearing) people who were regarded as being entitled to donations and development projects and got the attention of benefactors.

For example, when Foster's donations to Adamorobe happened fifty years ago, being an illiterate farmer was standard for both deaf and hearing people and their rates of poverty were similar. Kwame Osae recalled that hearing people begged to Foster and said: "I don't have clothes, I'm a farmer, please give me something." Hearing people who lived with deaf relatives typically also benefited from donations, such as receiving a piece of soap or a plate of rice, but the majority of hearing people in Adamorobe did not benefit. According to Kwame Osae, some hearing people therefore acted as if they were deaf, during Foster's donations. There were hearing people who were as poor as the deaf (at all points in history); yet it was the deaf people who got support. Joseph Okyere gave the example of when massive bushfires struck in Ghana in 1983 and a very high number of people lost a lot. The fires did not discriminate between deaf and hearing people, but in the aftermath of the fires, charity agencies and NGOs did.

Joseph Okyere observes that this points up a difference between deaf and hearing people:

> The question is why not raise funds for all the Adamorobe people but Adamorobe deaf? And if only deaf, why? This shows the difference between deaf and hearing people. So in my own opinion it is the people who help the deaf, separate the deaf from hearing.(…) In the past we thought we are all the same range, lead the same life and when everybody comes from overseas to Adamorobe, they think of the deaf. (Joseph Okyere, 4 August 2009)

Of course, educators and pastors also made the distinction between deaf and hearing people by "singling out the deaf," something that had not happened in Adamorobe in the past with regard to traditional religion and traditional (oral) education. However, going to school and attending church were not deaf-specific. Donations or development projects aimed at "the needy in society" are different in that respect. Deaf people themselves described the fact that the hearing people got nothing as a kind of justice, a victory, just like the chief's death, the loss of their teacher's leg, or the fact that the police do not arrest them.

The consequence of distinguishing between hearing people and "needy" deaf people was a disruption to deaf–hearing relationships, in three ways. First, according to many deaf people, there was a lot of jealousy, which led them to practice secrecy about donations where possible. When I distributed gifts to the deaf, it was always in my room and deaf people hid the items under their clothes or in bags, to keep hearing people from seeing them on the paths of Adamorobe.

Jealousy or suspicion of jealousy provoked witchcraft accusations: when Akosua Obutwe got a deep cut in her wrist during an accident with her cutlass, she claimed that it was a witch who let it happen, because her deaf daughter gets sponsorship from Americans (Signs of Hope International) to go to school. Similarly, when the grinding disk of the corn mill did not work well, the belief was that an Adamorobean witch was the cause. The late Agnes Bomo, on the other hand, played down the amount of jealousy, stating that the hearing people were generally not envious of donations. Personally, I did not experience open envy, only playful or challenging questions directed toward me: hearing people also wanted business projects (even if they already had jobs) and wanted to know why I only supported the deaf.

Second, some hearing interviewees thought that the fact that only deaf people were supported by benefactors had negatively impacted on the quality and frequency of contact between deaf and hearing people. One of them added that the deaf people were greedy with their donations. Joseph Okyere situated this phenomenon in the broader societal tendency of increased individualism (as discussed at the end of chapter 3), saying that the increased "selfishness," to use his word, was true for both deaf and hearing people: "I can see that in this modern world people fight for their own and this has created that vacuum as if deaf and hearing are not close."

Third, traditionally, people who are needy or short of cash are supported by their lineage. In the case of the deaf people, the responsibility partially shifted to external benefactors and to the church. When a deaf person needed an expensive hospital visit, the family of the person was expected to support him/her financially if needed. I learned that financial support from the family did not always suffice, but Akorful had a particularly low amount of trust in the hearing relatives of ill deaf people that they would pay for their health costs. Hence, when I was in the field, Akorful tried to pass on (a part of) this financial responsibility to me. When visiting chronically or severely ill deaf people after church services, he often requested

that I support the concerned person financially. He usually made these requests directly and in public, making it very difficult for me to say no. Tensions arose among the family, Akorful, me as the white visitor, and some deaf people. For example, in the midst of September 2009, Okoto fell ill and his health deteriorated rapidly.

> After church, Akorful looked in on Okoto, to pray for him along with some churchgoers. Okoto was still in a very bad way, had visibly lost weight, was laying in a sweat on his mat, and could hardly move. Akorful started to ask him if he had been to the hospital, who had been responsible for him, etc. He was getting enraged, "why Okoto had not had enough help" because that's how he saw it: his hearing family had not been helping him enough. Akua Fiankobea suggested that I would help him, because she had seen Akorful making the same suggestion before when other deaf people were ill. Akorful replied that I could share the costs with Okoto's hearing family and then a discussion started about how much I should give. First they said I should decide about the amount myself but then Akorful suggested fifty cedis, which wasn't just sharing the costs anymore, but rather the total sum required. The deaf people who were there thought this was too much money. Several of them said that Okoto's hearing family did have money but were too mean to spend it. I watched Akua Fiankobea saying to Akorful that he needed to help Okoto, but Akorful replied that he didn't have any money. Then Akorful said to the deaf people that they all needed to share the costs. They went very silent for a moment; I saw them thinking "What the heck?" Then all hell broke loose: the deaf were very angry that Akorful had the nerve to suggest this. They argued that they don't have any money, that Okoto has asked for his illness himself, that Okoto is not family. They blamed Okoto for the situation he was in: carrying heavy weights, not going to church, working too much, working not enough, drinking too much, not going to the farm, he stole something (and someone did a juju to punish him). Akorful replied that when some deaf people in Accra were severely burned because of a gas explosion, many members of the deaf community contributed to help them, so why couldn't they do that too? (Fieldnotes, 4 October 2009)

Thus, while the deaf went to greet each other when they were ill, and helped to care for ill deaf people (chapter 4), they typically did not help each other financially; they did not apply the DEAF SAME philosophy in the context of financial responsibility. They also were ambivalent about my role: they typically said that they disagreed with Akorful's requests and pointed at the lineage's responsibility. However, they would be happy to receive money themselves. Hence, I got the impression that it was not merely a matter of principle, but that there also was an element of jealousy involved.

Akorful's intervention in Okoto's situation created (or made public) an expectation, and after experiencing heavy social pressure I provided financial support. Afterwards I got additional requests from Okoto's family (which I did not honor), for example, to pay for his medicines. When Okoto unfortunately died a few days later, his family asked me to pay for his coffin or at least to finance a large part of it. It is customary that funeral guests give contributions to the deceased person's family at the funeral, but financing the coffin is traditionally the lineage's responsibility.[182] Thus, once the expectation that I would give financial aid was created, further requests arrived.

Group Leadership and the Role of Deaf Sociality

In the previous sections I described how Akorful tried to set up a mechanism for deaf people from Adamorobe to support themselves, culminating in the corn mill project. In the frame of these attempts to set up a deaf support network, he tried to establish central leadership for the deaf in Adamorobe. He tried to pursue certain ideas about the role of these (hearing and deaf) leaders, about the gender of these leaders, and about the future of deaf leadership in Adamorobe.

One of his strategies was to add responsibilities to the ones that the late Agnes Bomo already had. Traditionally, Agnes Bomo interpreted when the deaf people were called by the chief and when there were visitors. Together with Samuel, she had been the leader and gatekeeper of the deaf people during situations in which they were grouped or assembled, such as when visitors came to meet the deaf people. Samuel's role gradually decreased after his move to the bush. Akorful gave Agnes certain extra tasks: helping him to narrate Bible stories during church services, helping to distribute donations, and acting as a kind of social worker for the deaf people.

Akorful also expected Agnes to be a leader in the corn mill project and to support him with organizing the deaf children's schooling, such as accompanying him to the school and going to the market to buy what the children needed for school. Furthermore, Akorful thought that Agnes Bomo, rather than a trusted hearing signing relative (as was traditionally the case in Adamorobe), should accompany deaf people to the hospital. He thus insisted that Agnes should be used as an interpreter. In return for all her extra tasks, Agnes received a share in donations, and the deaf people were expected to regularly bring her water from the pump, or farm products (but they often did not). Neither the deaf people nor Agnes easily accepted

or recognized all extra responsibilities Akorful imposed on her, especially regarding the interpreting. The variety of roles that Akorful granted Agnes, and the resistance from both Agnes and deaf people, is another example of Akorful's thinking contrasting with some customs and traditions in this village. Sometimes deaf people felt that Agnes got too much power, got too much to say in their affairs, and other times they turned to her in case of deaf-related or family-related conflicts or problems. Their relationship with Agnes was thus ambivalent.

Akorful often told me that he wanted to stop preaching in Adamorobe one day, and to give the leadership of the church group over to deaf people from Adamorobe. His ultimate aim was to empower the deaf people from Adamorobe to that extent that he would "not be needed anymore." As for the future, Akorful believed very much in the young, school generation, hoping that in the long term, one or more of the schoolchildren could take the leader of the church group.

Thinking of the more immediate future, Akorful tried to train Kofi Pare and Kwasi Boahene, who had learned GSL from Samuel Adjei, to take leadership positions in the church group and in the village. Kofi Pare was known as a sincere and righteous person with authority and strong opinions, as someone who knows a lot about Adamorobe's deaf history and was good in sharing his knowledge in a clear and coherent way (hence he features in so many of the quotes in this book). Akorful asked both men (but mainly Kofi Pare) not only to interpret occassionaly in church, but similar to his requests of Agnes, he gave them certain responsibilities out of the church. An example was bringing the deaf children to school in the first years of their schooling (see chapter 7), because Akorful thought their parents would not take this responsibility. These two men also had to share the responsibility for the corn mill project with Agnes Bomo, which led to conflicts about the safeguarding of the profits and a lack of clarity about management. In line with this, Akorful expected them to follow up certain aspects of the microbusiness projects organized during my research. I noticed that Kofi Pare and Kwasi Boahene were reluctant to take on too many leadership tasks and also got the impression that deaf people in Adamorobe were not interested nor inclined to appoint or approach one of them as a leader, even though Kofi Pare's opinion was often valued and influential.

It was no accident that Akorful's "trained leaders" were male. He said he did not want to give Agnes the leadership after he left, not only because he wanted the deaf people to be responsible for themselves, but also because she was a woman. Akorful's male-oriented attitude was also reflected in his

focus on the men during his services. According to him, the deaf women cannot remember stories, cannot explain things to a group, always reply to questions wrongly, cannot translate, and only can sign songs well. In discussions about the deaf people's microbusiness projects, Akorful only came with suggestions for the men and when the projects were announced, the women were cautioned separately that they should be serious about the project and not "play," although I noticed that the women seemed just as serious as the men and in many cases more so. (Akorful's attitude toward deaf schoolgirls was very different though, and much more favorable.)

In everyday life in Adamorobe, however, the gender difference was less evident. When observing deaf men and women from Adamorobe in and outside of the village I did not see a particular gender-related difference in independence, self-reliance, and self-confidence. Ama Korkor's opinion and position—as the person who most often passed on news, mediated in deaf–deaf conflicts, and gave her opinion bluntly—were at least as influential as those of her brother Kofi Pare, although not on entirely the same issues.

In summary, Akorful's attempt to organize a deaf-based support network in the space of the village, outside of the church, met disinterest and resistance. Akorful understood deaf sociality based on the church group as having to lead to a tangible support network based in a formal or structural organization with a financial grounding, centralized leadership, and a designated interpreter. Through this network, he aimed to organize social security and health insurance, social work, interpreting, and the financial and practical organization of deaf schooling. In essence, Akorful tried to promote the idea that a deaf-based network should get first priority in deaf people's orientations and loyalty, and it should liberate them from dependency on their families, whom he believed did not support their deaf relatives.

For deaf people in Adamorobe, however, most of these functions were perceived either as not necessary, or as family responsibilities. Lineage is central in Akan culture and religion, and in Adamorobe, deafness was no real barrier to build and maintain bonds within deaf–hearing families. This contrasts with the ideas of outside agents such as pastors who regarded the deaf as oppressed individuals per se. These agents themselves, Akorful included, came from contexts in which deaf people were disadvantaged in the job market, were often discriminated against by hearing people (including their families), were subject to difficulties in communication as people surrounding them typically did not know sign language, and were geographically dispersed. In such contexts, his ideas might have led to action.

9 Visitors, Researchers, and Tourism

There have been a number of researchers in Adamorobe, and other visitors such as Ghanaian deaf people and white tourists who were either deaf or hearing. They had in common that they were attracted to Adamorobe because of its large number of deaf inhabitants. Often, the aim (or by-product) was to benefit from their visit in Adamorobe, such as by making pictures or recordings; collecting family trees, blood, skin; recruiting workers; or enjoyment and/or cultural exchange; sometimes in exchange for resources such as donations. Often, more than one motive was involved. In Adamorobe, there was a lot of ambivalence about these visitors and their motives.

Ghanaian Deaf People: A Project, Donations, and Feelings of Exploitation

Historically, deaf people from Adamorobe have had (often uneasy) contact with Ghanaian deaf people from outside the village. Deaf people from Adamorobe knew some deaf people in other areas such as Aburi, Kokoben or the cocoa farms, and regular deaf visitors came to Adamorobe, such as (former) presidents and executive members of the Ghana National Association of the Deaf (GNAD), representatives and pastors from churches (and the former two often overlapped), and some deaf individuals. Sometimes deaf people from Adamorobe went to visit their deaf acquaintances in Accra, but it was mostly one-way traffic from Accra and its surroundings to Adamorobe.

On several separate occasions I observed a total of about ten Ghanaian deaf people visiting Adamorobe, often individually, most of them from Accra. They were educated, most of them were male, and two of them were female. They came to the village for different purposes: visiting or accompanying me, bringing secondhand clothes, visiting previous deaf partners or family from Adamorobe, or preaching to the deaf people from Adamorobe. Most of them displayed behavior I experienced as paternalistic, disinterested, and sometimes even disrespectful toward deaf people from Adamorobe. This is in line with the observations (mentioned in

chapter 7) that AdaSL was sometimes regarded as "illiterate signing," and that (people in) villages were often seen as backwards.

These deaf people often feigned interest when listening to stories told by deaf people from Adamorobe. Some visitors tried to exclude deaf people from Adamorobe when communicating with me, talking about people who were present by using fingerspelled words. I also encountered the opinion that the deaf people from Adamorobe were backwards and should visit places such as factories "to learn," because they "know nothing about the world." I even observed some people making empty promises, for example to bring a white lady to marry one of the single deaf men.

Akorful often complained that the GNAD did not really support the deaf people in Adamorobe, and believed that they should do. The only example of "help" given by the GNAD was the occasional donation of secondhand clothes that previously belonged to GNAD-presidents or (board) members, and a visit regarding the marriage law in which they unsuccessfully defended the deaf people's right to marry, at Samuel's request. Some GNAD members, including the president, met Nana Osae Boakye in (or around) 2002 and argued that deaf marriages usually bring forth hearing children, which was not even true in Adamorobe.

Rather than complaining about those people not "helping" them, or complaining about the paternalism, deaf people from Adamorobe seemed to appreciate these visits. However, some of them felt exploited by GNAD members, first because of the GNAD farm (see below), second because the GNAD used Adamorobe as a tourist attraction, and third because GNAD members took videos of them.

In chapter 7 I mentioned that in the 1970s and 1980s, a number of deaf Ghanaians regularly came to Adamorobe to preach. In the second half of the 1970s, some of the same individuals helped to organize a GNAD farm-project. Corn, cassava, tomatoes, and yams were cultivated on the piece of land behind the Anglican school that had been given to the deaf people in the 1960s, for their school. Later they got the use of a second piece of land from the late Kwasi Afari, who was a lineage head and the father of five deaf people.

The deaf people called it "Foster's farm," but it was not Foster who led this project, just like the school in Adamorobe was called "Foster's school," although it was not established by Foster. Samuel Adjei (who was GNAD president from 1980–1983 and was involved with the project) told me that the project was organized by Foster's right-hand man Seth Tetteh-Ocloo,

who was one of the first Ghanaian deaf teachers for the deaf trained by Foster, and founded the GNAD in 1968. The previously mentioned Odame was also involved.

According to Samuel, the aim of the project was to benefit both the GNAD and the deaf people from Adamorobe. Deaf people from Accra came on their days off to work on the land, and the GNAD sold the yields of the harvests for fundraising. Deaf people from Adamorobe sometimes helped on the farm (e.g., planting, building sheds, helping with the harvests) and occasionally got resources in return, such as rice, second-hand clothes, oil, wheat, or a little bit of money. A number of deaf people remembered that they were unhappy with the situation: the land was vast, the harvests big, they worked hard on the land, and they got almost no profit from it. For this reason, they sometimes took products from the farm: they felt that they belonged to them.

While these deaf people felt exploited, Samuel complained about their attitude: "The Adamorobe deaf didn't really want to work, they said they were hungry. They wanted gifts. They didn't want to work without gifts." I was told that the project was closed down in 1988. Different people (hearing elders and deaf people from Adamorobe, and deaf people from Accra) gave various reasons for the end of the project: the farm yielded no profit anymore and/or the landlord sold the land.

The pattern of feeling exploited also became apparent in other situations. They did not appreciate that several former GNAD presidents and board members brought white visitors to them (see further), told the visitors that they could film the deaf people from Adamorobe, and most of the time offered nothing in return. Two white deaf visitors confirmed that former GNAD presidents indeed suggested that they do the filming, one of them also commenting on "the arrogant and paternalistic behavior of these people."

Former GNAD presidents also carried out their own video recording. Kwasi Boahene narrated how he and Kofi Pare were taken to Accra to be filmed for many hours, signing AdaSL stories that would be shown at meetings or conferences abroad; however, the deaf men said they never received the money they were promised in return:

> Actually I didn't want to but I let him do it. I had to sign about clothes: about nice clothes and putting on shoes, not dirty clothes but clean clothes. So I was filmed and I also had to sign I'm not married, that I have a farm and what I grow there, like cassava and so on.(. . .) And I had to sign about a big pig I shot,

> a story. And they filmed that. I told about how I distributed pieces of this pig. After filming we talked for a while and then we left. We got 2 cedi for the bus. I wanted 100 cedi! But X said he didn't have money. He said: "I don't have money now, but I'm going to fly and when I return I will have lots of money and give it to you." But he was lying! If he calls me again to come to the city, I don't want to go anymore! (Kwasi Boahene, Fieldnotes, 1 December 2008)

One of these (previous) GNAD officials even asked me to hand over my own recordings to present at a conference. When I refused on ethical grounds, he said he would either film himself or take a deaf person from Adamorobe there to "display" AdaSL live (which ultimately did not happen). All these experiences led to a heightened suspicion among deaf people from Adamorobe toward deaf people from wider Ghana. For example, one day a deaf person from the Church of Christ in Tema came to Adamorobe and announced that there would be a church camp for a week, selected seven deaf people to attend, and promised them shoes, clothes, and money in return for attending. Some deaf people did not believe that it really was a church camp, and suspected that they would have to sign for the camera. The camp was later cancelled.

Audiologists and Geneticists and the Problem of Ethics

Some of the practices of researchers who undertook audiological and genetic investigations and distributed hearing aids in Adamorobe raise ethical questions as well. Such researchers have visited Adamorobe since the 1960s and were not always welcomed.[183] For example, David narrated that in the early 1970s,[184]

> I used to flatter myself that they are happy to be visited by distinguished doctors from the great city. But this is by no means the case. The children adored us and followed us everywhere as we lightened their dull lives but the grown-ups wanted gifts to cover their loss of time and you can't really blame them.

I learned that deaf people did not consider visits from researchers as exclusively negative. Kofi Pare and other deaf people explained that they actually enjoyed the tests: to hear soft and loud sounds through the headphones was a very special and strange experience. While none of the deaf people in Adamorobe had hearing aids, there have been at least three instances in history where hearing aids have been present: at school in Mampong in the early 1960s, at school in Adamorobe in the 1970s, and again in the 1990s, when a team of Ghanaian and foreign audiologists visited to do audiometric tests and provided some of the deaf people with a hearing aid.[185]

The deaf people with whom I spoke about the hearing aids explained how these gave them an interesting introduction to sound, and that when they wore a hearing aid they could hear people calling them. While most of the deaf people smiled at the memory of the hearing aids, other deaf people did not have such positive feelings about them, or said they did not want them again although they enjoyed the sounds. For example, Kwasi Opare signed: "I threw it away! Hearing people kept clapping and yelling at me and that made me angry!" Others gave arguments that were similar to those given for not wanting to be hearing, such as: "I like to be deaf" and "God has made me this way." However, while there was ambiguity, hearing aids were generally presented as a curiosity.

The memory of genetic research at the other hand, triggered highly varied and intense feelings. Nyst was present during the investigation published by Meyer et al.[186] and explained how their visit happened:

> One day I came to the little square in front of the school; many deaf and some hearing sat on settees under the trees, say in front of the house of the headmaster. Two big white tents were set up and the white people/doctors were there. Everyone was sitting there with long faces, and I asked what was going on. "Agnes Bomo told us to come here. We don't want anymore, every time they come to tap blood and to get hairs etc." I went to the German leader: "The deaf people don't want this at all!" He: "No, but it's for their own good." "We have done earlier research about river blindness in blah blah—another African country—and there people didn't want to collaborate either in the first instance. We also take a little piece of their skin but hey they don't need to know this." I: "But surely you can't say this is ethical?" "Oh yes it is, we got ethical clearance from blah blah in Germany." He was very friendly, and very convinced that he was doing something good. (Victoria Nyst, Personal communication, 5 March 2009)

Deaf and some hearing people received yellow rain jackets and were led into one of the big white tents, for the production of sweat, because the researchers suspected that the carriers of the "deaf gene" had a different skin structure. Kofi Pare remembered that he was terrified what would happen to him in that tent: "I had been really afraid then. We talked among us about who had been afraid and who hadn't." Afua Kaya and Kwame Osae recalled that they had to take all their clothes off, even their underwear, and said that their pubic hair was cut. From a few deaf people, some skin was removed from their shoulder. They showed me the scar it left and explained that the biopsy was very painful and made some of them cry.

One man's wound became inflamed so that he could not work for a few days. I asked Nyst for the deaf people's reaction at the time:

> Especially Kofi Adin was very angry. Didn't want to "deliver" his [deaf] children for this research. He did at the end of the day though, because of the gifts. Two bars of soap, a cutlass, and the rain jacket! (Victoria Nyst, Personal communication, 5 March 2009)

Deaf people explained that the participants in the research received money and items like rice, cocoa powder, milk, and clothes. Kofi Pare recalled that the genetic researchers also filmed Adamorobe and AdaSL, and that he received a sum of money for taking them around. Thus in some aspects, those researchers did not differ too much from tourists, other researchers, or representatives from NGOs and churches. However, genetic research poses significant ethical problems, not only because of the uneasiness, fear, and pain involved, but also because this kind of research was so gravely misunderstood by deaf people in Adamorobe.

Several deaf people told me that the researchers wanted their blood to use it as a medicine for "weak people," because deaf people's blood is "very hard and very red" and therefore "very good, strong, and healthy." According to Kofi Pare, first the blood is boiled, and then

> Those cheats sell it: "Hey! This comes from Adamorobe, a strong medicine! If you inject it in your buttocks then you will see that after a few days you will be totally strong and healthy!"(. . .) That white man told us: "Your muscles are strong! Over there, people have weak muscles." And we said: "Ah . . ." They have weak muscles there, yes weak arms (*laughs*). (Kofi Pare, Interview, 10 June 2009)

This discourse is probably related to the belief that deaf people are stronger than hearing people, combined with the meaning that blood has for Akan people: it gives a human being his humanness and material constitution. Deaf people felt proud but also exploited: "They are cheats! They give us things here, so they can sell our blood there with much more profit!" One woman thought that these people become especially rich when selling the shoulder skin rather than the blood.

There was another parallel discourse that might seem contradictory but was often mentioned together with the previously discussed one: deaf people thought they would remain healthy and strong if their blood was taken. Kwame Ofori explained: "If they don't tap blood, you will fall ill

and die." According to Kofi Pare and other deaf people, this was what the research leader told them, interpreted by the late Agnes Bomo:

> The hearing person told us we won't fall ill and won't die. I said to the others: "See? Thank him, we are all friends." They understand. That's how it is. I said to the others: "You refuse to let them tap your blood? Then you will see you will fall ill soon!" (Kofi Pare, Interview, 10 June 2009)

Deaf people did not realize or understand that the visitors were conducting research and not extracting something from their bodies to sell or to keep them healthy. Even Agnes Bomo, who acted as interpreter, did not know what the research was for:

> There was an American white man who came here with a doctor to test their blood to see if there is any infection. Later when the result came nothing was bad about it. Later they came for the skin back to the hospital at Kumasi Okonfo Anokye hospital. And there was no bad result so they ended the research. (Agnes Bomo, Interview, 10 September 2009)

This could mean that the hearing people also had no clear understanding of what the genetic researchers were actually doing.

Visitors and the Representation of Adamorobe, the Deaf People, and AdaSL

During my fieldwork, I tried to build a relationship of trust with deaf people before using my photo camera. I took a number of photos of deaf people and the village and shared them on the little screen on the camera, causing a lot of laughter. Deaf people regularly came to my room to watch on my laptop the pictures and short movies I had recorded in the village; after my fieldwork I sent them prints of the pictures and a set of DVDs so they could watch the short movies at the home of someone with a DVD player. I also recorded interviews with a number of deaf people. Before beginning each interview I noted some of the themes I wanted to cover: usually some general themes, sometimes more specific questions. The selected deaf people were remarkably comfortable with signing spontaneously and freely for the camera and often linked a story to a chain of other stories. I expected that the people might feel sensitive about my showing the pictures, movies, and individual interviews during presentations abroad. I found that, instead, they actually *expected* me to show these pictures and interview fragments, to be able to inform audiences properly about Adamorobe.

While I had a rather positive experience with regard to using a camera in Adamorobe, deaf people told me stories of not being happy about visitors' use of cameras. After meeting hearing white or Asian foreign visitors (researchers; representatives of NGOs, churches, and charities; and tourists), deaf people almost never received copies of the pictures taken of them, which they considered very precious.

White visitors (including myself) also were not aware that the deaf people typically preferred full-body shots over close up shots, that the pictured person preferred to know when he/she was photographed, and that people preferred to be photographed facing the camera rather than in profile. They also preferred to be pictured, for example, with a car, with a book, with a beautiful house, when they drank beer or soft drinks (instead of water), or when they wore their best clothes, in other words, displaying literacy, beauty, wealth, and pride. Their experience was that visitors did just the opposite, picturing "how dirty and poor Adamorobe is," by shooting ramshackle houses, dirt, and unfortunate individuals. A very good example is the previously mentioned film made by Signs of Hope. Toabea narrated how she regarded this kind of filming behavior:

> They filmed XX's foot injury, they filmed XY's ugly teeth, they filmed XZ's head fungus, etc. They just came to film here and left! They film the dirty things here and then they show it there and then people see it's dirty here. And if they film the deaf, they complain (*imitates with pityful face*): "I don't have money, I don't have a husband, I always need to go to the farm and that's why I don't have money, I'm hungry," and so on. Hearing people [from Adamorobe] are insulting the deaf because of this, that deaf people tell about and show Adamorobe in this way. (Fieldnotes 13 June 2009)

Deaf people displayed a tension between wanting to represent themselves as needy or poor in order to secure donations and being aware that this negatively influences the representation of themselves and their village. When encountering visitors, deaf people also tended to see pictures and movies as a "means of exchange." They encouraged white visitors to record them, but with a tacit expectation that they would get something in return, otherwise they felt that that the images were being "stolen." They told me that "the deaf are hungry and don't get money and all the white people do is taking pictures of us and filming us, the thieves!" This was particularly true with regard to filming, as also became apparent in the section about the GNAD. AdaSL is unique and foreigners are therefore interested in

filming it. Most deaf people, however, were no longer prepared to "sell it cheaply," sometimes refusing to sign when visitors are filming, especially if they were hearing. For example:

> A white person came and I didn't do any AdaSL. The white person was hearing (*indignant*), not deaf, but a white hearing person. We all sat together and I asked a black person next to me who this man was. I learned that he's hearing. I didn't greet him, the white man came and greeted and I just nodded surly and asked him curtly how he was doing. I don't hear. If he is hearing I refuse to sign. The deaf all didn't do AdaSL. They just sat still and looked at him. The white person was filming everywhere and gave some money and left, around noon. I watched them going and asked someone: Why the hell did they come here? Ah, film because there are a lot of deaf people here, and then leave? I will tell you something: that white man is a cheat! He's going to sell it over there! So he's cheating. They all said I was right. (Kofi Pare, Interview, 3 September 2009)

Joseph Okyere pointed out that hearing people also felt ambivalent about visitors: there was a certain feeling of pride because Adamorobe's name has become popular, but on the other hand, "the visitors do only picture the bad buildings or houses. Second, they don't explain to the whole world that Adamorobe is not only deaf but both deaf and hearing." The idea that Adamorobe is no safari park has also been expressed by current Chief Nana Osae Boakye: "People show up in droves for the deaf people, what for? Why is that necessary?. . . They are productive in society and they are human beings so they are not something for show for people to just drive here and see."[187] Rue reported that several hearing people were disturbed about the way she had learned about Adamorobe—she had read about it on the Internet.

On the other hand, deaf people have been "displayed" to outsiders during dance performances. Many deaf people danced during funerals and ceremonies and several of them had name signs derived from the way they dance. However, letting deaf people perform a stylized dance as a group was an idea initially pursued by "outsiders." Apparently, this first happened in the 1970s. Agnes explained that Godfried Akufo Ofori (the teacher of the former deaf school in Adamorobe) and several hearing visitors from churches and Legon University taught the deaf people how to perform traditional dances. Having learned to dance, the deaf people were sometimes asked to dance the *fontomfrom* (an Akan dance) on festivals such as Odwira, and on other occasions when white

visitors came. When I asked for the reason for these performances, Joseph Okyere explained:

> We realized that people thought that deaf cannot express themselves. So we do this to surprise people who have that idea. (…) People think deaf cannot do anything such as dance, sing, worship God, etc. and also cannot perform something during the times of occasion. (Joseph Okyere, Interview, 2 October 009)

While many deaf people liked to dance, few liked to perform, and they needed constant direction from Agnes Bomo while performing. Apparently, when I was in Adamorobe, "deaf dance" had not been organized for several years because nobody took the initiative to provide a donation or refreshments for the deaf people after their performance, which is the custom with performing groups. Also, because of the absence of the chief, Odwira had not been organized properly for several years. Still, deaf people dancing is another example of how people from Adamorobe tried to control and/or produce representations of the deaf presence in their village.

White Deaf Tourists: A Feeling of (Dis)Connection

When they talked about visitors, deaf people from Adamorobe distinguished between deaf and hearing visitors. Most foreign visitors, representatives of NGOs, churches, and charities, for example, who came to Adamorobe to visit its deaf population were hearing; but deaf people living in Adamorobe told me that they preferred deaf visitors, expressing empathy with white deaf people. When I showed pictures of my deaf partner and of deaf friends, the typical reaction was: "Ooooh … that's from God," with an expression of pity in their eyes, then "acceptance" followed, with often the comment "DEAF SAME." DEAF SAME was thus understood as transcending Adamorobe. In Ama Korkor's words:

> All deaf people everywhere are connected. All deaf are connected and the same. Do not fight with each other but be happy. Do not gossip, that is bad. We are all the same. When you go to Aburi or Accra for example: we are all the same: all the deaf everywhere are connected, the same. You shouldn't discard or ignore each other: deaf are all connected, the same. The hearing all speak badly about us: hearing people are bad, but we are connected, the same, we are one. (Ama Korkor, Interview, 21 November 2008)

Despite identifying with deaf people from other locations than Adamorobe, deaf people in Adamorobe also had ambivalent feelings, as became clear in their feelings about Ghanaian deaf people. Another

example is white deaf visitors. When I asked deaf people in advance if it was OK if three white deaf people, who had contacted me because they knew I was present in the village, would come to the village, they replied: "Yes, DEAF SAME, it is good that they come, we can show them some AdaSL, they can see that the signs here are different from theirs." This sounds like an exchange without any special expectations. However, it appeared that the fact that the visitors were "DEAF SAME," did not automatically entail an easy and natural connection without any mutual expectations.

In Europe, before my fieldwork, I also encountered two other deaf Northern tourists who had traveled in Ghana. Because of Adamorobe's location in relation to Ghana's capital, easily accessible on a main road to and from Accra, it is convenient to visit the village as day trip from there. These five visitors visited Adamorobe as a short excursion from Accra. They were Europeans in their twenties and thirties; four of them were members of signing deaf families and all of them were active in deaf organizations or associations. The deaf visitors in Adamorobe did not wear hearing aids during their visits and they were fluent in one or more European national sign languages and in International Sign. The visitors were interested in Adamorobe because of its being a shared signing community and expected to be able to connect somehow with the deaf people there. Some of them were brought there by (former) board members or presidents of the GNAD who were aware of the attractiveness of this location to foreigners.

These visitors expected that an enthusiasm based on "DEAF SAME" would be present in Adamorobe. This, however, was not the case, at least not to the extent expected. One foreigner, who visited in 2009 during my stay in Adamorobe, told me afterwards:

> I was a little bit surprised that some deaf villagers did not care about our presence. It should be fun to receive deaf foreigners in their village but some villagers—especially men—showed little or no interest. Just saying "Hi" and a short introduction was enough for them. They did not ask about Europe, Accra, and so on. There is not much interest in visitors.

Another person who visited before my stay in Adamorobe told me: "The deaf were uninterested and passive, in contrast to the hearing." Although the deaf visitors and deaf people from Adamorobe all considered each other to be "DEAF SAME," this did not automatically entail an easy connection, and differences between them came to the fore. I encountered several examples of this disconnect.

First, while deaf Europeans and Adamorobe deaf both used sign languages and expected that communication would occur easily, communication was often quite difficult. AdaSL is very different from the sign languages the foreigners used, including International Sign. As explained in chapter 2, the core of AdaSL consists not only of a number of local gestures, but also of mimes of Akan customs, local foods and their preparation, farming terms, and festivals, and the structure of AdaSL is influenced by spoken Akan.

The second problem was the fact of the very different backgrounds of the deaf foreigners and Adamorobe deaf people. Conversation themes in the daily life of deaf people in Adamorobe included relationships with family, witchcraft accusations, the marriage prohibition, the *mmoatia* at the river, and the sale of lands surrounding the village, themes that foreign visitors could not easily comprehend. I observed how a few deaf people from Adamorobe tried to talk about such topics with deaf foreign visitors, who had difficulty in understanding the signs and making sense of the stories. Similarly, the visitors asked me, "Why do they [Adamorobe deaf] introduce their families so elaborately?" The visitors did not have the context to grasp what was important to these deaf people.

In addition, the European visitors were distressed by the living conditions and economic structures in the village, describing them as "primitive," "isolated," and "backwards." Surprised by the lack of "modern" infrastructure and facilities, they asked questions such as, "How can you [the researcher] live here?" Because the deaf people in Adamorobe are uneducated in the Western sense, they asked, "What is these deaf people's level of thinking?" and one visitor referred to them as "immature" because of the lack of schooling. These visitors were not able to see beyond what they thought was deprivation or poverty.

Expectations of Adamorobe Deaf People

Expectations of deaf people in Adamorobe contributed to the disconnect with white deaf visitors: they expected and requested gifts or donations from these deaf visitors just as they did from any (deaf or hearing) foreign visitor to the village. Visitors whom they particularly remembered and honored were people who came with cars full with soap, rice, clothes, and other products, and/or distributed money. When deaf people told me such stories it was never clear to me whether these gifts or donations came from the visitors themselves, or whether these people were representatives of churches and NGOs that provided the donations. In deaf people's stories (and perhaps

also in their eyes), these were all the same: they typically told the stories as if the very people who brought the donations also financed them.

Many deaf people from Adamorobe thought that white deaf visitors should display philanthropy "from their heart." For example, one deaf woman was very angry that the three white deaf visitors who came during my fieldwork were not brought along to her house during their tour of Adamorobe. Her kitchen had collapsed a while ago and, in her experience, seeing her kitchen and her old deaf mother shocks visitors to that extent that they give them some money.

Deaf people from Adamorobe did not immediately ask or beg for donations. However, when donations did not appear to be forthcoming, a number of deaf people requested money or donations at the time of the visitors' departure. A deaf visitor who visited Adamorobe in 2005 stated:

> At the end when we should leave, they asked if I had brought some gifts for them. I was so unprepared—but had a bit of money which I gave them. They wanted me to promise to send them clothes and so on.

My deaf Indian husband experienced the same thing at the end of a three-day visit: upon his departure, four deaf men requested money from him when I went to the toilet. It was totally unexpected for him and he replied that I already supported them with business projects, but that he would talk with me about their request. The deaf men urged him not to do so, because they thought that it would make me cross. During my subsequent two-week break from the village to travel with my husband, the story started to grow legs: most deaf people believed that my husband was planning to give a generous donation of money and rice and assumed that I had told him not to do so. As a result they refused to go to the church while I was away, because they were upset about this.

It was also not appreciated when visitors arrived on regular days instead of holidays (i.e., Thursdays or Sundays) and then expected to meet the deaf people. Deaf people counted the days when they were asked to stay in Adamorobe (instead of going to their farms) as "hungry" days because they live off their farms, and felt that visitors should provide them with food or money to "reimburse" them for their presence.

Some deaf schoolgirls in Adamorobe, aged between 15 and 18, were highly critical about this attitude toward visitors, as demonstrated by Owusua:

> If a white person is coming, then they put on a face and they say: "Is that person going to give me money for food??" (*rhetorical*) If a white person is coming and

> they ask him so much money, is that right? (*indignant*) I once told X that she shouldn't ask for money when a white person is coming but just needs to be good company for them, and maybe the white person will give some money in the end, but maybe they won't. But X got angry with me, she waved it aside, she denied it, she didn't want to hear anything about it! She said: "Then I still don't have food! Then I will be hungry!" At the school in Mampong it's different, so many white people come there, we are used to white people there and we have a good relationship with them. I challenged X with this and then she was quiet for a while. She wants to get too much money out of white people and exploit them. (Fieldnotes, 4 September 2009)

The three deaf visitors who came during my fieldwork also visited Mampong and indeed experienced an enormous difference between Mampong and Adamorobe. The schoolchildren in Mampong were very enthusiastic to receive white visitors; they led them around and tried to talk with them, and most children did not ask for money or other gifts. Of course, boarding schoolchildren are not entirely comparable with adult farmers who have to provide for themselves, as Ama Korkor argued: "Life in Adamorobe is hard!" Owusua, on the other hand, put emphasis on the traditional Ghanaian value of hospitality, contrasting the attitude of the deaf adults in Adamorobe not only with the children at Mampong but also with the deaf adults in Kokoben, where she was born. She argued that the latter would receive guests enthusiastically and invite them for a meal "but in Adamorobe all they do is stare, looking surly and say they are hungry and don't have money for food. All they want is receive and receive."

However, in addition to the unfulfilled expectations of donations in Adamorobe, there are several other reasons why deaf people in Adamorobe do not automatically regard visitors as a nice distraction from everyday life. For the deaf people in Adamorobe, a visit by a white person was not a rare occurrence like in Kokoben, but something that happened regularly throughout the years, and during or after these visits they repeatedly experienced the same disappointments or frustrations.

Deaf people in Adamorobe felt a lingering sense of failed promises. They said that Northern visitors in the past made promises to return and do something for them, such as sending them the pictures they made, sending them to school, making them hearing, coming with a big coach to take them for a trip, or taking them to a "white country," all of which were unfulfilled. It was not clear if visitors explicitly made these promises, or if this was deaf people's understanding, but in any case, many deaf people felt betrayed.

Deaf people in Adamorobe were also disappointed that many visitors come only once. When talking about foreigners who visited Adamorobe, they typically added: "Never came back since then" and "Will come soon, you will see," even if the visit happened decades ago. The deaf people expected that visitors would return regularly to greet them, to distribute the pictures they made, and of course, to distribute donations, especially if they had stayed in Adamorobe for a long period of time or frequented Adamorobe over a sustained period of time. Rue, a photographer who visited Adamorobe repeatedly over the course of a month, did not come back after her project, so a number of deaf people thought she must be ill or dead, what else could be the reason that she never returned?

For all these reasons, Adamorobe deaf people were not as enthusiastic as the foreign tourists expected. Since visitors were not aware of Adamorobe history and cultural practices, there was a disconnect in expectations on both ends.

Are Future (Deaf) Visitors Welcome?

Given the range of reactions to various kinds of visitors, I asked a number of deaf people in Adamorobe how they felt about visits in the future, especially those of white guests. Sometimes, deaf people said they would welcome any person from whom they could get a donation, but at other times they were reluctant to accept visitors altogether: "No! Just come and stare at us?? No!!" A recurring theme then, was that deaf people in Adamorobe felt ambivalent as to how much weight to give to the "DEAF SAME" argument in case of white visitors. They liked that white deaf visitors typically tried to communicate directly instead of through Agnes Bomo. Deaf people from Adamorobe also seemed to expect more generosity from deaf visitors, although at the same time they expressed that the amount to be expected from a deaf person would be lower.

Deaf Adamorobeans said that deaf Northern visitors were more welcome than hearing people because they are "DEAF SAME," but even so, they often said that both deaf and hearing visitors should stay away, or their feelings fluctuated between welcoming deaf people and rescinding the invitation. Deaf people from Adamorobe thus deployed the discourse of "DEAF SAME" to explain why they do or do not have expectations from deaf foreigners, but sometimes they felt that the whiteness and foreignness trumps DEAF SAME. I will give three examples of three different

conversations (with five different people in total) in which such ambivalent feelings were expressed:

A : I don't want to go to the church if white people come. I don't want hearing white people to come. A deaf person is ok, I can chat with them and teach them some AdaSL. And a deaf person will distribute generously. We will take good care of the deaf white people. Hearing are HEAD-HARD!

Me: Ok, so imagine on a Sunday a coach full of deaf white people is coming here, they talk to you and if they leave, they all give you some money, is that what you like?

A: No … I don't trust it.

Me: Ok and if there are just two of them, for example? Two deaf white people? And they distribute clothes, for example?

A: No, I don't like that either. Only you are ok, you are good.

(Fieldnotes, 30 September 2009)

Me: If a white person comes for a visit once and distributes rice, is that okay?

B: No, that person would walk around here in Adamorobe and look around and write that there are filthy houses here and that it is dirty here!

Me: And a deaf white person?

B: No, I would have nothing to do with it, I would go to the farm [to avoid meeting them]! Deaf people here are HEAD-HARD (*proud*). I don't want to talk to those people.

Me: And if a white deaf person comes, just to the church, not entering the village, and distributes rice, would you like that?

B: No.

C: We accept you and Nyst because you are HEAD-SOFT [i.e., flexible, friendly, generous] but we don't want a new one.

Me: But if it is just once in the church, not someone who is staying for a longer period?

C: Then neither, then I don't want to go. I don't believe at all that that person would bring rice.

Me: And if that person would really bring rice?

C: I don't believe it, it would be cheating again, like it happened before.

Me: Ok, but imagine he would *really* bring rice?

C: But then he probably won't bring clothes and he probably won't distribute any money. (*stubborn and displeased face*)

(Fieldnotes, 7 September 2009)

D: I will tell [visitors]: You will give a little bit of money? No! I want a lot of money! Then I am happy (*elated*), I put it in my pocket and I will demonstrate AdaSL signs. If it is little money, I will be angry! I want to GRAB a lot of money (*naughty look*). They will see that deaf are HEAD-HARD! But you are deaf, you came with Francis [the person who introduced me in Adamorobe], deaf help each other. DEAF SAME, you can stay and you

give us things. But others … I take my cask of water on my head and my cutlass under my arm and go to my farm and will curse the visitors from a distance like this (*sends insulting sign in direction of the village*).(…)

Me: Should I tell this to people who want to visit Adamorobe?

E: No no! A bit of money is enough (*laughs*) DEAF SAME! If deaf people come, a little bit of money is enough, but hearing people need to give a lot of money!

D: No! Lots! (*points to a metal tub near her*) This must be completely full! (*bursts of laughter from both of them*)

E: Don't say! Then they don't want to come anymore!

D: (*playful but convinced*) No! Lots of money, this tub must be full and I distribute it among the deaf! (*lifts the tub, acting like it is very heavy, and they laugh*)

E: (*to me*) Tell them they can come.

Me: Also if they don't have or give money?

E: Give us a little money and then go.

D: No, I want lots of money! (*but comes, by way of compromise, with a smaller plastic tub*) I want 300 cedi.

E: If they don't want to come anymore, less money is fine as well.

Me: So you like white people's visits?

E: But yes! They don't know AdaSL and I can show it, that's good. (*to X*): If she's going to say we want lots of money, they don't want to come here anymore! (*to me*): Write down that a little bit of money is enough.

(Fieldnotes, 27 May 2009)

In summary, I learned that deaf people particularly mistrusted visitors who were not properly introduced and just arrived in Adamorobe and started filming or taking pictures: this happened when I was in Adamorobe, and they just sent the visitors away. But even after a proper introduction, such as by former GNAD presidents or Akorful, and even if the visitors were deaf, the deaf people were often suspicious and/or distrustful and felt ambivalent. They also often contrasted short visits with my prolonged stay in Adamorobe. They said that they did not want to "teach" a new person all over again, and expressed the wish that Nyst and I, having learned their language and having some understanding about life in Adamorobe, would regularly visit them. At the same time, as I have set out in the previous chapter, my being deaf and being white were factors that were ambiguously utilized in discourses, and I did not escape from high expectations and intense suspicion: in that respect, my being a guest in Adamorobe was not that different of an experience from those of day visitors.

10 The End of the "Deaf Village"?

In this book I described how in Adamorobe, deaf people were inherent in the space of the village: deaf people featured in origination legends, sign language was part of the linguistic mosaic, hearing people had experiential knowledge about sign language and deaf people, and deaf and hearing inhabitants naturally had ambiguous feelings about living together. Expressions that deaf and hearing people are all "SAME" naturally appeared, along with the identification of differences that were experienced positively, neutrally, or negatively. The case of Adamorobe demonstrates that the pervasive presence of sign language and the great emphasis on family life in a community with a genetic pattern similar to that of Martha's Vineyard does not prevent nor exclude the notion of hearing people as "them" or "the other." Both deaf and hearing people recognize that deaf people produce social space differently.

Nyst assumes that "socialisation on the basis of a shared Deaf identity is a recent phenomenon in Adamorobe" and suggests that this change happened following the role of outsiders such as tourists, researchers, charity agencies, and educators who "singled out the deaf."[188] Rather than suppose that there was a radical historical change from a sort of fully deaf–hearing mixed space to the contemporary frequent occurrence of deaf-only spaces, I hypothesize a more gradual change. I suggest that deaf spaces existed in Adamorobe in the less recent past, but the production of these spaces probably increased in intensity, frequency, and duration, and deaf-related discourse incorporated additional elements. In other words, it was not the case that deaf spaces were produced *because of* change such as outsiders singling out the deaf, but rather that change was *incorporated* in the production of deaf spaces. I will illustrate this by imagining a history of deaf space in Adamorobe.

A History of Deaf Space in Adamorobe

At a certain time in history, probably in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, a few (or perhaps only one, to begin with) deaf people moved to Adamorobe or were born in Adamorobe. They communicated

with hearing people in their immediate environment via gesture and one or more home sign languages that started to emerge. As the number of deaf people in Adamorobe grew, their communication evolved into a village-wide sign language that was increasingly used and shared between deaf and hearing people and among the deaf people themselves.

Deaf people would have come into contact with each other automatically in the then-much-smaller village, especially given the dense kin and social networks and the fact that many deaf people had deaf siblings or cousins. Deaf people among themselves could have developed and used a more sophisticated and quicker version of the sign language, since they used primarily visual ways to communicate (i.e., sign language was their *first* language) in a predominantly hearing and speaking world.

The experience of being deaf was something that these deaf people had in common with each other, but not with hearing people. They possibly acknowledged the fact that they were not alone, expressing an us-with-us feeling by signing "DEAF SAME." While it is not clear when deaf people in Adamorobe created this expression and the discourses surrounding DEAF SAME, there was an indication that deaf people identified with each other at an early point in history: since time immemorial deaf people have married each other. Did this happen because hearing people preferred to marry a hearing rather than a deaf person, or was it because deaf people shared a sense of sameness, or both? Either way, it labels deaf people as "the same," thus the exact reason for this marriage practice does not matter in this respect.

Another feature of early identification is that deaf people's "special features" were marked in some of the origination stories that were probably told long before they were first recorded in the second half of the twentieth century: for example, the stories about the handsome hardworking farmer and the deafened warriors. It seems that these stories incorporated beliefs about deaf-specific features, features which in turn confirmed deaf people as "the same."

Deaf spaces in Adamorobe have probably always been set up in the midst of a predominantly hearing environment. Thus I hypothesize that deaf people in Adamorobe were compelled to interpret and describe the difference and sameness between deaf and hearing people from early on. In addition, both deaf and hearing people felt the need to situate and explain why there were so many deaf people in Adamorobe. This happened in neutral, negative, and positive discourses, including the manifold stories and discourses about the causes of deafness.

Deaf people from Adamorobe saw themselves as part of wider society and as equal to hearing people ("DEAF HEARING ALL CONNECTED," "DEAF HEARING SAME"). Hearing interview respondents described Akan and AdaSL as "the same language," emphasized that deaf people could do the same things as hearing people in everyday life, and recognized the place of deaf people in Adamorobe's historical time and space, "since time immemorial until the end of days." At the same time, deaf people from Adamorobe were proud to be deaf (HEAD-HARD and EYE-STRONG) sign language users who had an existential bond with each other ("DEAF SAME," "DEAF CONNECTED").

I suggest that, in addition to the inclusive attitude toward deaf people in Adamorobe, negative attitudes are likely to have always been there as well. Ambiguity seemed to be inherent in both the stories and discourses about the causes of deafness (deafness as a punishment or as a gift) and in the attitudes toward deaf people (such as the insults "EAR-HARD" and "HEAR-NOTHING"). Therefore, elements of *contestation* were most likely present in deaf people's discourses from the outset, as reactions to insults and other ways of discrimination. This leads us to the question of what role "us-against-them" (i.e., "HEARING BAD") had in relation to "us-with-us," in the formulation of "DEAF SAME." We could even wonder if deaf people were typically said to be short-tempered *because* they often felt oppressed and reacted to that.

I suspect that the contestatory and defensive elements in deaf people's discourses strongly increased with the introduction of the marriage law. The marriage law meant that deaf spaces were explicitly threatened: deaf people were not allowed to experience "DEAF SAME" in the central sphere of marriage *and* parenthood anymore, and there was also a future threat that there would be fewer and fewer deaf people in Adamorobe. These combined threats have probably led to a stronger discourse in favor of deaf space. Deaf people did point at a "good cause" of deafness (i.e., God) in order to explain why they should have the right to live and to have deaf children. In addition, deaf people from Adamorobe were led to share views about why deaf people were as good and as productive as hearing people, or even better and more productive than them, and thus valuable members of human diversity in God's Creation. They pointed at the fact that deaf people can do in society what hearing people can do, also in these modern times: "If I get a deaf child, I can send it to school."

The situation in Adamorobe was paradoxical: marriages between deaf people and (signing) hearing people could be regarded as bridging a gap between deaf and hearing people, but the result was exactly the opposite.

Deaf people wanted *the right to deaf space* in marriage to be able to participate happily in hearing society. When that was taken away from them, it left most deaf men unmarried and it made many deaf women frustrated and unhappy in their relationships. The existing deaf–deaf love relationships emerged as deaf people followed their yearnings, to circumvent this devastating rule. At the same time deaf couples typically conformed to the marriage law by not having children at all. We could interpret this as agency rather than subjection: deaf people controlling their space by making decisions about life and death, to be able to maintain quality relationships with their extended family that are essential to daily life.

A deeper effect of the marriage law was that deaf people felt unwanted in hearing society. As such the marriage law probably negatively impacted the quality of deaf–hearing relationships (feeding the "HEARING BAD" discourse and suspicions about poisonings) which possibly drove deaf people further together. It perhaps also impacted the quality of social relationships in deaf spaces. The strong negative tensions in deaf spaces and the excessive gossip, that is, the struggle to bring "DEAF SAME" values into practice, were possibly (partially) fortified by their two biggest frustrations in daily life: the marriage law and their being "uneducated poor farmers."

This book has demonstrated the significance of external views in the implementation of the marriage law: the courtesy stigma, but also the possible role of genetic counseling. Yet other events influenced deaf spaces in Adamorobe. People from other places in Ghana and beyond brought deaf people in Adamorobe purposefully together as group, as a large deaf space, with the aim of formal education, worship, and donations, for development projects, for cultural exchange and tourism, for dance, or for research. Gathering deaf people for formal education and church worship occurred over prolonged periods and in institutional contexts, while they came together intermittently for donations, dance, and research.

Deaf people both resisted and complied with various attempts to group them, and these reactions fed back into their discourses about deaf sociality and deaf space. Deaf people expressed that they accepted the grouping in large deaf spaces in contexts when donations were offered (i.e., for example during church, and by visitors) and that they missed being addressed by the chief as a group (i.e., a context when they felt respected as deaf minority in Adamorobe). They also wanted interpretation in sign language for the deaf group who then sit together, and they wished they were educated (successfully) together. On the other hand, they were ambivalent about

being grouped for other purposes, such as the group development projects, group health insurance, and group leadership.

This is where we see that Akorful's understanding of deaf sociality based on "DEAF SAME" conflicted with that of deaf people in Adamorobe: in Akorful's view, the deaf people from Adamorobe needed to be organized on a (deaf) group level more than empowered individually or rely only on their families. In his eyes, "DEAF SAME" should lead to a financially grounded deaf support network organized and empowered by the church, responsible for projects such as the corn mill, the organization of deaf schooling through the deaf church, and the creation of hearing and deaf leaders and interpreters. In Adamorobe's deaf spaces, on the other hand, the discourse of "DEAF SAME" did not incorporate the notion of relegating all responsibilities to deaf spaces, nor to preferring interactions in deaf spaces over all interactions with hearing people, nor to emphasizing responsibilities of fellow deaf people over those of the family.

Deaf people were thus *ambiguous* toward the attempts to group them; while they emphasized the connection with each other by using the "DEAF SAME" they did not use the "DEAF SAME" argument in the above-mentioned cases, to avoid being financially responsible for deaf schoolchildren or sick deaf people. Instead, they emphasized the bond with hearing relatives in this village where the use of sign language is pervasive. One's lineage is central in Akan culture, and in Adamorobe, being deaf generally was no real barrier to building and maintaining bonds within deaf–hearing families. This contrasts with the discourse of "outside" agents who regarded the deaf as needy, deprived, or oppressed individuals worthy of receiving support; they came from different contexts, in which deaf people were disadvantaged in the nonsigning societies that surrounded them.

The "DEAF SAME" argument was strategically deployed by the deaf adults from Adamorobe, used or omitted in order to ally with or distance themselves from deaf visitors, deaf schoolchildren, or each other. They emphasized the bond with white and black deaf visitors who were "the same" because they were deaf, deploying the "DEAF SAME" argument to explain why they had (or did not have) expectations from them. They neglected to use this argument when they felt that the "outsider" aspect of the visitor prevailed over the visitor's deafness because of disappointments and feelings of exploitation, because of difficulties with communication, or because they emphasized that deaf people's family should support ill fellow deaf people rather than visitors.

Another tension became apparent in the relationship between the deaf adults and schoolchildren. On the one hand, deaf adults emphasized the "DEAF SAME" bond with the deaf schoolchildren when they explained why the children should greet them, tell them things and "speak up," and do things for them (such as bring them water) and why they gave advice to and did things for the children in the past. They stated that "DEAF SAME" should not be trumped by gender, implying that deaf schoolgirls should be comfortable in their interactions with deaf adult men. On the other hand, deaf adults did not want to work for the deaf children's schooling (in the corn mill project) because "they are not my children." There was a generation gap based on unfulfilled expectations and jealousy, which were partially caused by expectations based on "DEAF SAME," and not easily trumped by the "DEAF SAME" idea. In their ideal world the deaf people from Adamorobe are educated and therefore not (only) are farmers but also have a wider array of life choices and better opportunities to move outside of Adamorobe. Confronting the deaf children, who in their eyes (will) thrive because of their formal education, was challenging for the deaf adults.

Context, Increasing Marginalization, and the Meaning of the Farms

This book has illustrated the significance of sociocultural and historical context with regard to deaf people's place in societies. The question of whether deaf people are included, situated, and accommodated in their environments, and/or encounter severe limitations in everyday life, relates to the contexts in which they live. Deaf and hearing people from Adamorobe experienced a contrast between there and places outside the village, where people didn't realize that deaf people can do anything that hearing people do, and where deaf people were subject to "leaf-insults." The world "outside" was, of course, not cut off from the village, but frequently and tangibly entered Adamorobe, giving rise to feelings of apprehension for a number of deaf people.

The importance of context not only implies that deaf and hearing people living together is part of the *habitus* in Adamorobe, but also that this situation has the potential to *change* when the context changes, such as the general societal tendency toward a loosening of community ties and the influx of new immigrants in Adamorobe. In figure 10.1, I schematize how different processes, agents, and discourses, all featuring different perspectives on deaf people and sign language, accumulated in Adamorobe.

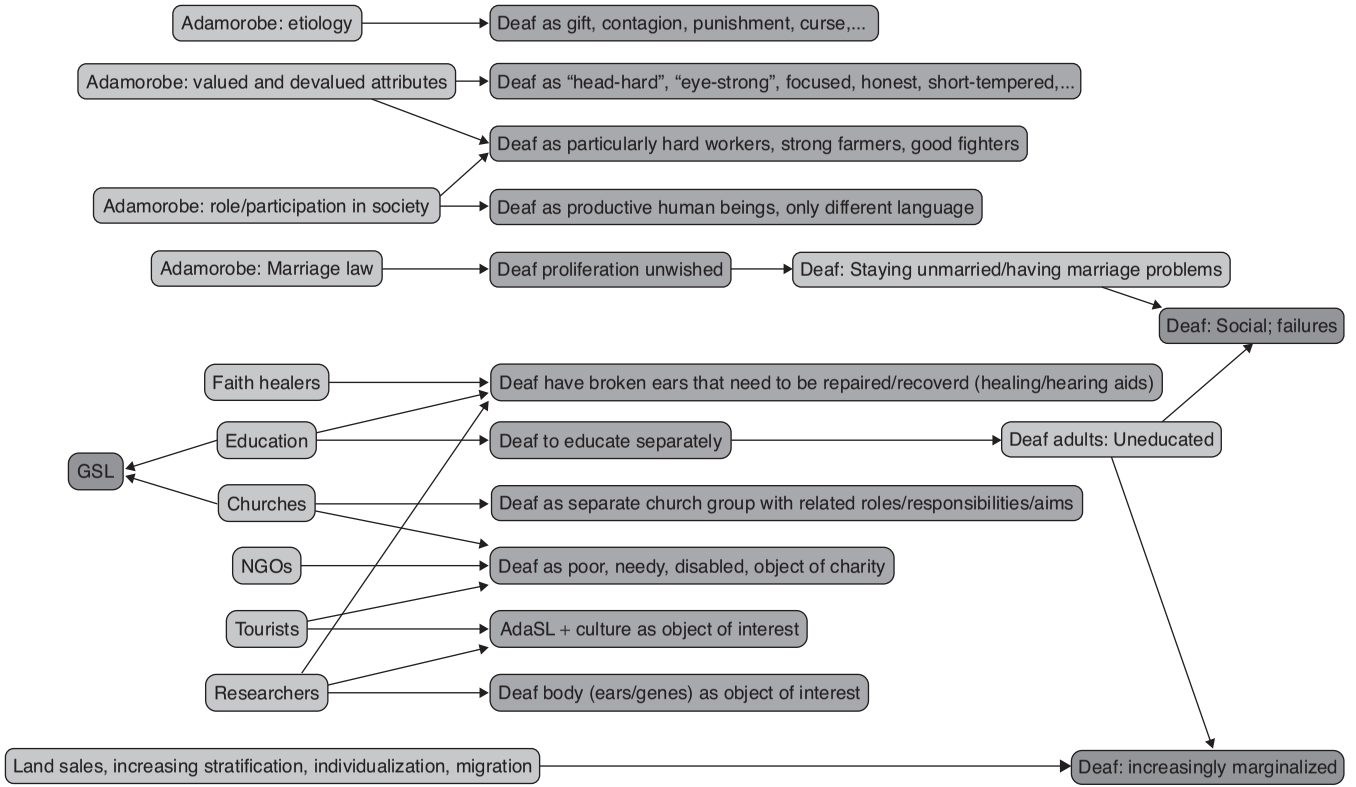

Figure 10.1. Perspectives on deafness in Adamorobe.

Some were general (i.e., not deaf-specific) processes that indirectly influenced deaf spaces and deaf–hearing social practices in Adamorobe. Capitalism, Christianization, and the commodification of land came along with increasing fragmentation, stratification, and individualism in Adamorobe, and an increasing importance placed upon education and diversification of employment options. As a result, the value placed on the characteristics and expected roles of deaf people in Adamorobe changed. Being a hardworking farmer was not enough to secure esteem in society anymore, and deaf people ceased to have a role as town guards or warriors against the Ga.

In this changing society, deaf people felt disadvantaged because of their illiteracy. In addition, fewer hearing people in Adamorobe knew sign language well and interacted with them. In the ontological dimension, deaf people were marginalized as well: because of the wish to avoid deaf offspring as a result of deaf–deaf marriages, they were denied the right to marry each other. All these processes, constructing the deaf people as unmarried, uneducated people, often gave them the feeling that they were marginalized.

In addition to these general processes, there was a more direct influence of specifically deaf-related processes on the conceptualization of deaf people in Adamorobe. The fact that Adamorobe was known as a "deaf village" rendered it particularly susceptible to these. Adamorobe's reputation brought agents who singled out the deaf people to group them for the purposes of education and Christianization, and agents constructing them as needy people, and as such contributing to the already increasing polarization, fragmentation, and differentiation between deaf and hearing people, and to the construction of deaf people as marginal.

Sometimes, tensions and ambiguity resulted when global ideologies surrounding deafness were localized. Examples are the closure of the school in Adamorobe because of the integration policy of the teacher, the charitable focus on deaf people in a community in which they were seen as being able to do the same things as hearing people, and the church that tried to take away responsibilities from the family.

An important consequence of deaf-related processes was the introduction of another sign language, GSL, to Adamorobe. While hearing people regarded Akan and AdaSL as "the same" and emphasized the shared roots of AdaSL and Akan, deaf people described Akan, AdaSL, and GSL/ASL as three distinct but equivalent languages. Deaf people (both adults and

children) realized that one can say the same things in AdaSL as in GSL/ASL. Deaf people pointed out the distinctive features of AdaSL: they said that the language was "HARD" (which was a source of pride rather than concern), that it was more pleasant to use, and that it was more expressive (and therefore more clear) than GSL/ASL. Neither the asymmetries in daily communication situations in Adamorobe nor the introduction of GSL through church and schooling correlated with negative ideologies about AdaSL. Knowing GSL in addition to AdaSL conveyed prestige, and a number of deaf people wished they had a better command of the language.

Illiteracy and not having received any sustained vocational training also impacted Adamorobe deaf people's perceptions of their own capacity to follow a sustainable "get-out-of-poverty" plan, rather than live for the "now" instead, "eating from money" when it becomes available. Being an illiterate farmer was not at all unusual in Adamorobe, and it was certainly not a phenomenon limited to deaf people. However, for many deaf people of Adamorobe, being illiterate and having incomplete schooling were experienced as important and painful limitations. In deaf people's discourses, being unschooled (or not having completed their education) was inextricably related with a sense of neediness: because of the failure of formal education, they were limited to farming, and being a subsistence farmer was connected to being needy. This sense of neediness was, at least partially, instilled (or fortified) by benefactors who focused on the deaf people: the charitable donations from various NGOs and churches, starting with the Rev. Andrew Foster's own frequent donations.

Deaf people wished that "outsiders" (including myself) would bring enormous donations so they would not have to work, an idea based on the golden time of Foster, when they received regular donations and could still marry freely. They saw a relationship among being thin, being poor, lacking charity, and the necessity of farming. The opinion that they were entitled to donations was very firmly established among deaf people in Adamorobe, and I hypothesize that this adversely affected the efforts put in development projects. Being used to handouts (regarded as resources that should be free for them and not require too much effort) and a lifetime of poverty and on-the-edge subsistence living, deaf people put more weight on what would have more immediate effects in their daily lives, strongly preferring donations over projects. The more recent lack of aid further consolidated the sense of neediness, and with it, the discourse of

farming as a repetitive practice that was connected with limitations, as expressed in the bitter and disappointed utterance, "To the farm, again and again and again."

In this utterance, they expressed that farming is a rhythm that is very difficult to break or change. While they felt inner resistance to the insurmountable repetitiveness of this rhythm, they also demonstrated a certain extent of conciliation with their "fate" as "strong deaf farmers," as evidenced by the notion of deaf people as hardworking beings who can fend for themselves, just like (or better than) hearing people, as well as the deeper-rooted ontological idea that farming is in their blood, so that deaf people who were "too lazy to farm" were condemned. It seemed that deaf people from Adamorobe mainly complained about being farmers to give their poverty-induced frustrations a voice, not because they strongly disliked farming in itself.

The farms were also described as havens. They were places the deaf people thought would always be there to escape to, when projects fail, when donations don't come, and when faith healers and other visitors were to be avoided. The farms thus could be seen both as part of the problem (being subsistence farmers means having limited financial capital), and a sturdy base to fall back on.

The Future of the Deaf Population in Adamorobe

During my last visit to the village in May 2012, two and a half years after completing my fieldwork, deaf people talked a lot about their farms. They were bitter because many of them lost their farmland and got the use of a piece of land that was much farther away. The crops they had been growing were destroyed to clear the land for the real estate developers who had bought it (see chapter 2). Farming was relegated to the margins, not only in terms of the ongoing diversification of job opportunities, but now also quite literally in space. I wonder what this new development will mean for the deaf people's subsistence and identity in the long term.

There are also questions regarding the current generation of deaf children. What will happen when they complete their education? Will they feel less marginalized than the deaf adults after having enjoyed an education? Will they be able to circumvent the marriage law, for example by moving and/or marrying outside Adamorobe? When moving outside the village, will they be subsumed by the (in several aspects much worse) marginalization of deaf people in Ghanaian society outside Adamorobe?

With regard to social interactions in Adamorobe, will there be many deaf spaces consisting only of (ex-)schoolchildren, as was the case during my fieldwork, or will they follow a similar pattern as the three homecomers, socializing to a greater extent in both deaf and hearing adult village life?

Finally, what language(s) will they use mostly? Nyst remarked that AdaSL is potentially endangered: the language is losing child speakers who use the language as their first language in everyday life.[189] For most of the year, the children from Adamorobe were not present in the village, which impacted their AdaSL fluency and their relationships with deaf adults in Adamorobe. Also, relationships between deaf children and hearing adults were far less intensive than relationships between hearing and deaf people who mostly stayed in the village. A full and radical shift to GSL is not possible as the hearing people in Adamorobe do not know this language. If at least some of the deaf schoolchildren stay to live in Adamorobe, I suspect that they will continue to use GSL with each other, AdaSL with the hearing people, and both languages with the largely unschooled deaf people. Perhaps their AdaSL will improve, their GSL accents in AdaSL lessen or disappear, like the language use of the homecomers, or maybe they will instead reinforce each other in the use of GSL.

It could be argued that, during my research, Adamorobe's habitus was no longer as inclusive and favorable for deaf people as it had been in the further past, as the deaf people expressed that they experienced negative consequences of historical processes described in the book. On the other hand, we should not see the influence of these processes as entirely dominating, overpowering, and removing the local ways of situating deaf people, not as yet. The local beliefs and practices were not replaced by these processes, but these processes and discourses supplemented the local ones. It appeared complexity and ambiguity had increased in Adamorobe, but this does not mean that people entirely lost touch with past ways. The shared cultural roots of AdaSL and Akan were emphasized and these languages were valued equally. AdaSL was seen and experienced as a unifying force for the inhabitants of the village. Also, through their everyday spatial practices and in their discourses, the deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe ultimately emphasized that in the end, deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe were "all one," "since time immemorial until the end of days."

What remained from Adamorobe tradition, to do "like the ancestors did," was strongly emphasized: both deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe stressed that there (still) *are* deaf–hearing conversations and that there

are interactions such as the greetings. In everyday life, deaf and hearing people in Adamorobe led their lives side by side, communicating through sign language. Differences between deaf and hearing people, ambiguity in social interactions, and historical changes in deaf–hearing relationships were not downplayed or ignored; in the end, these people chose to emphasize and celebrate unity and sameness in their everyday discourses.

Other questions arise with regard to another important development: the rapid influx of migrants has been driving down the overall percentage of deaf people in Adamorobe. In 2009 there were 2,500 residents; in 2012 there were 3,500, and the hills around the village were increasingly being cleared for new housing (thus resulting in the loss of farmlands). It is not clear if and how this change in the demographic structure of Adamorobe will impact upon the lives of deaf people in the village. I described in the book how the demographic processes (a steady influx of migrants) and socioeconomic processes (diversification) in Adamorobe had already contributed to a change in sign language practices and knowledge: less contact between deaf and hearing people, and thus less widespread knowledge and use of AdaSL. Asymmetries in daily communication situations (i.e., lack of accessibility to hearing conversations) were not caused by a conviction that AdaSL is limited or inferior, but were triggered or reinforced by the above-mentioned demographic and economic (and resulting sociolinguistic) changes.

While in the past, immigrants were likely to learn some AdaSL, new immigrants may not know or learn AdaSL, and we do not know what attitudes they will harbor toward deaf people. It is not yet clear whether and how communication happens in contact zones between deaf people and new immigrants, and if, and how, differences exist between the way that recently established hearing immigrants and long-term hearing residents conceptualize signed and spoken languages and gestures. Another strand of possible future investigation are ideas held by (both recent and established) immigrants with regard to deaf people, especially with regard to their knowledge, intelligence, potential, and limitations. Will the fact of the greater population of nonsigning migrants have an impact on the image that Adamorobeans have of their village, including the definition of Adamorobe as a "deaf village"? How will long-term and new inhabitants of Adamorobe regard the societal position of deaf people?

It is possible that the deaf population of Adamorobe and its language will become extinct as a result of the (changes in) migration and marriage patterns of both deaf and hearing people. The youngest deaf child

I met in Adamorobe was 11 years old in 2012. The changes in deaf and hearing marriage patterns might cause an effect comparable to the (near) extinction of the "deaf gene" in Martha's Vineyard.[190] The reduced circulation of the "deaf gene" in Adamorobe has two causes: First, the people from Adamorobe increasingly married people from outside Adamorobe. Second, deaf people were complying with the marriage law and having abortions. Abortion may be one of the main reasons why the prevalence of deafness was declining in Adamorobe, perhaps as much as the marriage law itself because the marriage law did not prevent all deaf people from starting relationships. Without these, there would be proportionally many more deaf people in the village today.

Hearing people regarded deaf people as part of the population, but wanted Adamorobe to lose the stigma of the name "deaf village." Although they saw interactions with deaf people as an inherent part of Adamorobe's everyday life, they did not seem to regard the presence of deaf people and of AdaSL as having value in themselves; they evidently regarded the former as an accident, coincidence, or fate, and the latter as an accommodation. The unique situation of deaf people in Adamorobe will probably become a relic of the past, and AdaSL is likely to disappear, because this language was only or mostly used by and with deaf people. Thus, although both deaf and hearing people from Adamorobe expressed unity, and the infiniteness of this unity ("since time immemorial"), and if there is no unexpected turn of events, "the end of days" for the deaf people of Adamorobe may come in the next few decades rather than in the distant future.

At times there was a deeply felt sorrow among the older deaf people: fewer deaf people were born, and remembering deaf people who had died therefore made them additionally bitter; deaths were deplored in utterances such as "Sooooo many deaf died, there were soooo many deaf here in the olden days." When the late Okoto died during the last week of my fieldwork, deaf people summed up the names of the deceased deaf people during the previous few years, to add Okoto to the list. They felt one of them was lost, and that the number of deaf people was further decreasing. Okoto's best friend Kwaku Duodo lamented, "They are all dead … (*sorry look*) Now there are mostly a looooooot of hearing." They expressed pride in the characteristics attributed to them (such as being hardworking and good fighters), pride in their "HARD" sign language. They felt embittered that the future existence of deaf people in Adamorobe was threatened. "It is all over," the old Yaa Awurabea used to sign.

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