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Producing and managing deviance in the disabled colonial self: John Kitto, the deaf traveller

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Introduction

In 1832 five articles appeared in the illustrated weekly paper the *Penny Magazine* by a man who identified himself as 'The Deaf Traveller'. Before going on to write about his journeys in the Middle East the author (John Kitto) explained to his readers that he 'lived in as total and absolute deafness as I suppose can be possibly experienced'. Kitto believed his readers would 'easily perceive' that his deafness 'must have given a very peculiar character' to the 'history' of his 'life' and 'travels', which would not 'diminish their interest' in the 'things' he had 'to tell.'ⁱ The premise of the articles was that his travelling to the East as a deaf man was extraordinary, or as he put it, a 'singular' thing to do. One might also say it was a 'deviant' thing to do disrupting as it did both the paradigm of the strong, able-bodied coloniser and that of the static disabled person unaffected by Empire.

This chapter explores the disabled colonial-self, a figure that in its very nature can be read as 'deviant'. Postcolonial analysis has traditionally focussed on two groups: the coloniser and the colonised. Such work importantly illuminated the stark power dynamics in colonial contexts, and the discursive power of the binary opposition drawn between them.ⁱⁱ But in the last two decades scholars have reflected on the problematic potential in drawing the line between them too strongly. Ann Laura Stoler, for example, has argued that the historiographical division between 'colonizer' and 'colonized' problematically reproduces two key constructs of imperial authority: firstly that Europeans in the colonies were a 'natural community' 'easily identifiable' in terms of their 'culture' and 'race'; and secondly that lines between the 'rulers' and the 'ruled' were easily drawn. Stoler argues that this conceptualisation bears little relation to the ambiguous realities of colonial rule using 'poor whites', women, children and servants as examples of where the boundary between 'coloniser' and 'colonised' was blurred.ⁱⁱⁱ Using the life of John Kitto, a deaf man who travelled to Malta and Baghdad in connection with missionary work and who produced a number of Orientalist writings, I argue that disability was another site of instability in the relationship between colonisers and colonised and that this transgression between the strong discursive lines separating 'self' from 'other' constitutes colonial deviance. Disability, I also argue, was an important axis of embodied difference that contributed to the complexity of colonial relations both at home and overseas and troubled the construction of the colonial self.

Deviance, disability and difference

The literary critic Rosemary Garland Thomas claims that disability is 'the paradigm of what culture calls deviant' and that the 'disabled figure' is 'the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and deviance'.^{iv} Thomson's argument draws on what are now the established claims of scholars of disability that, like 'race' and 'gender', 'disability' is a social construct rather than a medical reality.^v People who are deaf, blind, who have mobility difficulties or intellectual disabilities are not 'disabled' by their impairment; rather they are disabled by a society organised architecturally; socially; educationally; and economically around the able-bodied. As the historian of disability, Jacques-Henri Stiker has argued, disability and disabled populations always represent what is 'unlike', what 'should not exist' or what must be assimilated.^{vi}

The social malleability of disability, allows it to be imbued with whatever a society considers particularly deviant, disturbing or disruptive and to be inflected with ever-shifting fantasies of the 'extraordinary', 'monstrous' or 'incomplete' body.^{vii} In both Greek and Roman Antiquity, 'deformed' infants were exposed at birth and 'returned to the gods'.^{viii} From *Leviticus's* injunctions on the ritual 'uncleanliness' of the 'blind', 'lame' or 'hunchback' (*Lv*, 21, 17-23), to the miracle healings of the Gospels, Christianity's founding texts and subsequent teachings have been riddled with powerful and conflicting interpretations of disability.^{ix} Whilst disability was commonplace in the mediaeval and early modern periods, it was also linked with monstrosity, witchcraft, poverty and charity.^x The Enlightenment provoked new ways of conceptualising difference not least driving medicalised attempts to 'cure' the disabled and a particular fear of intellectual disability as 'throwback'. In the nineteenth century attitudes towards disability shifted and hardened as so have attitudes towards gender and race been argued to do.^{xi} As Sarah Chinn puts it 'disabled people were no longer just inferior versions of the able-bodied; rather, they were constitutionally different'.^{xii} It may be further argued that the 'hardening' of attitudes towards race and disability were not simply analogous phenomena but were part and parcel of the same process.^{xiii}

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries colonial expansion was highly formative in shaping the society and psyche of metropolitan Britain.^{xiv} Images of the colonial other were prevalent in cultural products from sermons to school-lessons, published literature to family letters, from missionary memoirs to museums, in public and private fantasies and fictions.^{xv} Analyses of colonial culture both 'at home' and overseas have demonstrated that the construction of the 'colonial other' was 'mutually constituted' with new ways of imagining the colonial self.^{xvi} Race, gender and class, have been staples of such analyses but disability has been little used by postcolonial scholars to understand the making of difference. The literary critic Felicity Nausbaum is one of the few exceptions and her argument that in the eighteenth century the difference of race, 'anomaly' and gender were intricately enmeshed gives much food for thought.^{xvii} Elsewhere I have argued that in a context when issues of race and empire gained increasing levels of cultural dominance, attitudes towards deafness and disability absorbed some of the associations of colonial difference.^{xviii} Diverse ways in which this can be seen include the exhibition of disabled and racialised others as 'freaks' in Victorian Britain; the discussion of intellectually disabled peoples as 'savage'; the framing of disabled populations in the language of 'discovery'; and in 'scientific' discussions of whether Down Syndrome (or in contemporary usage 'Mongolianism') was a 'race' or a 'disability'.

In colonial discourse disability is usually associated with the body of the colonised. The colonial 'other' was often represented as physically, mentally and spiritually 'defective', lacking in intellect, prone to sickness, and 'mutilated' by indigenous customs. Such discursive alignments posed disability amongst *colonisers* as doubly deviant. Not only was disability here as elsewhere a disruption of the able-bodied norm but it problematically aligned white colonisers with a racialised other. In many ways, disabled British people in their very existence disrupted ideas about the Anglo-Saxons as a 'superior', 'imperial race'. In Britain, disabled people potentially represented 'degenerate' otherness, a 'class' of people estranged from 'mainstream' society. To the anxiety of many the irregular genetic and epidemiological causes of congenital deafness meant it always threatened to emerge within the 'imperial race' itself.

In this chapter I want to examine the ambivalence of disability in the colonial self, particularly by focussing on how the deviance of disability was produced and managed by colonial actors and how

this was spatially contingent. Whilst often understood as a passive condition, disability, like other identities is partly performative, produced and managed by individuals with impairments and those around them. Being disabled requires a constant negotiation with the valued norm. As Thompson puts it 'disabled people must learn to manage relationships from the beginning...disabled people must use charm, intimidation, ardour, deference, humor [sic], or entertainment to relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort.'^{xxix} In a colonial context geography and 'race' shaped the way in which disability, naturalised as embodied and 'fixed', was produced, decoded or, conversely, able to pass undetected. Inspired by Clare Anderson and others' recent discussions of the utility of life writing to illuminate those often considered 'marginal' to the colonial encounter as well as connections between disparate spaces, contexts and ideas, I explore these interaction through the life and writings of John Kitto the so-called 'deaf traveller'.^{xx}

John Kitto the Deaf Traveller

Kitto was born (hearing) in Plymouth in 1804 to a working-class and deeply impoverished family. Deafened at the age of twelve and unable to be supported by his alcoholic father Kitto spent his adolescence in a workhouse and was reliant on reading and writing in order to communicate. His desire to learn attracted the attention of local philanthropists who went on to provide for his formal education. As a young man he worked in Malta as a missionary assistant, and then in Baghdad as a tutor for the sons of an English missionary there. When Kitto returned to Britain in 1832 he started a career as a writer and Biblical scholar and had a prolific textual output. Despite considerable success, in middle-age, Kitto suffered from financial ruin, chronic pain and the loss of three children. He died at the age of 51 in 1854 in the German spa town of Cannstatt where he had travelled to for treatment.^{xxi}

Kitto is not the kind of subaltern whose lives Clare Anderson has illuminated. Unlike her examples, he left extensive written records, including those that were autobiographical. He was a published writer, and in his short lifetime received international recognition for his work including an honorary doctorate. On the other hand, as a deaf man, Kitto experienced marginalisation and discrimination. His body deviated significantly from that of the archetypical able-bodied coloniser: not only was he deaf but his short stature (he was 4 foot 8 inches) was also a source of personal disappointment and frustration. He experienced significant poverty both as a child and as an adult and his class background excluded him from certain literary circles. In mapping Kitto's movements from metropolitan sites to those of formal and informal colonialism, I am in part mapping these slippages in status. In doing so, I hope to address wider questions about the construction of the colonial self; the ambivalence of individuals who occupied positions as both subordinated and subordinator; and the significance of colonial encounter as terrains where deviance was produced and managed.

To date, Kitto has received little historical attention, though his publications have been of interest to literary scholars and literary theologians.^{xxii} Of particular interest to me here is Eitan Bar-Yosef's article on Kitto's 6-part series, 'The Deaf Traveller', written for *The Penny Magazine*.^{xxiii} In it, Bar-Yosef discusses of the construction of the 'Victorian disabled traveller' and the perceived paradox created by disabled people (associated with stasis) who were geographically-mobile. In particular, I draw on his argument that Kitto and other travellers with disabilities 'problematized the very notion the able-bodied traveller, given that all travellers, particularly those ignorant of local languages, encounter obstacles of the unfamiliar'.^{xxiv}

This points us towards the socio-spatial contingency of disability. What is considered, performed and experienced as disability (and hence as deviance) differs according to one's positioning both geographically and socially. When in Britain, John Kitto, was primarily read as deaf, an identity that was stigmatized, and indeed racialised, as an internal colonised 'other'. Yet when he was abroad, Kitto was read as a white, British, Protestant man who carried with him the racialised privileges of the 'self', the colonial elite. Whilst 'new imperial' scholarship has increasingly recognised that 'home' and 'away' were mutually constituted zones in the nineteenth century, they were nonetheless terrains where identities were articulated, performed and managed distinctly. On some occasions deviants 'at home' were yet more troubling 'overseas' where they embodied a collapse of easy colonial categories of 'self' and 'other' and in so doing threatened the performance of superiority upon which colonialism relied. At other points individuals deemed 'deviant' in the metropole, including disabled people, seem less so overseas due to their alignment with white privilege and power. Imperial Britain was also a colonial space, albeit one where the rule of difference was less violently enforced than overseas. As such the language of difference and otherness developed in the Empire could be used 'at home' to identify what may be termed 'internal others' split off and rejected from the colonial self.

At home: deaf as 'other' in a quasi-colonial encounter

Kitto lost his hearing at the age of twelve when he slipped when helping his father to slate a roof and fell backwards onto the paved court below. When he woke from a coma two weeks later he was surprised to find he struggled to communicate with the anxious relatives around his bed. In Kitto's words, 'one more clever than the rest more clever than the rest, hit upon the happy expedient of writing upon a slate' soon the writer 'displayed upon his slate the awful words, "YOU ARE DEAF"'.^{xxv} This constituted a major trauma and a marking point in his life. Disability differs from other categories of identity, such as class, ethnicity and gender in the extent of its malleability both in terms of the extent of change (one moves between the false binaries of 'non-disabled' and 'disabled') and the commonality with which change occurs within an individual life-cycle. Of course other identities can also shift, but gender and ethnicity, for example, nonetheless tend to be more stable markers than that of disability in terms of the scale of change. Today, it is estimated that only about 14% of disability is evident from birth, by far the majority of disabling conditions are acquired.^{xxvi} Whilst it is impossible to calculate the exact numbers of deaf people in the nineteenth century, taken as a proportion of the overall population, there were many more deaf people in Britain in the past than there are today. Illnesses causing deafness (such as scarlet fever; mumps; chicken pox; influenza; measles; meningitis; and rubella) were prolific and there were higher rates of industrial accidents. Furthermore, what today might be considered a moderate or 'correctable' hearing loss, had profound social implications as audio-enhancing technology was of poor quality and, for those like John Kitto prohibitively expensive.

That Kitto lost his hearing at the onset of adolescence meant that deafness functioned as a key element in his identity formation, in how he was viewed and in how he viewed the world.^{xxvii} In this way Kitto differs from those deafened in adulthood such as Harriet Martineau, perhaps a better known deaf and disabled traveller.^{xxviii} That he was *deafened*, rather than born deaf, was also highly significant in the way in which Kitto forged his deaf identity, it was linked with trauma, parental neglect, and loss. It meant he had good familiarity with the English language and this remained his key means of communication even though, after his accident, this meant conversing by written

notes and the manual alphabet,^{xxxix} rather than speech. Acquiring deafness through an accident also meant that Kitto would not have been subject to the anxieties and prejudices projected onto the congenitally deaf in this period who were believed to be intrinsically 'degenerate'. By the age of 12, Kitto had also already formed his prejudices about disability and, like hearing contemporaries, saw the deaf as a deeply deviant group.

The experience of deaf people in metropolitan Britain can be read as a quasi-colonial encounter in which deaf people were situated as a deviant other.^{xxx} Many Deaf^{xxxxi} activists discuss the encounters between deaf and hearing people as colonial. Harlan Lane, for example, claims members of Deaf cultures as linguistic minorities, with a distinct culture, that suffer the 'physical subjugation of a disempowered people, the imposition of alien language and mores, and the regulation of education on behalf of the colonizer's goals'.^{xxxii} The roots of this 'colonial' relationship can be seen in the medical and educational 'advancements' of the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. The link long drawn in western philosophy between language and thought meant that without speech, deaf people were imagined unable to think, reason, or believe in God.^{xxxiii} Often conceived as 'idiotic', deaf people were sometimes unable to inherit; denied access to the courts; and refused education.^{xxxiv} Medical 'advancements' in this period were also problematic, painful and ineffective.^{xxxv} Kitto himself described how various doctors 'poured into my tortured ears various infusions, hot and cold; they bled me they blistered me, leached me, physicked, me and at last, they put a watch between my teeth, and on finding that I was unable to distinguish the ticking, they gave it up as a bad case, and left me to my fate.'^{xxxvi} Later in the century, fears about the creation of what was called 'a deaf variety of the human race' were used to discourage deaf people from marrying and reproducing.^{xxxvii} These interventions were justified on the grounds that deaf people fell outside what it meant to be a thinking, functioning, person.^{xxxviii}

Constructions of deaf people as a 'degraded' and 'heathen' people in need of civilisation and salvation also carried colonial and racial connotations. In the same manner that indigenous language were dismissed as incapable of conveying the intricacies of 'civilised' thought, the rhetoric of racial discrimination was often deployed to claim the 'deaf and dumb' were 'savages' stuck at a 'primitive' stage of 'evolution' and that their language was 'degraded'.^{xxxix} The sensational discovery of the 'savage of Aveyron', a 'wild' boy without speech and possibly deaf, who lived 'naked' in the woods until he was eventually captured and examined, raised fears about 'primitive' Europeans at a time when 'savagery' was being increasingly located overseas.^{xl} Baynton has discussed the 'ethnicisation' of deaf people in late nineteenth-century America where the use of sign-language marked their exclusion from the nation and concerns about racial 'degeneracy' were applied to groups defined by supposed ethnicity and supposed ability alike.^{xli} In Britain and Ireland earlier links can be drawn between the treatment of deaf people and wider processes of colonisation, including those of a more 'humanitarian' model. In some publications, deaf people, like the 'degraded' Indians and Africans of Empire, or the slum-dwellers of London's East End, were explicitly labelled as 'heathens' who needed rescuing.^{xlii} Deaf asylums were imagined to be so unlike the hearing world as to be as far away as an overseas territory. Joseph Hatton, for example, wrote on his 'exploration' of the Margate Deaf Asylum in language reminiscent of that of an imperial traveller: 'Deaf-and-Dumb-Land is a new country to me... I experienced some of the sensations of a discoverer.'^{xliii} This imagery is not only about geographical distance but also about colonial otherness. The use of such metaphors, and indeed the shared practices of exclusion that went with them, are useful in thinking about the

splitting of deviant elements from the colonial self and the projection and containment of them into a 'foreign', geographically removed, other.

Kitto was keen to distance himself from such tropes and, as a deaf person who was literate in English and claimed to 'abominate' sign language, occupied an ambivalent position in regards to the British deaf community. Kitto was at pains to distance himself from other deaf people particularly the group he, like hearing commentators, labelled the 'uneducated deaf and dumb'.^{xliv} In his biographical writing about deafness, Kitto uses a 'deaf and dumb boy', only conversant in sign-language, met in his youth, to serve as an example of the kind of deaf person that Kitto himself was not. The boy exemplifies many of the stereotypes of deaf people in this period, impoverished, isolated and unteachable. Later in life, Kitto was deeply offended to have been connected with the Deaf and Dumb Institution and strove to distinguish himself from 'deaf mutes'.^{xlv}

Yet Kitto was also acutely aware of his own outsiderhood. Following his accident, Kitto found that the way in which he was viewed, even by his family, completely changed. 'I was no longer required to resume my former labours' he later wrote, 'and it is now clear to me, that I was considered to have been rendered useless by my affliction'.^{xlvi} Not only was he thus excluded from the possibilities of work and 'independence' that were cornerstones to Victorian masculinity, but his embodied ways of being were considered deviant. His need to write things down or finger-spell his conversation with his companions, was conspicuous, and drew attention in the streets.^{xlvii} His voice, which he only acquired at all after an episode discussed below, was guttural and unregulated, his accent marked him as different, and significantly as 'foreign'. 'Those ... who do not know me', he wrote 'often take me for a foreigner'.... 'I am told my voice is unlike the voices of other men', suggesting a sense of gendered as well as racial deviance.^{xlviii} He was aware of what disability scholars have called the 'disabled gaze', a parallel ocular identification of difference that has been discussed by post-colonial scholars as 'the colonial gaze'.^{xlix} He writes of the way in which his voice, unvarying in volume and thus, in quiet streets, perceived by those around him as too loud, attracted stares. Walking down Burlington Arcade he was 'lost in astonishment' to find everyone to stop and stare at him with what he described as 'that rude gaze which I take to be characteristic of the English people, as I never noticed the like of it in any country through which I have travelled'.¹ Whilst it is possible that this stare was peculiarly English, Kitto's interpretation also suggests that he felt most conspicuously deviant as a disabled person in Britain. Because of the alignment of difference with what was colonial in this period, and the slippage between languages of race and disability in the nineteenth century, Kitto's encounters 'at home', can in some ways be read not only as deviant but as having a quasi-colonial dimension. So pervasive was colonial discourse in the nineteenth century that it shaped the way in which other forms of difference were seen and recognised including back in metropolitan Britain.

Overseas: disabilities in spaces of formal and informal influence

When deaf people travelled to the Empire, the complex and fluid intersections between ethnicity and disability were further contorted. British people with disabilities could be immensely troubling to white communities overseas anxious to project an image of the superior mental and physical capacity of Europeans to indigenous people. It also threatened to disrupt wider colonial discourses where 'sickness' was increasingly associated with the colonial 'other', of Africa as a 'sick continent' for example, of Bengal as the 'home' of cholera or of indigenous peoples across the globe as needy

patients for western biomedicine.^{li} From a different perspective, operating in a colonial sphere where they were often read through their race as well as their disability provided some deaf people with an opportunity to circumnavigate some of the disadvantages posed by deafness at home. The empire could also be a space where new identities could be tested and tried out, including those considered deviant.

Having undergone an important 'change' and growth of 'spiritual life' during his late teens, Kitto resolved to work, in some capacity, as a missionary. This was an ambitious decision for a deaf man. Highly conscious of the costs of supporting incapacitated missionaries, and saturated with their own prejudices around mental, physical and spiritual 'health', most nineteenth-century missionary societies systematically filtered out disabled applicants. The London Missionary Society, for example, automatically rejected all candidates who had experienced, or had a family history of epilepsy, mental illness, speech impediments or deafness - all conditions believed to impede a candidate's ability to learn a foreign language.^{liii} When it had been first raised, Kitto too, saw a missionary career as an impossibility thinking himself 'entirely incompetent to the duties of so arduous a station' and believing his 'deafness' to be an 'obstacle'.^{liiii} But a solution was found where Kitto could make a textual contribution: he would go as a printer, the printed pamphlet being a staple tool for proslytization in this period. Even then, his admittance to overseas missionary work was far from guaranteed, but Kitto was relieved to receive notice that 'The Committee [of the Church Missionary Society] did not consider my deafness as any material impediment to my usefulness as a printer at one of the Society's stations' and so Kitto went to London to train.^{liv} On 20 June 1827, he set sail to Malta in that capacity.

The moment when Kitto left England for the first time, on the ship to his new station, marked a major psychological and physiological change in how he performed his deafness. Ever since his fall Kitto had spoken with 'pain and difficulty', 'in a voice so greatly altered as to be not easily understood' and one, which as noted above, that troubled his ethnic and gendered identification. Due to intense self-consciousness about speaking, Kitto had induced others to believe that he was 'mute' – communicating only through writing or the manual alphabet. But when on the ship to Malta, Kitto's travelling companions, Dr. Korck, a German physician, and Mr. Jadownicky, a converted Polish Jew, realised that Kitto *could* in fact use his voice, but choose to not. Kitto later explained how, with the ship's captain, the two had 'entered into a conspiracy', refusing to understand 'a word I said, otherwise than orally throughout the voyage'. Kitto claimed that 'as I had much to ask...I made very great progress with my tongue during the six weeks' voyage, and by the time we reached our destination, had almost overcome the habit of clutching a pen or pencil to answer every question that was asked me.'^{liv} The shift was likely in part due to the psycho-dynamics of his relationship with Krock and Jadowvicky, but the striking nature of the change, previously believed by Kitto to have been impossible, is suggestive of the power of the liminal space of the ship. The only Englishman on board, and suspended between metropole and colony, the ship may be read as equivocal colonial sphere where all identities were liable to transition.^{lvi} In leaving Britain, Kitto seemed to leave behind his primary personal as a 'deaf-mute' and come to be seen, in the first instance, as an Englishman abroad..

Kitto arrived in Malta later in 1827. At this point Malta occupied the unusual position of being a colony in Europe. Kitto was horrified by its Catholicism, which he saw as utterly other. He wrote of the Maltese as utterly 'other', full of the 'zeal of error against truth, of darkness against light'.^{lvii}

These othering tendencies were extenuated still further when, little more than two years later, he was employed as the tutor for the sons of a missionary and travelled with the family to where they were to be stationed in Baghdad.

Baghdad was a cosmopolitan city with diverse populations of Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Jews, Armenian Christians, Russians and other, small, European communities where many British people were engaged with informal imperialism, not least through the missionary activity with which Kitto was associated. In this period, Baghdad was also in the midst of extreme political turbulence. Kitto's time there coincided with the dispossession of the Mamluk rulers and reimposition of direct Ottoman rule by Ali Ridha Pasha; a protracted siege; and outbreaks of cholera and plague. But Kitto was much impressed by the city, a place he described as 'the renowned seat of an Empire which stretched its gigantic arms from the Indus to the Mediterranean, and the great scene of Arabian Tale and romance'.^{lviii} Reaching Baghdad was in itself a subversion of what it meant to be deaf as Kitto himself was aware, as he reflected:

'At one time I had no idea but that I should spend my days in the obscurities of my humble location, and then, when this view was altered, it seemed so much the tendency of my deafness, to make me a fixture, in some chimney-corner, that I should quite as soon, perhaps sooner, have thought of crossing the rivers of the moon, as the Neva, the Volga, the Terek, the Araxes or the Tigris.'^{lix}

In Baghdad, Kitto felt himself to be primarily read as 'European' and, significantly, this gave him the potential to pass as hearing, at least in his interactions with the Armenian, Jewish, Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish communities that lived there. The fluid and cosmopolitan nature of Baghdad itself contributed to the dilution of Kitto's 'outsider' identity. The ethnically diverse populations, not always conversant in the same languages, often resorted to gesture or pantomime to convey their meaning. Kitto, always reliant on non-verbal communication, excelled at interpreting such gestures. He believed that, in Baghdad, his occasional signing caused him 'to seem to them rather as a foreigner ignorant of their language, than as deaf; and the resort to signs had not strangeness to them or attracted that notice from others which it never fails to do in this country [Britain]'.^{lx} Conversely, Kitto could also use *speech* to pass as a hearing British person, also recording examples when, *not* wanting to communicate, he spoke in English knowing that although his guttural voice was not likely to be understood, as it seldom was by strangers, those encountering it would attribute the mis-understanding to their own unfamiliarity with English rather than Kitto's own difficulties with speech. Occupying a position of power, be it one designated by racialised, gendered, or abelist status, could entail the authority to dictate who or what was, and was not, deviant. Part of the power of the coloniser in colonial spaces was the ability to define deviance.

Even more identifiable performances of deafness, such as finger-spelling, could be represented in the colonial field, not as deviant, but as one of the wondrous European 'achievements' brought to unEuropean spaces. 'How greatly did not... the natives of the country, - marvel at it', Kitto wrote of finger-spelling, 'as at one of the mysteries which might have been hidden under the seal of Solomon. And how pleasant was it to behold the reverence and admiration of THE USEFUL eradiate their swart countenances when the simple principle of the art was explained to them, and it was shown to be as available FOR THIER OWN LANGUAGES – Arabian, Persian, Turkish – as for any other.'^{lxi} Here finger-spelling is imbued with the same awe-inspiring powers that missionaries describe the written

word to have had in other contexts. Finger-spelling is not represented here as a signifier of disability, but as another example of the enlightened technology of the European.

In his interactions with the European communities in Baghdad or amongst British Protestants in Malta, however, Kitto continued to feel marked as deviant, his body holding within it the contradictions in the colonial community and regime. In Malta Kitto was disappointed to his colleagues. His ankles (which had been weak since his fall) were not strong enough to stand at a printing case for ten hours a day; he did not enjoy conversation with his colleagues as he found it difficult to follow due to his hearing loss; and complained that his colleagues did not understand his 'privations' as a deaf man.^{lxii} This was not acceptable and Kitto returned to Britain only two years later in the midst of considerable bad feeling. In Baghdad, both Kitto and his colleagues seem to have accepted without question that his being deaf 'preclud[ed]' him from many tasks abroad including 'from any occupation that can be called *missionary*.'^{lxiii} Kitto appears to have internalised the view that deaf people were 'disqualified' from the possibilities and responsibilities enjoyed by his hearing colleagues. In a personal letter written when Baghdad was ravaged by cholera, and the family he was staying with fell sick, he wrote of 'the hard prospect' his employer must have faced 'of leaving his young family and affairs in the hands of a deaf man, unacquainted with the language, and quite ignorant of managing business in these countries.'^{lxiv} Here, deafness and his Englishness are aligned in the perceived difficulties of communication overseas. Kitto presents himself as unmanly almost, unable to step in to defend the young family.

Back home: textual constructions of the colonial other and self

Having returned to Britain in 1832, Kitto never left Europe again. But his relationship with both the geographical spaces of the informal Empire and the conceptual spaces occupied by the 'eastern other' were sustained and extended in the remainder of his life through his writing which included travel writing, children's stories, ethnographical accounts and Biblical scholarship. In representing 'the East' and making it part of the imagined world of its nineteenth-century British readership, Kitto, like so many other writers, created images of Empire with which the British engaged and influenced how they imagined the colonial other. He also shaped his own positioning within this Empire.

As a white, Englishman in Britain, Kitto occupied a dominant, valued and invisibilised ethnic status. At the same time, his deafness resurged as a deviant condition, effecting how he was perceived and how he experienced the world. In his letters Kitto recorded more 'annoyance in consequence of [his] deafness' when travelling from Plymouth to London, than in his travels all around the Middle East together.^{lxv} Kitto was, however, viewed differently to before he had left Britain when he returned. He had undergone a major class transition, finding upward mobility in his writing. The authority that he had gained by visiting and observing 'overseas' places fed into his new authorial identity. Textual production, in which the author may, to some extent, be seen as non-embodied, offered new ways in which to negotiate the embodied deviance of deafness. Imperial travel writings were also, of course, an important media through which images of Empire were transmitted to the British public and new ideas about otherness were framed.^{lxvi}

Kitto's first published writings were five papers entitled: 'The Deaf Traveller', a series commissioned for and published in *The Penny Magazine* in 1832. As implied by the title, Kitto's deafness was essential to his authorial identity in these pieces and his travels believed to be of public interest

precisely because of it.^{lxvii} As mentioned in the opening of this chapter Kitto believed his readers would 'easily perceive' that his deafness 'must have given a very peculiar character' to the 'history' of his 'life' and 'travels'.^{lxviii} Interestingly, however, having set himself up so overtly as 'the Deaf Traveller', in the pieces themselves Kitto hardly made any reference to his deafness whatsoever, and, unlike in his private writings, he does not mention experiences which may have offered an additional or different perspective to that of a hearing person. It may be argued that Kitto's decision not to mention his deafness at the same time as the decisive marketing of his accounts as a 'Deaf Traveller', may suggest that the writings were an attempt to resist the construction of deafness as 'deviant'. From a different perspective, doctors and educationalists too, were trying, in this period, to suggest that deaf people could be *made* 'normal' through oralist education. In much the same way that missionaries displayed Christians of colour in western dress as 'evidence' of 'civilisation', they exhibited deaf people who had been 'taught to speak' to demonstrate the wonders of their professions. Unlike the 'talking deaf and dumb' required to perform by their teachers and doctors, however, Kitto, exercised considerable agency in presenting himself. He negotiated deafness both as an 'exotic' condition which would excite a reader's interest, and yet as one that did not deviate too far from able-bodied norms.

Kitto's later writings included *The Pictorial Bible* which was published in three large volumes between 1835 and 1838; *History of Palestine and the Holy Land, including a Complete History of the Jews* (2 volumes 1841); the *Cyclopeadia of Biblical Literature* (2 volumes, 1848) and *History of Palestine from the Patriarchal Age to the Present Time* (1852); As in the accounts of contemporary Orientalists, Kitto's whiteness, masculinity, learning and familiarity through travel with the places about which he is writing, combine to create the authoritative voice typical of a colonial writer. Characteristic tropes include his 'ethnographic' descriptions of place and people and the collapsing of space and time in depictions of the 'East' where the assumption is made that by looking at Palestine and Persia in the 1830s one would 'see' the 'Biblical Land' of two millennia earlier.^{lxix} Although Kitto is sometimes present in these narratives (e.g. in his discussion of his difficulty in sitting cross-legged), his deafness is entirely omitted. Given that 'The Deaf Traveller' series was published semi-anonymously (under 'J.K.'), his readers were not necessarily able to connect the pieces and were often unaware that Kitto was deaf. 'There has not... been any studious concealment or deep secret in the matter', Kitto said of the omission, 'it has rather been my wish that I should not seem to owe any part of the success I might attain as an author, to the sympathies which my sufficiently singular personal history might be likely to produce.'^{lxx} Writing offered Kitto an opportunity to pass as hearing as he was disembodied in his writing; he felt the admiration his work received would be undermined if his deafness was known.

Yet Kitto also produced one of the most striking memoirs of deafness of the Victorian period, *The Lost Senses*, in which he wrote in great detail about the physical and emotional aspects of his deafness, from his experience of sonic vibrations to an acutely personal account of his struggle to control his vocal chords. In some ways, *The Lost Senses* can be read as an attempt to navigate the perception of deafness as deviant discussing the manual alphabet in the same terms as a discussion of Greek and Hebrew, for example, a move that clearly associated the manual alphabet with the status of classical learning.^{lxxi} At the same time, however, the self is split. The foil onto which Kitto projects his anxieties about deafness are sign-language users. In Kitto's writing, as with that of hearing contemporaries, sign-language (as opposed to the manual alphabet) is associated with otherness, and in turn that otherness is orientalising. He comments that 'The signs used by the

Oriental to express universal acts and object' he saw on his travels 'not to be materially different from those which my former deaf-mute companion had employed.'^{lxxii} He also reproduces at length the writing of several scholars, describing sign language as a 'natural language' used amongst the hearing 'savages of America', drawing the established association between sign-language, 'primitive' communication, and otherness, that also added a colonial dimension to his writing.^{lxxiii}

In thinking about the relationship between colonialism, deviance and disability, it is significant that one of the most striking ways in which Kitto attempts to navigate the deviance of deafness in *The Lost Senses* is in his framing of the disability he experiences at home, through the more accepted idiom of travel. Kitto began *The Lost Senses* with a statement about his deafness explaining that he felt to lie 'under the same obligation to the public of describing [my] condition, as a traveller is under to render his report respecting the unexplored countries which he has traversed.'^{lxxiv} In the context of imperial Britain, where such travel was associated with status, the imaginary imperial terrain repositioned a deaf identity not in the position of the colonised but in that of the coloniser.

Conclusion

This chapter has used deafness to explore notions of deviance in the colonial self as constituted by experiences in metropolitan Britain, formed through colonial encounters overseas, and generated through textual production. I have argued that disability, though seldom considered by postcolonial historians, was an important axis in the construction of deviance and of colonial difference. In the nineteenth century many of these fantasies around disability (including those of dependency, deviance, and deformity) were inflected by the language of colonial difference. Whilst the treatment of the deaf in Britain was very different to the treatment of colonial others overseas, it shared with them practices of exclusion, subjugation and denial. These attributions were performative and contingent in part of colonial positioning. Deaf, white British people, slipped between positions of colonized and colonizer as they moved around the Empire both produced deviance and enabled those labelled as deviant to manage that label.

Here, I have traced these negotiations through the life and work of the deaf traveller John Kitto, to explore the way in which disability could disrupt and transgress colonial discourses. But some of my arguments have wider implications. Firstly, the chapter has made an implicit argument that colonial deviance can not only be formed in formal colonies but also in metropolitan Britain, spaces of informal imperial influence and in the imagination through textual production. Secondly, in arguing that the bodies of disabled colonisers were intrinsically deviant, I have suggested that the body of the coloniser more generally was a vulnerable site in colonial relations. And thirdly, in arguing that disability never simply existed but was produced, performed and managed in a manner contingent not only on time and place, I have also sort to argue for the spatial and social contingency of deviance. As such, I have attempted to show that disability can help us to both understand the 'lived realities' of colonial actors themselves and to understand the role played by deviance in identity-formation and the creation of social categories.

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ⁱ J. Kitto (1833) 'The Deaf Traveller, No. 1', *The Penny Magazine*, p. 310.

ⁱⁱ F. Fanon (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London); F. Fanon (2007) *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, New Edition (New York).

ⁱⁱⁱ A.L. Stoler (2002) *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: race and the intimate in colonial rule* (California), p. 42. See also A.L. Stoler (1989) 'Rethinking Colonial Categories: European communities and the boundaries of rule', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1), pp. 134-61.

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^v M. Oliver (2009) *Understanding Disability: from theory to practice*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke), pp. 41-58.

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^{vii} For changing constructions of disability across time and places see for example, essays in D.M. Turner and K. Stagg, eds (2006) *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity* (London). For disability as deviant see Margrit Shildrick (2012) *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality* (Basingstoke).

^{viii} Stiker, *A History of Disability*, p. 39.

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- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*
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- ^{xxiv} *Ibid.*, 139.
- ^{xxv} J. Kitto (1845) *The Lost Senses* (London), p. 12.
- ^{xxvi} Indeed many disability activists talk about those who are not disabled as the 'temporarily able bodied' to signify the fragility of the condition, not least as one ages.
- ^{xxvii} Kitto, *The Lost Senses*, pp. 1-17.
- ^{xxviii} On whom see S. Bohrer (2003) 'Harriet Martineau: Gender, Disability and Liability', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 25, pp. 21-37.
- ^{xxix} It is important to note that the 'manual alphabet', 'finger spelling' or as Kitto himself often put it 'finger-talk' is a manually transcribed form of the English language, not a language in its own right. In this way it is radically different from British Sign Language (BSL), for example, which is a language entirely independent to English with its own grammar and vocabulary. Whilst Kitto was an enthusiastic user of the manual alphabet he 'abominated' sign language.
- ^{xxx} For more on the intersections between disability and colonialism see M. Sherry (2007) 'Postcolonizing Disability', *Wagadu*, 4, pp. 10-22 and A. Quayson (2002) 'Looking Awry: tropes of disability in postcolonial writing', in David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson, eds, *Relocating Postcolonialism* (Oxford), pp. 217-31.
- ^{xxxi} In Deaf politics 'deaf' (with a 'small d') is used as an adjective to denote not being able to hear; Deaf (with a 'capital d') is used to denote an identity (in the same way as Black operates as a political identity) and may, in some cases, be used to describe a hearing person closely affiliated with the Deaf community. In this chapter, I use this distinction only when discussing contemporary theoretical work by Deaf scholars and historians. In the nineteenth-century the distinction did not exist. As I shall explore, Kitto's identification with a d/Deaf identity is highly ambivalent and I discuss him as 'deaf' throughout to minimise confusion.
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- ^{xlvi} Kitto, *The Lost Senses*, p. 74.
- ^{xlvii} *Ibid.*, p. 100
- ^{xlviii} Kitto, 'The Deaf Traveller, No. 1', p. 310.
- ^{xlix} R. Garland-Thomson (2009), *Staring: how we Look* (New York).
- ^l Kitto, *Lost Senses*, p. 28.
- ^{li} See for example: W. Anderson (2002) *The Cultivation of Whiteness, Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne); M. Harrison (1999) *Climates and Constitutions: health, race, environment and British Imperialism in India 1600-1850* (Oxford); M. Vaughan (1991) *Curing their Ills: colonial power and African illness* (Stanford).
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- ^{liii} J. Kitto (18 April 1824) 'Diary', reproduced in Ryland, *Memoirs*, 138.
- ^{liv} Kitto in Ryland, *Memoirs*, p. 113. [I now can't find this quote – check original in the BL].
- ^{lv} Kitto, *The Lost Senses*, pp. 20-2.
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