Disability, human rights and the global South

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Topics

• Disability in the Majority World (global South)
• Northern-ness of disability theory
• The centrality of colonialism
• The coming of UNCRPD
• The Importance of UNCRPD
• Eurocentric nature of human rights
• The paradox of Human Rights for the global South
Disability in the Majority world

- 600 million disabled people globally
- **400 million live in the global south**

- 20% malnutrition
- 16% accident and war
- 11% infectious diseases
- 20% congenital diseases
- 20% non infectious diseases
- 13% other (ageing)

WHO figures
Northernness of disability theory and processes of scholarly colonialism

The dominance of the global North results in 3 textual moves:

1. The Claim of Universality
2. Reading from the Centre (global North)
3. Grand Erasure

(Connell 2007:44)
The centrality of colonisation and colonialism

• Colonisation: Production of disability as a result of
  – invasion of lands owned by First Peoples.
  – theft of land, resources and cultural heritage/sites
  – destruction of prior culture
  – representation of Aboriginal peoples as ‘non humans’

• Colonialism paved the way for 20\textsuperscript{th} globalisation that allows the disabling of people in the global South.

• Disability and impairment as a discourse foreign to much thinking in global South (sub Sahara, Aboriginal Australia)
The coming of the UNCRPD

- Initiated by Mexico 2001 driven by the global politics of development
- Biggest victory for the global disability movement
- Adopted a social discourse rather than a medical discourse
- Recognised disability as a human rights issue
The Importance of UNCRPD

• Can be used as an instrument to change structural processes of disablement internally in nations as well as globally

• Article 32 International Cooperation - place pressure on global development institutions to include disability

• Formation of new global alliances – for example International Network of Women With Disabilities
Eurocentric nature of human rights (HR)

• Claims to universality or continuation of colonialism?
• Politics of impairment (assumed be be be natural) important for understanding situation in global South- redistributive justice
• global South violate HR & victims ‘rescued’ by agencies from the global North (Mutua 2008)
• US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq justified by HR and democratic agenda
The paradox of Human Rights

• “One of the paradoxes of contemporary neoliberalism is that it promises freedom and human rights, but leaves most disabled people in impoverished, socially isolated situations, with few safeguards and protections, struggling for the basic dignities of life”

Sherry in Gill, M & Schlund-Vials, C (eds) 2014
The paradox of Human Rights for the global South

• Individualised rights – not collective
• Globalisation can weaken capacity of nation states to act and take responsibility for violations of rights
• Natural and ecological catastrophes, malnutrition result in impairments beyond capacity of state
Conclusion: towards an emancipatory politics

• Optimism in the internationalisation of human rights – especially voices of disabled people from global South.

• Research from the global South

• Global South may use and ‘subvert’ UNCRPD to produce different emancipatory politics

• Politics of impairment – social dynamics in bodies in global South need to be recognised and supported by disability movement of the North.
References