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Esme Cleall, Global Histories of Disability: Thinking about Power, Place and Personhood

A 'Global Moment' for Disability History?

In many ways, the labels 'Global History' and 'Disability History' appear an unusual coupling. Putting aside the vast variations within each of these research areas and simply thinking about the main themes that emerge from each field, it is clear their concerns have hitherto been rather different. Global History, a label which evokes the grandest scale of all, has tended to focus on issues such as globalisation, mobility, migration, networks of connection and the growth of world empires.[1] Disability History, meanwhile, has tended to take smaller frameworks, looking at the establishment of institutions, for example, within specific national and local contexts, or at the development of special education in a specific nation state.[2]

There are, however, problematic tenets behind an imaginative gulf between Global History and Disability History. One presumption is that 'mobility', which has proved such an important theme in Global History, is less relevant to disabled people (and we might argue that the very term 'mobility' in this context has dubious ableist inflections) because of the ongoing association between disability and stasis. Another mistaken presumption is that the lives of disabled people are apolitical; as though, read through the bodily, they can somehow be abstracted from the 'big stories' of political change. There have also been different historiographical approaches to the relative fields. Global History has been influenced more by Political and Economic History whilst Disability History has largely been dominated by Social History – recovering the lives of disabled people through small-focus investigations and has not easily taken on global aspirations.[3]

One of the problems with trying to write the Global History of anything, let alone Global Histories of Disability, is how to cope with the large scale that is involved, even though, of

course, Global History has never meant the history of everything or everywhere. Many historians, including certainly myself, are limited by their inability to deal with vast scales pragmatically as well as, of course, conceptually. And there are other dangers when taking up wider world narratives such as losing the specificity of time and place or the potential to underline universal trajectories at the expense of having a sensitivity to plurality and divergence. This is where the format of an edited collection comes into its own. *Global Histories of Disability* does not claim to be a Global History in and of itself, and not all chapters deal with issues of connection, network or migration. Rather it aims to bring together eight quite different stories and analyses based on disparate global sites in order to grapple with research questions about disability, power, place and personhood across the world. Sharing stories, and drawing on different branches of expertise, has allowed us a much wider scope for our thinking and generated some interesting juxtapositions which helps us to keep expanding and diversifying our understanding.

Of course, not all gaps in the literature point to holes that urgently need filling and some important works have already been published which take a wide scope, such as *The Routledge History of Disability,* the Bloomsbury series *A Cultural History of Disability*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*.[4] But there are several reasons why I believe that Disability History still needs its 'global moment'. First, Global History may offer one route into addressing the widely recognised whiteness of Disability Studies. As long ago as 2006, disability theorist Christopher Bell identified that the whiteness of Disability Studies (a discipline he ironically dubbed 'White Disability Studies') was an urgent problem.[5] Black perspectives and the lives of other people of colour who were also disabled have largely been excluded from the burgeoning work recovering the lives of disabled people empirically. More recently scholars, such as the cultural theorist Jasbir Puar, have suggested ways in which the whiteness of the field also affects how the disabled body is understood theoretically.[6] The way

in which disability has been ascribed to people of colour as another marker of deviance from the white, male, able-bodied norm, has, for example, fed back into the understanding of the category of race as well as of disability.[7] Relatedly is the failure of Disability History to have much coverage in the Global South despite the fact that physical disability is often caused by phenomena that, in the twenty-first century, are more commonly experienced there such as warfare, poverty and famine. Another problem is that, even within the Global North, there is a strong bias towards western Europe and the Anglophone world whilst other regions, the former Soviet Union, for example, continue to be widely excluded. Again, there are multiple consequences of these limitations both in terms of the patchy coverage in empirical knowledge and in that, in tending to stick to national borders, Disability History has inclined to naturalise these boundaries and divisions, taking them for granted, instead of interrogating and contesting them.

From the nation state to Global History: frameworks, mobility and connection

One of the big contributions made by Global History, as well as also by the related fields of World History, Imperial History, and Transnational History, has been the power to challenge the primacy of the nation state as a framework through which historians approach their subject matter. That the nation state has dominated historical research, not only when it appears to dictate the terms of engagement (for example in the Political History of warfare), but also in Social and Cultural History (such as in the History of the Family or indeed the History of Disability), is some evidence of its power to shape, not only the scope but the framework of research. From the middle of the twentieth century onwards, however, a growing number of ways to circumnavigate the historiographical power of the nation state have been developed by historians in a range of subdisciplines, including those interested in ‘connected’ or ‘comparative’ historical research, or those conducting global micro-histories which examine

how situations that may superficially be seen as 'local' shape and are shaped by wider global phenomenon.

One approach is that of Transnational History. Whilst different practitioners of Transnational History have differing interpretations of the field, some of the main themes of the subdiscipline have been the emphasis on the movement of people and ideas across national boundaries, or the examination of economic, social and demographic interconnections between different geo-political spheres.[8]

Akira Iriye, one of Transnational History's chief exponents, has claimed that the two elements that define both Transnational and Global History fields (which he sees as closely related), are, firstly, the desire to 'look beyond national boundaries to explore interconnections across borders', and secondly, the especial concern with 'issues and phenomena that are of relevance to the whole of humanity, not just to a small number of countries or to one region or the world'.[9] I will discuss these briefly in turn.

Firstly, Transnational History for Iriye, and we might also argue Global History and Imperial History for others, have done very useful work in tracing the flows and connections of peoples, goods, ideologies, and praxes across the world. We might, for example, think of the huge numbers of enslaved people brought to the Americas through the Transatlantic Slave Trade via the notorious Middle Passage or, on a similarly large demographic scale, we might discuss the lives of the indentured labourers or colonial settlers.[10] In these cases, it is obvious that the nation state is an inadequate framework through which to understand the lives of disabled people, who travelled through imperial circuits, and were sometimes prohibited from returning to their homelands and sometimes compelled to do so against their will, as and when that was seen to be economically expedient. As Hunt-Kennedy and Madhwi demonstrate in their chapters, we can see both enslavement and indenture as generative of disability through brutal

labour conditions, overwork and corporal punishment, as well as illustrative of the interconnectedness of the global world of the nineteenth century.

On an individual rather than a large-scale demographic level, the historical geographers Alan Lester and David Lambert, in their edited collection, *Colonial Lives in the British Empire*, demonstrated the utility of tracing individual people as they moved between colonial spaces as a means of elucidating the power of global connections, and the way in which these movements contributed to the construction of imperial ideologies.[11] In such a manner, we might, through a global approach, draw attention to the long-distance journeys made by disabled people in the modern period and indeed the relationship between these movements and the creation of disability. As there were many disabled people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it should come as no surprise to us that, despite the image of stasis long associated with disabled people, many disabled people led global lives. Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), the deaf British writer and sociologist who travelled widely around Europe, the US and the Middle East is one example of global mobility; James Holman (1786-1857), the so-called 'blind traveller', who journeyed around Europe and Russia before circumnavigating the globe between 1827 and 1832, is another. The example from the collection which speaks most clearly to this is the chapter by Hutchison on William Baillie who, after suffering a *coup de soleil* in Baghdad (having previously worked in India) was rendered incapacitated through mental illness and returned to Scotland.

Ideas, as well as people, could cross nation state borders. Critical colonial historians have done much to demonstrate the power of agents of cultural imperialism in the patterns and practices of everyday life in many places of colonial contact. Missionaries, to take just one obvious example, did not only intend to shape the religious beliefs of those they encountered, but were also concerned with the way in which converts dressed, cohabited and ate. And, of course, influencing the way in which disabled people were treated by non-disabled counterparts was a

key element of this as missionary societies established leprosy colonies and hospitals, disseminated literature which reenforced western cultural constructions of disability and used disabled people as 'object lessons' for particular forms of compassion and of othering.

Missionaries were not the only agents of cultural imperialism – doctors, government officials and settlers also played a part. As Julie Livingston famously explored in the case of twentieth-century Botswana, the very concept of disability can to some extent be read as a western or even a colonial epistemological imposition.[12] In this volume, Sam de Schutter explores a similar process whereby western European thinking helped to frame what it meant to be disabled in Kenya. For example, de Schutter explores the way in which ideas that came together in the British Tomlinson Report of 1944, which aimed to 'rehabilitate' and 'resettle' disabled people, were taken up and adopted in colonial Nairobi. These ideas included western associations between disability and 'idleness'.

Not all such transitions occurred in formal colonial or postcolonial contexts. In her chapter, Magda Zdrodowska examines the transmission of US ideas about Deaf politics into late twentieth-century Poland after the fall of the Soviet Union. As Zdrodowska argues, the introduction of Deaf American culture to the former Soviet Bloc had a transformative effect with many d/Deaf Polish people adopting and adapting practices that had been developed in North America. In these cases, as elsewhere, however, we must remember that whilst ideas could cross boundaries, this was rarely a straightforward process of export, but often involved a complex process of negotiation between new ideologies and autochthonous practices, creating new and sometimes syncretic conceptions.

Iriye's second point is also pertinent. Even if disability is understood to be a cultural and historically contingent construction of impairment, disability scholars have also argued that disability can be seen, as Lennard Davis has famously put it, as 'a social process that intimately

involves everyone who has a body and lives in the world of the senses.'[13] That is an issue that is certainly of relevance to the whole of humanity. One of the implications of global or transnational approaches to Disability History, therefore, may be to challenge the assumption that western ideas about impairment and disability are either universal or inevitable.

From a different perspective, we might note that histories of disability that include a consideration of people of colour and/or those in the Global South, is an important corrective to the deep rooted denial of humanity of people of colour, historically. European colonisers were determined to argue that black women, for example, experienced pain less intensely than white women, an assumption that has many implications for other histories of disability.

Imperial, Colonial and Postcolonial approaches

Although Global History and Imperial, Critical Colonial or Postcolonial History have somewhat ambivalent relationships, following the contours of empires is another significant approach both to challenging the primacy of the nation state and looking at phenomena from global view points.[14] Whilst some work by postcolonial theorists has pointed to the intersections between colonialism and disability and the importance of examining them together, the relationship between colonialism and disability has remained vastly undertheorized.[15] Further, much of the work that does exist, including special collections by Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, and Shaun Grech and Karen Soldatic, is dominated by literary critics and sociologists, rather than by historians.[16] Despite this under-theorisation, there are many ways in which empire is a useful starting point in discussing disability historically.

As imperial, colonial and postcolonial scholars have demonstrated, empires facilitated the flow of people, goods and ideas across the globe, concentrated political power in imperial metropoles and shaped the lives, imagination and psyches of their imperial subjects.

The huge structures of empire, as well as everyday practices of imperialism, can be read as so formative as to undermine the 'nation state' itself as a category of interrogation in the imperial metropoles as well as in the colonies. Britain, for example, as John Mackenzie, Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose and others have demonstrated, was not only underpinned economically and politically by its imperial role, but was culturally and socially shaped by the fact that it was at the centre of a global empire.[17] The British consumed sugar, tea and tobacco from overseas sites of empire, studied the lives of missionaries and other colonial 'heroes', dressed in cotton from India and from the slave plantations of the Americas, connected with empire imaginatively through novels and other fiction, visited imperial exhibitions, coloured global maps red, and, in the twentieth century, celebrated 'Empire Day'. Enduringly, they also generated, disseminated and consumed the language and ideas of racial difference, which both justified and produced formal imperial structures and, of course, have gone on to outlive them.

To say that disabled people lived separately from these developments would be curious and, I believe, flawed. Disabled people living in Britain consumed the products and ideologies of empire alongside non-disabled peers. Less passively, disabled British people also participated in the making of empire, such as Francis Barring (1740-1810), the deaf slave trader and director of the East India Company, or Francis Humberston Mackenzie (1754-1815), who was also deaf and an early nineteenth-century Governor of Barbados.[18] Imperial travellers who were deaf and/or disabled might be another example, such as John Kitto, who travelled to Malta (a British colony in Europe) and Baghdad in the service of a missionary society, or George Tait, who travelled to Canada in search of work, 'gold' and 'adventure'.[19] Disabled people also resisted empire and slavery such as the blind anti-slavery activist Edward Rushton (1756-1814).[20]

If, as has been convincingly demonstrated, what it meant to be British was shaped by the empire, so too did empire shape what it meant to be disabled in Britain. British disabled peoples' organisations such as the British and Foreign Blind Association operated in an

imperial arena, funding work amongst blind Palestinians as well as British people 'back home'. British people who were actively disabled by imperial service through their participation in wars of conquest, for example, were hastily shipped back home where they posed less of an embarrassment to ideas about British strength and masculinity. And disabled people who never left or imagined themselves outside of British shores, nonetheless had lives moulded by imperial ideologies; the rise of eugenics, which framed intellectually disabled British people as a threat to the so-called 'imperial race', is just one example of this.[21] Similar arguments can, of course, also be made of other European empires.

From a different angle, we might think about the huge capacity of imperial regimes to generate disabled populations. Imperialism, not least in the period covered by this volume, was a physically, as well as culturally, epistemologically and psychologically, violent process. Wars of expansion generated disabling injury and death on all sides. Labour regimes, including slavery and indenture, where people were worked to states of injury, disability and death, were intimately connected with both the economic and ideological tenets of empire. Punitive practices in the colonies, not limited to the stark example of amputation in the case of the Belgian Congo, also marked imperial power on to the bodies of the colonised.

Another way to connect empire and disability is to use work detailing imperial lines as conduits of information across the globe, to think about the circulation of particular forms of knowledge about the body.[22] We might, for example, think of empire as a means of disseminating 'western' knowledge, or knowledge forged in the Global North, about the body rooted in biomedical understandings, to disparate regions across the globe. As mentioned above, Livingston's work on disability in Botswana, for example, demonstrated that ideas about blindness as a 'problem' as opposed to a more neutrally read way of being, were linked to the spread of western influence in the southern African subcontinent.[23] At the same time, not all knowledge transfer was imperial or, indeed, one directional. Whilst focussed on humanitarian ideologies rather than on

the body, the work of Zoe Laidlaw, Alan Lester and others has demonstrated that information did not simply flow out from the metropole in one direction. The nodes of empire, and the networks generated by and for imperial actors, facilitated the spread of information around and across European empires. We might think, in this regard, about information pertaining to what it meant to be disabled, as well as techniques in 'special' education being transferred between metropolitan and colonial sites.[24] Or we might think about how indigenous knowledges about the body, and about healing practices, were reappropriated by colonial scientists and taken back and sometimes patented back in European metropoles.[25]

Six chapters in this volume (Hunt-Kennedy, Lieffers, Madhwi, de Schutter, Hutchison, and Brégain) explore questions of disability within the context of European colonial and neo-colonial contexts, offering the opportunity to examine different ways in which colonial regimes shaped the lives and experiences of disabled people. If we recognise the USSR and the USA as representative of other forms of imperialism, we might say that in some ways each chapter here can be related to the History of Empires.

Disability History as Global History

There is the potential for these Global, Transnational and Imperial historical approaches to have transformative effects on the field of Disability History and on the questions that drive our research. The more global examples we have of the experience and construction of disability, the better we can understand the praxis and theory of what it means to be disabled. More than simply adding geographic variety, disparate studies elucidate the global inequalities and the power structures which are generative of disability as well as which profoundly affect the experience of it. At the most basic level, this collection juxtaposes eight chapters, each of which takes a different geographical focus, allowing the reader to make connections between the lives of disabled people and the social construction of disability across a wider range of

case studies than is usually possible (examples here include those taken from Kenya, Natal, West Africa, Mauritius, Algeria, Poland, the US, the UK, and the Caribbean). In doing so, we can see the relevance of one of those rationales to Global History mentioned by Iriye, the universal, if we might add culturally differentiated, condition of the bodily, including the impaired body. Within particular chapters too, we can see the influence of Global History, be that by tracing individuals as they travel across the world as in Hutchison's chapter, following groups of people crossing continents through coercive labour practices as Hunt-Kennedy and Madhwi do, or tracking ideas and ideologies burgeoning in new spaces as seen in Zdrodowska's work. So too can we see the History of Empire in Hunt-Kennedy, Madhwi, Hutchison and Brégain's chapters, and colonialism and neo-colonialism in de Schutter's, shaping both the geographical scope of study and the ideologies that shaped the lives of disabled people.

Global History offers new opportunities to historians of disability. It widens our coverage of the global locations through which disability was forged and disabled lives lived, helps us to extend our knowledge beyond the Global North, beyond a single empire or language, and imagine the History of Disability on a wider scale. It helps us to appreciate ideas about the mobility of people, things and ideologies, and the interconnections and exchanges between different sites and different locations. Placing chapters from eight different global locations alongside each other, *Global Histories of Disabiltiy* attempts to make a contribution to this work.

Challenges to Global History: reflections and chapter contributions

The discussion of Global History above, including of its merits and the contributions it could make to Disability History, should not, however, be taken as complete endorsement of the field, or a denial that there are also problems with global approaches to historical research. In

particular, assessments reflecting on the results of the 2016 UK Referendum on leaving the European Union and the election of Donald Trump in the US, have led to a step back from emphasising mobility, interconnection and interdependence, and to a greater focus on disintegration, fragility and insularity. The Covid-19 lockdowns that are taking place as this Introduction is written could be added to this and have increased this effect. In presenting these chapters, which all, in their different ways, contribute to the project of gathering Global Histories of Disability, there are three subthemes which pull them together and which form part of the subtitle of this collection: power, place and personhood. These themes are intended in part as a reflection of the ideas that emerge in the chapters in this edited collection, and in part ways of addressing some of the critiques that have been levelled against Global History.

Power

One of the critiques that has been made of Global History is that in its emphasis on exchange, connection, integration and mobility, not enough attention has been paid to the power dynamics that shape all of these processes. Some conduits of information flow faster than others. Sometimes relationships are structured vertically rather than horizontally. 'Exchange' is not usually between parties with equal amounts of power. Mobility is uneven. The ability to be mobile is limited economically and politically, and disability affects who is and who is not able to move, including in terms of bodily capacity, architectural constraints and political and legal restrictions. The connections that Global History allows us to explore, economic, political and social, were not simply level, as is sometimes implied through images of 'connection' and 'continuity', but created 'lumpy' networks where power ran through hierarchies as well as across lateral spaces.[26]

There are many sources of power some of which disrupt as well as contribute towards tendencies to globalisation. One example of this is immigration legislation which, even in the

period prior to the First World War, which is sometimes thought of as a 'golden age' of migration where movement was unrestricted by the policing of international borders we see today, were restrictive. The privilege to move transnationally was heavily contingent on race, gender, economic status and, of course, on disability. From the cost of long-distance travel, to the social disapproval faced by lone female travellers, many were unable to move freely. Added to this were the manipulative language tests designed to keep certain ethnic groups from entering the US, colonies of the British empire and, post 1905, Britain itself, and the outright prohibition of disabled people who were considered potential 'burdens on the state' from travelling. Other sources of power discussed in this volume include colonialism, religion, neo-colonialism, capitalism, development, gender and labour, all of which shaped the lives of disabled people.

When we examine power in relation to disability, there are other sources of power not so obvious from non-disabled perspectives. In the 2018 conference from which this volume stemmed, Thomas Tajo, a blind activist and academic, spoke to us about visual culture being normatising and oppressive.[27] He argued that the privileging of visuality in the west (not least as a result of the invention of the printing press) conflated the ability to see with the ability to be productive. This conflation can be seen as a form of discursive power which, he argued, had far-reaching and enduring consequences for people who were blind that are still felt in the contemporary world.

In this book, 'power' is most explicitly discussed in the first section. Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy's chapter examines power in one of its starkest forms: the plantation slave regime in the colonial Caribbean and the slave ships that took the enslaved over the so-called Middle Passage. Using Achille Mmembe's formulation of the 'state of injury' in which enslaved men and women were kept, Hunt-Kennedy describes a paradox whereby enslaved people were both valued for a 'fit' and non-disabled body and had that body systematically destroyed through labour, malnutrition

and punishment. The transatlantic slave regime is perhaps one of the strongest examples of the expression of power explored in this collection, or perhaps that has existed. But it was not alone in reflecting the violence of imperialism. The indenture system, often referred to as a 'new system of slavery', was also a very violent labour system closely bound up with the imperial enterprise.[28] Madhwi's chapter demonstrates the high level of control exerted over indentured labourers in Mauritius and Natal by both plantation owners, and by doctors, who had the power to determine whether an indentured labourer was medically 'unfit'. Their decisions had very real consequences which ranged from 'unfit' male workers only receiving half the normal wage, to determining whether they were able to receive treatment in the local hospitals, to whether or not they would be able to travel back to their home colony as well as the conditions of such a voyage. The intersectional nature of power is also evident from Madhwi's chapter, not least in the fact that 'unfit' male workers were to receive the same wage as 'fit' female workers. We also see different colonial actors holding different amounts and types of power, from doctors, to plantation owners and ship captains, to the labourers themselves and the politics of location dictating how various colonial ideologies played out.

In examining Kenya between 1940 and 1970, Sam de Schutter's work examines, in part, the continuation of policies towards disabled people between colonial and post-independence periods, and the influence of 'developmentalism' on welfare policies for disabled people. In his chapter, de Schutter argues that colonial policies effectively 'invented' disability in this period, that is when disability is defined as it was then, as an 'unproductive' or even an 'idle' state in colonial places where disability had previously carried other meanings. Here we might think about power discursively. For example, the power of the colonial and post-independence neo-colonial regime to impose these definitions of disability on to various populations, demonstrates ways in which imperialism did not only generate disability in a bodily sense, but also ideologically. There were many lived consequences to this linguistic power to name.

Place: global horizons and local specificities

As Jeremy Adelman wrote in his famous essay, 'What is Global History Now?', despite the rise of Global History, the formation of new curricula and the publication of ground-breaking volumes elucidating the move towards globalism, networks and transnational connection, the 'power of place never went away'.[29] Patterns of 'separation, disintegration and fragility' continued to be of importance, undermining and contradicting the trends towards globalism of both the past and the present. Notwithstanding the grand scope of Global History, the specificity of place remains highly important if we are to hang on to cultural and historical context even when working on a large scale. To put it a different way, the politics of location determine how any phenomena is viewed. The same issues also affect the related field of imperial history about which Antoinette Burton writes: 'imperial history is not…the view from nowhere. There is a politics to its location(s), and where we see it from is the question.'[30] One of the ways of circumnavigating problems of space is to adopt multi-site interrogations of the same phenomenon. As in this volume, this can be done collaboratively. Each of the chapters in this collection is rooted in one or more different global locations. It is hoped that having these chapters appear alongside each other in a single volume will allow the reader to draw their own comparisons and conclusions, whilst maintaining sensitivity to the specificity of place. The coverage is not of course comprehensive and there are large regions of the world absent, but with eight chapters, at least in part, discussing Europe, North America, Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean (and those at the original conference also covering the South Pacific and East Asia), this is at least an attempt to think about the constitution of disability at a number of different global sites.

As well as pulling together different regional specialisms, this collection has also benefitted from the linguistic skills of its contributors. One of the criticisms rightly levelled against global historians is the Anglocentralism of the endeavour. As Adelman puts it:

> ‘It is one of the paradoxes of global history that the drive to overcome Eurocentrism contributed to the Anglicising of intellectual lives around the world… It is hard not to conclude that global history is another Anglospheric invention to integrate the Other into a cosmopolitan narrative on our terms, in our tongues.’[31]

In including chapters that stretch beyond the English-speaking world, including in its analyses the French Empire, and post-Soviet Poland as well as works from across the British Empire and the US, this volume attempts to resist the Anglo-centralism of the Global History moment. If we recognise disability as the cultural and social construction of impairment, we, in so doing, entrench the importance of the discursive realm in its investigation. Breaking out of an Anglophone world also means challenging the language through which we think of disability and widening our approach to recognise that some concepts have no easy translation.

Gildas Brégain’s chapter allows us to appreciate the particularity of place even within the same imperial framework: the French Empire. Taking three very different colonies and groups of colonies: Algeria, Madagascar and French West Africa (which in turn included Mauritania, Senegal, French Sudan, French Guinea, Ivory Coast, Niger, Upper Volta and Dahomey), Brégain explores the diverse and heterogeneous nature of French imperial policies intended to assist disabled people. As he explains, policies were strongly differentiated according to the colonial site in question, and also by ethnicity and type of disability, indicating the enormous power of place to impact the lives of disabled people even within the same imperial regime. As a colony legally incorporated into metropolitan France, Algeria had a very different status to either Madagascar or French West Africa, a difference which had direct consequences for the way in which disabled people living in these locations were treated as well as the economic assistance they received. Algerians who were blind, for example, had more rights than Madagascans who were blind.

Allowing for the specificity of place is not the same as a reversion back to nation state histories. One way in which the nation state can be circumnavigated in historical research is to take a smaller scale, by adopting a local or regional framework. As well as allowing for local historical research in general, one of the important consequences of adopting local or regional perspectives is the potential to challenge western and colonial impositions of geo-political boundaries on to indigenous peoples and territories. For example, we might look at the Punjab region of South Asia instead of privileging the mid twentieth-century constructs of India and Pakistan. More radically, perhaps, we might do as Caroline Lieffers does in her chapter, which takes as its framework the lands of the Umo^{n}ho^{n} people in the region of the Missouri River, the Great Sioux Reservation and Spokane in Washington Territory. Whilst now firmly within the boundaries of the US, foregrounding indigenous territories offers a very different perspective from the studies of disability in the US with which scholars of disability have come to be familiar, which focus on the experience of white Americans. This shift not only allows us to foreground indigenous people, but also contributes to Dipesh Chakrabarty's project of 'Provincializing Europe' as a postcolonial perspective which undermines western categories as the only lenses for historical analysis.[32] It has major implications for understanding the perspective of indigenous people who were also disabled and how they understood their place in the world. It also allows us to think more critically about our assumptions of those in the west who were also subject to regional, sub- and super-national patterns of identification. In her analysis of indigenous American responses to new technologies of prothesis, Lieffers demonstrates how the geo-political imperialism of the west during the expansion of the US in the nineteenth century also heralded cultural imperialistic impositions including the concept of ableism. Orientating her study around three indigenous men, Joseph La Fleche, Peter Three Legs and an unnamed Spokane man, Lieffers examines the multiple cultural inflections on prothesis and its many interpretations within a dense cultural framework.

Elsewhere in the volume, the space on board the slave ships during the Middle Passage is shown in Hunt-Kennedy's work as well as the West African coast and the Caribbean at the beginning and end of the journey. A different methodology through which to illuminate the power of place, yet also remain connected to a wider picture, is through global micro-histories, such as that used in Hutchison's chapter on William Baillie, which in focussing on the very small scale (one individual in this case) can effectively open up wider concerns.

Although the expression is spatial, place may also be thought of not only as a question of geography, but of temporality. Although many of these chapters are influenced by Disability Studies more widely, each is in essence an historical analysis and it is this in part which distinguishes the collection from other analyses that have attempted to integrate concepts of disability, postcolonialism and globalism. And here, in part, I intend to make a plea for historicity. An historical approach is important because it allows us to ground our theorising about disability in the empirical. We must not abandon the theoretical in doing this, of course, but, in acknowledging the changing contexts in which disabled people lived their lives, we might contribute to the project of showing the construction of disability as contingent on shifting ideas and patterns of behaviour. A historical approach is also important because it allows us to contextualise attitudes to and experiences of disability in terms of other contemporaneous developments. For example, in order to understand the rise of eugenics, with its profound effects for disabled people throughout the twentieth century, we must locate its origins in imperial Britain, a Britain that was deeply inflected by the politics of race and belonging, and at a moment of territorial expansionism, justified, at least in part, through ascribing bodily and intellectual inferiority to those deemed 'other'.[33] It also means hanging on to the power of local histories which differentiate even global or transnational stories. As Zdrodowska explores in her chapter on the Polish deaf communities' campaign to criminalise the Polish Association for the Deaf, Deaf activism in contemporary Poland can both be

understood as a product of the import of US traditions of Deaf Activism (which in turn has been influenced by the Civil Rights Movements), and yet also placed in a local context of Polish resistance and struggle including the Solidarity movement. In so doing, Zdrodowska shows us the attempt by Polish deaf people to apply whole systems of thinking about deafness that had emerged in the United States, including the division between so-called adjectivally 'deaf' people with a lower case 'd', and identity-driven 'Deaf' people with a capitalised D, into Post-communist Poland (though it is a 'G' and 'g', in the Polish case, G' for *G/głuchy*).

Personhood

Personhood it is an important theme in Disability History with much relevance to what I have discussed here and which, in many ways, runs throughout the chapters of the book well beyond those that appear in this section. One useful way of examining the personhood of disabled people, not least in a global context, is an intersectional one. Intersectionality, a term originally coined by the African-American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a way of thinking about the coming together of different identities, in particular those of race, gender and class in order to understand the differential experience of people who might otherwise be categorised together – as women, for example.[34] Adding disability to this, which several scholars have done, is an important move.[35] The links between disability and other forms of difference work both on discursive levels, through a shared language of dependency, for example, and in practical terms, for example disabled people are more likely to become impoverished and, at the same time, impoverished people are more likely to become disabled. These relationships are clearly seen in Lieffers's paper where the indigeneity of Joseph La Fleche, Peter Three legs and the unnamed Spokane man came together with their gender and social status. Furthermore, in the case of Joseph La Fleche (also known as *I^{n}shta Mo^{n}ze*), an Umo^{n}ho^{n} leader, the son of a French-Canadian father and a Ponca mother, who used his prosthetic leg to dramatic theatrical effect, we see how powerfully issues of religion and conversation can be in inscribing meaning to

disabled states and its amelioration through prothesis. In Madhwi's chapter on indentured labourers, meanwhile, we can see the intersections in particular between race and disability. The reason why indentured labourers from India and China were shipped to Mauritius, Natal and other colonies was because Asian people were imagined to be able to do the gruelling plantation work that formerly enslaved African people had performed under enslavement, and that was considered to be unsuitable for the constitution of Europeans. In turn, these conditions of overwork, generated disability both in the form of physical impairment and disease and in terms of mental distress. Further, as Madhwi notes, indentured labourers would sometimes impair themselves intentionally in order to be sent home, to escape the cruel nature of work and living conditions on the plantations. In this way we see the belief, at least, that disability presented the opportunity to a better life, an interesting subversion of commonly held constructions of impairment.

The final section, Personhood, starts with Iain Hutchison's exploration of the life of William Baillie, a Scottish East India Company civil servant who, during time stationed in Baghdad and Bombay appeared to suffer a *coup de soleil,* engendering a large degree of mental distress and rendering him incapacitated for the rest of his life. Using a micro-historical analysis, Hutchison discusses the impact of being labelled disabled in this way had on Baillie's life, including the power exercised over him by doctors and family members. In writing about William Baillie, Hutchison shows us how, following the onset of William's mental distress, the Baillie family made sustained attempts to hide William's disability, not least through institutionalisation. Indeed, as much work in the field of disability history has demonstrated, institutionalisation was a very significant feature of the lives of many disabled people throughout the period and was often linked with the attempt by family members and society at large to render disabled peoples invisible, to separate them out from those who 'belonged' to the family, and to hide them as though a shameful social stigma.[36]

As in this case, it is clear that examining personhood is in part about emphasising the humanity of people who have been denied full selfhood and drawing attention to agency and individual experience. It has also been important in making visible lives that too often have been forgotton or actively rendered obscure. As Lisa Beckmann shows us in her analysis of the so-called 'Ugly Laws', there were deliberate ways in which not only the identity of disabled people was erased, but their very lives and existence. These laws criminalised the public appearance of people who were maimed, mutilated or otherwise believed to be 'disfigured', rendering their existence within the public sphere, particularly on the street, illegal. This made *de jure* the exclusion of disabled people that has so often occurred *de facto* in the public sphere through inaccessible public spaces. The impact of this legislation, which had a very dehumanising effect on disabled people, can also be seen as literally hiding disabled people behind closed doors. Focusing on the visual signifiers of disability, these laws had the effect of reducing disabled people to single characteristics and had a normatising effect, limiting the range of human bodies it was possible to encounter. Although the 'Ugly Laws' posed a particularly striking legislative example of an attempt at the erasure of disabled people, they were by no means new or unique in their attempt to render disabled people invisible.

It was not only disability, of course, that led to the erasure of identity and this partly explains the bleeding between this section and other chapters. The politics of erasure of course meant different things in different places. In Hunt-Kennedy and Lieffers's papers we see literal meanings attached to what it means to make someone disappear. In her chapter, Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy evokes the brutal process through which slave traders and owners attempted to amputate enslaved people from their African identities. Through the forced march to the west African coast, the Middle Passage, through slave markets and on the plantation, enslaved people were robbed of their identity, denied their kinship ties and alienated from their bodies, and generated irreparable psychological trauma. Given the profoundness of this experience, it

is not surprising that the creation of disability and disfigurement was part of this as the bodies of enslaved people were branded, beaten and otherwise scarred in displays of ownership. In Lieffers's chapter, meanwhile, we see indigenous Americans negotiating disabled identities at a time when the erasure of all Native American people was a possibility as disease and violence swept through their territories due to the expansion of European settlement into the Americas. Another example of the literal erasure of disabled people that remains an important element of disability history is the murder of disabled people, denigrated as 'life unworthy of life', through the Nazi 'T4' programme. Although there is not an example of this work in this collection, Katarzyna Ojrzyńska's paper at the original conference, which explored memories of the T4 exterminations in Anglophone, Germanic, and Polish Cultures, helped feed into the thinking behind this volume.[37]

Exploring personhood also brings up the question of a disabled identity, another important area in Disability History. All too often, disability has operated to collapse other identities within it as though people could be reduced to one defining characteristic. In this way, we might remember the work of the literary theorist Ato Quayson which argues that fictional representations of disability operate as a trope which appears to short-circuit other identifying information.[38] The photograph with which Beckmann begins her chapter shows a woman with the sign 'BLIND' hung around her neck, is an example of this way in which everything about this woman was subsumed, or attempted to be subsumed, under this label. However, disability can also be seen as an intersectional identity that is always constituted with and by its relations with other categories of difference. As Beckmann demonstrates, the way in which this legislation particularly allowed for the removal of female 'medicants' from public spaces, points to the classed and gendered nature of the laws and of the intersections between class, gender and, we might also add, race, in the construction of disabled personhood (or indeed personhood more widely). In discussing the 'affective politics of ableism', Beckmann, drawing

on Susan Schweiks's work on the 'politics of ugliness', argues that through legislation such as the ugly laws, disabled people were constructed, hatefully, as 'other'. As she explores, the deployment of terminology such as 'horrible' and 'odious', to describe disabled people's bodies, reinforced an ideology whereby non-disabled people were expected to feel horror and even revulsion when confronted with physical disability. Ejecting disability from the self has been a common historical trope that not only signifies extreme marginalisation of people labelled as disabled, but also an element of the disavowal of human fragility more widely.

Conclusion

Although organised into themes of power, place and personhood, the way the chapters are divided up is to make the book more manageable and should not be treated as concrete or impermeable. Instead, it is hoped that sections will not be taken as discrete categories, but as themes that run throughout all chapters and that serve as anchors throughout the volume, as indeed are the tenets of Global History such as mobility, sketched out at the opening of the Introduction. Similarly, it is hoped that the reader notes the plurality in the title, histor*ies* of disability. From the chapters, it will be seen that there is not one global history of disability or universal narrative, but multiple, shifting and conflicting threads to the stories we tell.

All in all, the ambition of the collection is to offer global angles to the burgeoning field of Disability History which has its origins, and remains strongly rooted in, the US and western Europe. With several chapters examining the Global South, such work challenges the tendency to assume that the experience of disability in the Global North is a universal one. The volume intends to do more than add new case studies to our knowledge about disability in the modern period, it intends to use the insights gained from examining disparate global sites, and in particular through exploring disability in the Global South, to think more about the global history of disability both empirically and theoretically.

[1] For a few key examples of global history see P. K. O'Brien, 'Historiographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history', *Journal of Global History*, 1 (2006); Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, 2016), Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (W. W. 2014); Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: the Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); James Belich, John Darwin, Margret Frenz and Chris Wickham (eds), *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

[2] For disability history in the US see for example: Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, *The New Disability History: American perspectives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001). In the Ottoman Empire: Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman, Arab World, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014). For continental Europe see for example, Henri-Jaques Stiker, *A History of Disability* transl. W. Sayers (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1999). In the British Isles: Iain Hutchison, *A History of Disability in nineteenth-century Scotland* (Lewiston; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007); David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: imagining physical impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012); David M. Turner and Daniel Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution, physical impairment and British coal-mining 1780-1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018). For studies of the pre-modern era see: Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages*: *cultural considerations of physical impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[3] See for example, Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014; Giorgio Riello and Prasannan Parthasarathi, eds, *The Spinning World: a global history of cotton textiles, 1200-1850 (Oxford: OUP, 2009).* See also, David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg, *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity* (London: Routledge, 2006);

[4] Some recent works have a wide international scope. See for example, the six-volume Bloomsbury series: eds various, *A Cultural History of Disability* (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); Roy Hanes, Ivan Brown, and Nancy E. Hansen, *The Routledge History of Disability* (Routledge, 2017); Michael Rembis, Catherine Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (New York: OUP, 2018).

[5] Christopher M. Bell, ed., *Blackness and Disability. Critical examinations and cultural interventions* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997); Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[6] Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: debility, capacity, disability* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017).

[7] Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability: impairment and otherness across Britain and its empire, c. 1800-1914* (Cambridge, CUP, forthcoming).

[8] See for example: Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Fiona Paisley and Pamela Scully, *Writing Transnational History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

[9] Iriye, *Global and Transnational History*, p. 11.

[10] Jane Buckingham, 'Disability, Leprosy and Plantation Health Among Indentured Indian Labourers in Fiji, 1879-1911', in Henk Menke, Jane Buckingham, Farzana Gounder, Ashutosh Kumar and Maurits Hassankhan, eds, *Social Aspects of Health, Medicine and Diseases in the Colonial and Postcolonial Era* (New Delhi, Manohar, 2020), pp. 199-220.

[11] David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[12] Julie Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005).
[13] Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: disability, deafness and the body* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 2.
[14] See for example articles in the special issue by Simon Potter and Jonathan Saha, 'Connected Histories of Empire', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16.1 (2015).
[15] Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, *Disabling Postcolonialism: special issue of the Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 4, issue 3, (2010); Shaun Grech and Karen Sodatic, *Disability and Postcolonialism, (dis)encounters and anxious intersections: special issue of Social Identities,* vol.21 (2015). And see the articles in both of these special issues. The work of Gildas Brégain on blindness in French Algeria is also an important exception. Gildas Brégain, 'Colonialism and disability: the situation of the Blind in colonised Algeria', *ALTER, European Journal of Disability Research,* 10 (2016), pp. 148-167.
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the manipulation of British public opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester, MUP, 1984); John Mackenzie, ed, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, MUP, 2017); Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, *At Home with the Empire: metropolitan culture and the imperial world* (Cambridge, CUP, 2006).
[18] Cleall, *Colonising Disability.*
[19] Esme Cleall, 'Imperial Lives - confronting the legacies of empire, disability and the Victorians', in Iain Hutchison, Martin Atherton and Jaipreet Virdi, eds, *Disability and the Victorians: attitudes, interventions, legacies* (Manchester: MUP, 2020).
[20] Cleall, *Colonising Disability*.
[21] *Ibid*.
[22] For discussions of the circulation of knowledge through the British Empire, see Zoe Laidlaw*, Colonial Connections 1815-1845: patronage, the information revolution and colonial government* (Manchester: MUP, 2005); Alan Lester, *Imperial networks; creating identities in nineteenth century South Africa and* Britain (London: Routledge, 2001).
[23] Livingston, *Disability and the Moral Imagination*.
[24] Esme Cleall, 'Deaf Connections and Global Conversations: deafness and education in and beyond the British Empire, ca. 1800-1900', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* (April 2015).
[25] Laurelyn Whitt, *Science, Colonialism and Indigenous Peoples: the cultural politics of law and knowledge* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009).
[26] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: theory, knowledge, history* (Berkeley, 2005), pp. 91–2.
[27] Thomas Tajo, 'Blindness and Visual Culture: the politics of sensorial identities', delivered at Disability Histories: local, global and colonial stories, unpublished paper presented at University of Sheffield, 7th June 2018.
[28] Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: the export of Indian Labour overseas, 1830–1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).
[29] Jeremy Adelman, 'What is Global History Now?' on Aeon (2 March 2017) [https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment]
[30] Antoinette Burton, *Empire in Question: reading, writing and teaching imperialism* (Duke University Press, 2011), p. 21.
[31] *Ibid*.

[32] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2000).
[33] David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, 'The Eugenic Atlantic: race, disability, and the making of an international Eugenic science, 1800–1945', *Disability and Society* (2010), pp. 843-864.
[34] Kimberlé Crenshaw, ' Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43:6 (1991), pp. 1241-1299.
[35] See for example, Lennard Davies*, Enforcing Normalcy: disability, deafness and the body* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 1.; p. 162.
[36] Esme Cleall, 'Silencing Deafness: displacing disability in the nineteenth century', *PORTAL, Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* (April 2015).
[37] Katarzyna Ojrzyńska, 'Remembering Action T4 in Anglophone, Germanic, and Polish Culture', unpublished paper, presented Sheffield 7 June 2018.
[38] Ato Quayson**,** *Aesthetic Nervousness: disability and the crisis of representation* (New York; Chichester : Columbia University Press, 2007).