A Step toward a Conceptualization of Transnational Disability Model:

Engaging the Dialectics of Geopolitics, "Third World," and

Imperialism

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Abstract

This article is a summary of one part of a larger project, which studied war and the resulting production of disabled bodies, analyzed in a dialectical (i.e., not linear, oppositional, binary, idealist, or mechanical) and historical materialist framework. This article comprises a summarized report of one aspect of a case study and a new conceptualization of disability theory from a transnational perspective. The case study examines the social relations behind the production of disabled bodies in the Iran-Iraq war, in which chemical weapons of mass destruction were used. The second part of the article, using the case study report, develops an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-nationalist, and non-ideological (according to Marx's Consciousness Theory) model for understanding disability.[1] This study uses the global context of capitalist economy and the imperialist politics of the United States and Europe in the Middle East to understand how disabled bodies are generated through armed conflicts sustained by imperialist and nationalist social relations (always gendered, raced, and classed). This study engages

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Her research, praxis, and activism focus on imperialism, nationalism, and the acquisition of disability due to violence. Sona's research investigates the nationalist and imperialist politics of nation-building in the Middle East to understand how disabled bodies are generated through wars and degenerative public-spaces, such as prison, sustained by ideological, gendered, raced, and classed social-relations. Sona's academic research informs and is informed by eight years of community teaching experience, such as teaching English to and social-justice organizing with the newly-arrived (often traumatized) Iranian, Kurdish, and Cuban immigrant and refugee women with mental health concerns.

Her scholarship and praxis engage the dialectics of geopolitics, examine them in the context of incarceration and armed conflict, and understand internalized oppression from her standpoint, a war-survivor Middle Eastern woman's standpoint.

[1] For "non-ideological knowledge production and praxis" according to the Marx's Consciousness Theory, see Allman (2007).

the dialectics of geopolitics, examines them in the context of war, and proposes a new emerging model for Disability Studies from a war-survivor Middle Eastern woman's standpoint.

Keywords

Non-ideological; Iran-Iraq war; disabling imperialism; disabling nationalism; transnational disability model; Third World

Un pas vers une conceptualisation du modèle de handicap transnational: Engager la dialectique de la géopolitique, du « tiers-monde » et de l'impérialisme

Résumé

Cet article est un résumé d'un projet beaucoup plus vaste, qui étudie la guerre et la production résultante de corps handicapés, analysée de façon dialectique (c'est-à-dire non linéaire, oppositionnel, binaire, idéaliste ou mécanique) et d'un travail matérialiste historique. Cet article comprend un rapport résumé d'une étude de cas et une nouvelle conceptualisation de la théorie du handicap dans une perspective transnationale. L'étude de cas examine les relations sociales derrière la production de corps handicapés durant la guerre Iran-Irak, dans laquelle des armes chimiques de destruction massive ont été utilisées. La deuxième partie de cet article, en utilisant le rapport d'étude de cas, développe un modèle antiraciste, anti-impérialiste, antinationaliste et non-idéologue (selon la théorie de la conciliation de Marx) pour comprendre le handicap. Cette étude utilise le contexte global de l'économie capitaliste et de la politique impérialiste des États-Unis et de l'Europe au Moyen-Orient pour comprendre comment les corps handicapés sont générés par les conflits armés entretenus par les relations sociales impérialistes et nationalistes. Cette étude engage la dialectique de la géopolitique, les examine dans le contexte de la guerre, et propose un nouveau modèle pour les études sur les incapacités du point de vue des femmes du Moyen-Orient survivantes de la guerre.

Mots clefs

Non-idéologique; guerre Iran-Irak; l'impérialisme handicapant; nationalisme handicapant; modèle d'incapacité transnationale; tiers-monde

This article is a summary of a much larger project, which studied war and the resulting

production of disabled bodies, analyzed in a dialectical and historical materialist (DHM)

framework. The project, through a case study, examined the imperialist and nationalist social relations that produce and sustain disability. It traced these relations by considering the global context of war and engaging the dialectics of geopolitics. As well, it proposed a new model for Disability Studies (DS) that is termed "Transnational Disability Model" (TDM). The focus of this paper is three-fold: a) disabled war survivors[2] from the "third world"; b) the creation of disability by war in the "third world" by the "first world"; and c) formulating the first step toward the TDM via the case study report of Iranian chemical warfare victims in the Iran-Iraq war. First, I introduce some background information about the three main problems that are addressed in this paper. Then I proceed with a two-pronged approach that centres on a summarized case study report and the development of a new disability model based upon that report. Subsequently, I discuss the research methodology, entry point, and theoretical framework. Ultimately, I conclude by reviewing the immediate theoretical, political, and practical implications.

The Central Problems: Violence Creates Disability

The phenomenon of conflict is a social process that has prevailed since the dawn of humanity. The world spends over $389 billion USD a year on conflicts, arms, and equipping militaries (United Nations, 2007). Landmines and random explosions result in the largest number of disabilities caused by wars and armed conflicts. By the year 2020, more people are expected to die as a result of armed conflicts and war than from all other causes. Landmines and random explosions constitute the main threat to civilians

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[2] This includes veterans and civilians.

to date, causing 15,000 to 20,000 disabilities a year (United Nations, 2007). There is a

direct correlation between armed conflicts and disability (Meekosha, 2011). For every

child that is killed as a result of armed violence, 100 more children are left with

permanent, lifelong disabilities (United Nations, 2007).

Disabling Imperialism

Social relations of material production and consumption are intertwined with the

history of power imbalances between the two constructed worlds of "north" and "south"

(Erevelles, 2011; Meekosha, 2011; Priestly, 2015). These terminologies were

determined historically and geopolitically during the 1960s when certain nations were

considered mostly consumers of raw materials due to their owning and controlling

advanced technology and industry, while others were considered providers of raw

materials as well as cheap labour.[3] These "provider" nations were the ones conquered

and/or controlled by the former (Meekosha, 2011, p. 4). The power imbalance between

the two constructed worlds has been enforced historically through colonialism and

imperialism (Meekosha, 2011). These two processes are performed by one group of

people on another group of people as a form of exploitation by keeping the conquered

people, who are often unpaid/underpaid sources of labour, poor and dependent (Ghai,

2012). This is how countries that are or have been historically controlled under colonial

and/or imperialist rule suffer from a sharply divided class hierarchy (Meekosha, 2011).

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[3] "'Southern' countries are, broadly, those historically conquered or controlled by modern imperial powers, leaving a continuing legacy of poverty, economic exploitation and dependence […] The 'North', the global metropole, refers to the centres of the global economy in Western Europe and North America" (Meekosha, 2011, p. 4).

This means the class struggle is sustained within them by the imperial and/or colonial

rule as a means of control (Harvey, 2004; O'Connor, 2010; Wood, 2006). On the other

hand, Hannah Arendt (1980) argues "imperialism abroad cannot for long be sustained

without active repressions, even tyranny, at home" (cited in Harvey, 2004, p. 20).

Conquering and controlling nations is historically considered colonialism. In

modern times, direct occupation is not even necessary. Where direct occupation does

not occur, imperialism arises as a socially organized mechanism of control-and-conquer

(Konkle, 2008; Steinmetz, 2005). According to Steinmetz (2005), "Imperialism [is] a non-

territorial form of empire in contradistinction to colonialism as a territorial one"

(Steinmetz, 2005, p. 2). Steinmetz (2005) explains the difference between imperialism

and colonialism as follows: "Modern non-territorial empire, also known as imperialism,

has a much more sweeping agenda of controlling the world or a region for reasons that

include economic ones alongside security, glory, and order" (p. 8).

David Harvey argues that Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin presented their

definitions of imperialism as a form of space production, albeit with its own "terminal

contradiction" (Harvey, 2004, p. 62), as a solution for the crises inherent to capitalism.

Lenin defines imperialism as "capitalism at that stage of development at which the

dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established" (Lenin, 1916, p. 265). One

way in which the "new" U.S.-centered imperialism operates is through waves of

"accumulation by dispossession," that has provoked much global resistance and

resentment (Harvey, 2004). This means that war is a necessity for an imperialist state,

for it accumulates its profit by dispossessing other people from their land and resources.

That is why military invasion is at the core of any imperialist political agenda.

It is important to acknowledge several other political economists such as Prabhat Patnaik, Jamie Magnusson, Silvia Federici, and Glen Coulthard who have theorized imperialism and its delivered violence in different ways, such as accumulation through financialization, accumulation through encroachment, accumulation by primitive accumulation through exploiting women's labour, and primitive accumulation through colonizing Indigenous land, and so on.

Disability Studies Encountering "Imperialism" and "Third World"

My project here is to invite the reader to become aware of four geographical and historical gaps in the popular DS discourse. First, DS problematizes and shames the topic of "prevention of disablement". Second, there is a lack of discussion in DS on how disabilities are created by violence. Third, popular DS does not adequately investigate (rather than just mentioning) how disabilities historically have been produced by unequal power-relations between the two constructed "first" and "third" worlds (e.g., through war, poverty, environmental destruction, slavery, indentured labour, unsafe working conditions, colonialism, imperialism, theocracy, nationalism, poverty, unethical research, etc.). Finally, popular DS tends to ignore the disabled people of the "third world,"[4] thereby erasing their experiences of disablement.

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[4] It should also be noted that "third world"/majority-world/developing-world/global-south is not a homogenous concept, for it is comprised of several states, several lands, several nations or even state-less nations (e.g., Kurds, Palestinians) where people speak several different languages and practice several different cultures, customs, or religions. But they all have in common being overpowered by Western Europe and North America. In fact, beyond national and international boundaries, there is a commonality between them: they are all spaces of extreme exploitation and violence under global capitalist social relations (Erevelles, 2011).

Herein, I build on the few attempts that have been made by Meekosha (2011),

Erevelles (2011), and Gorman (2016) to widen the scope of this field to address the

aforementioned gaps. They have bravely intervened in the popular DS discourse, in

order to disrupt its colonial, imperialist, and mostly poststructuralist agenda by their anti-

racist, feminist, and materialist approaches. My intention here is to take their efforts to a

whole different level in two ways. One is by narrating a story of a war, in the middle of

which I was born. Second is by developing a new emerging disability model from my

standpoint, an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, non-ideological, and woman Middle Eastern

war-survivor. As such, I move from reading popular DS accounts only pertaining to the

United States., United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia to "Other" parts of the world,

such as Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan. I aim here to (re)theorize disability by trying to unveil

"the ways in which representations of subjects in disability rights and culture movements

have disallowed a focus on disablement caused by war, imperialism, and environmental

destruction" (Gorman, 2016, p. 8).

Case Study

To contribute to DHM approaches, as opposed to mechanical and idealist,[5]

which are less commonly applied in popular DS, I apply a Marxist approach to the case

study method to explore and understand the concrete material reality that disabled

people face in the "third world". I argue that an anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and non-

ideological (Allman, 2007) DS model should be deployed that not only engages with

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[5] See Gorman (2005) for the comparison between historical-materialism that is mechanical and idealist as opposed to dialectical which is non-ideological (Allman, 2007) according to the unity of thought and action.

disability, but also takes into account its intersections with race, gender, class, history, and geography within the material context of states affected by imperialism. Such a perspective is neither compliant to normative/standards[6] demands, nor is it complicit with bourgeois/liberal-democratic agendas (Erevelles, 2011). To pursue these goals, I completed a case study premised upon a DHM reading of disability in relation to Iranian and Kurdish victims/survivors of the Iran-Iraq war by building on the works of disability scholars who have applied Marxist theory to their analyses (e.g., Erevelles, 2011; Gorman, 2016).

My case study method was also informed by an understanding of geopolitics. In this particular context, it is important to pay close attention to this concept, as Iran is located in a politically and geographically strategic location in the Middle East—bordering Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Pakistan, and the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

Starting to Develop a New Theory from Case Study

According to Bendassolli (2013), "induction" assumes a leap from singular observational statements to general theoretical statements. Even though philosophers of science have tried to devalue induction, it is one of the foundations of qualitative research that takes us from deep observations to theory (Bendassolli, 2013). Here, I do not intend to reconcile the demands of empiricism with those of scientific explanation; rather, I intend to show that even one case can demonstrate profoundly how things

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[6] Such as white, European, English-speaking, bourgeois, heterosexual, and healthy.

work in the bigger picture. Eisenhardt (1989) defines case study methodology as "a research strategy, which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single setting" (p. 4). The case study method can lead to what Eisenhardt (1989) calls "emergent theory" (p. 4). Cameron and Quinn (1988 cited in Eisenhardt) suggest that one strength of the case study method is the likelihood of coming up with a new theory, which is a creative reframing of the literature into a new vision. Combining the theory-building process with the existing literature along with observation and experience can make a powerful new explanation for reality where the extant theory, alone, seems inadequate (Eisenhardt, 1989). Even though, TDM has been developed by an orthodox scientific method, I have strived to stay away from empiricism in thinking about disability relations. I have done so, for empiricism is an ahistorical process and does not work when thinking about social relations at any given time and space.

A Step Toward Transnational Disability Model

War is only one example of what I am exploring using the TDM. In fact, TDM can potentially help explain several other forms of violent disability-production mechanisms (i.e., exploitative social relations such as capitalism or patriarchy). The emerging TDM can explain what happens through disabling and deadly wars to racialized bodies in the Middle East, who happen to live in fertile lands with rich mines and plenty of natural resources. These resources have made them the target of imperialist violence, as military intervention is a fundamental necessity for capitalist states (Harvey, 2004; O'Connor, 2010). It is crucial to remember that there are countries in the Middle East

that have never been colonized by any European power, but are constantly affected by

the presence of the U.S. military in the region (i.e., imperialism). The U.S. presence has

always been justified by their political agenda in exporting "democracy" to the Middle

Eastern countries, which Chomsky (2008) calls "humanitarian imperialism"(p. 22).

People in the Middle East suffer on both ends: resisting their own repressive nationalist

states on the one hand and the U.S. empire-building on the other (Bannerji & Mojab,

2003).

Transnational Creation of the Iran-Iraq War

The Iran-Iraq war stretched from September 1980 to August 1988 and claimed

more than two million lives while leaving approximately one million people

disabled/injured (Haghgou, 2014; Hiro, 1991; Katouzian, 2009; Mikaberidze, 2011;

Murray & Woods, 2014). To understand how nationalism (either secular or theocratic) is

behind deadly wars, first we need to understand why nations, and in this case, Iran and

Iraq, were interested in prolonging the war, despite the fact that this meant producing

more disabled and dead bodies.

In 1980, Iran, as a newly established ideological state, was interested in

spreading its Shi'a ideology to all of the Middle East (Abrahamian, 1982). Iraq, on the

other hand, led by Saddam Hussein, was interested in establishing the League of Arab

Nations, oppressing every dissident (especially Shi'as and Kurds), and spreading Sunni

Islam to all of the Middle East (Al-Khalil, 1999; Timmerman, 1991). This is how

nationalism, whether theocratic or secular, uses human bodies as a shield to stay in

power. The United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission issued a report about Iraq's unresolved disarmament issue, which stated (United Nations, 2003) that during the war, Iraq deployed almost tons of mustard gas, tabun, and sarin against the Iranian soldiers and civilians [including Kurdish] (see also Central Intelligence Agency, 2007). The Tehran Peace Museum's website states that "Of the approximately 1,000,000 people exposed to mustard gas, 100,000 required medical care; and today 75,000 Iranians continue to be chronically ill"(Tehran Peace Museum, np).

There is substantial evidence suggesting the United States provided Iraq with intelligence concerning Iranian soldiers' locations and numbers while being fully aware of Hussein's intentions with chemical weapons, including sarin (Harris & Aid, 2013; Hiltermann, 2007; McGovern, 2013; Robinson & Goldblat, 1984; Timmerman, 1991). Phythian (1997) argues that the United States and Britain seemingly remained "neutral." But, in reality, they supplied both Iranian and Iraqi states with weapons, especially Iraq, in order to keep them in war, but also to let the Iraq have the upper hand. He demonstrates that the United States and Britain's ultimate goal was to keep the countries busy in war, so none of them would jeopardize the flow of the oil supply and trade in the Persian Gulf[7]; as well as to protect the other Gulf States, who happen to have a lot of oil (Phythian, 1997).

According to the recently declassified *National Security Archives* (1994), Donald Rumsfeld, the American special envoy to the Middle East from November 1983 to May 1984, met and shook hands with Saddam. They signed a deal, by which the United

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[7] Note that the capitalist social relations behind the war are evident here. The U.S. and Britain did not intervene in the war to end it, but to sell their weapons to both parties and police the flow of capital from the Middle East to Europe.

States agreed to support Saddam with military technology, armoured ambulances,

mainframe computers, and the precursors to chemical WMD, obviously with no "overt"

support (NSA archives, 1994). In return, Iraq would provide oil to the United States.

Hiltermann (2003) argues that the reason the international community kept silent

following the use of such prohibited weapons against Iranians was due to the American

political strategy of declaring both countries guilty.

When disability is produced through the use of banned weapons and the whole

world chooses to remain silent, "[this] silence encourages the tormentor, never the

tormented" (Wiesel, 2008, p. 118).

Contextualizing My/self and Historicizing my Agency

I was born in the middle of the Iran-Iraq war, in which chemical WMD were used

on civilians, including unarmed women and children, leaving them with lifelong physical

and emotional injuries. My pregnant mother, startled by a bomb dropped from an Iraqi

jet fighter near Esfahan, went into early labour. Though scared by the sirens, screams,

debris, and dust, she managed to deliver me in a hospital the same night. That night,

the story of how wars in the Middle East define my life began. When I was 6 years old,

the U.S. attacked Iraq to "save" Kuwait. In 2001, when I was 15, the U.S. attacked

Afghanistan to "save" women from the Taliban. Despite living in exile, I am still haunted

by remembering the nightmares I used to have, during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan,

as a curious little girl. In my dream, on my way to school, I would check the sky above

my head to make sure there were no planes bombing. Religious fundamentalism and

American imperialism are two real threats that never leave you alone if you're a Middle

Eastern woman. When I was 17, the United States attacked Iraq (Hagopian, et al.,

2013). The imperialist presence of the United States and allies in the Middle East region

was not hard to feel at all, even for a child with limited awareness.

Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi president, denied the allegations that he was in

possession of chemical and biological weapons—the very same WMD that had injured

Iranian soldiers during the Iran-Iraq war. The administration of President George W.

Bush claimed that Iraq posed a danger to the "safety" and "security" of the United States

(Burke, Degeneffe, & Olney, 2009).Unlike some states in the world, the theocratic state

of Iran has been brutal to its war veterans by oppressing them and not providing

sufficient care for their injuries (read their own words on fashnew, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c,

2016d, 2016e; Defapress, 2016; ShohadayeIran, 2014; Quds Online, 2015; Nasr, 2014;

Namehnews.ir, 2013). As such, I argue that not only were their disabilities created as a

result of the U.S. imperialist intervention (Chomsky, 2008; Hiltermann, 2007;

Timmerman, 1991), Iraqi nationalism (Al-Khalil, 1990; Timmerman, 1991), and Iran's

desire to export its ideological revolution (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2009; Katouzian, 2010), but

also as a result of the Iranian state sustaining those disabilities by not caring for the

survivors.

The Dialectical Historical Materialist Framework and the Transnational Disability

Model in Relation to Disability Studies Discourse

The opponents of the social model of disability accuse it of continuing to treat the

human body as an object that is passive and acted upon by the world, rather than an active subject. Especially poststructuralist phenomenologists such as Paterson and Hughes (1999), Shildrick (2009), and Titchkosky, (2007) have critiqued the social model for having a binary between disability (the social construction of difference) and impairment (the biological manifestation of difference).

On the other hand, post-structuralists, post-humanists, post-conventionists, and post-modernists disarticulate culture from power hegemony, reduce all political issues into cultural ones, and convert culture into a private matter (Bannerji, 1995). What makes post-structuralist, post-humanist, post-conventionist, and post-modernist approaches to disability similar is their disengagement from political economy as well as their depiction of human difference (e.g., race, sexuality, disability, and etc.) as a social construction/fiction (Erevelles, 2011).

Russell and Malhotra (2002), both political economist DS scholars argue that the social model of disability is inadequate for several reasons: first and foremost, the proponents of this model treat the environment surrounding the disabled person as "neutral"— as if this environment has not been designed and created by human beings with individual, social, cultural, and political subjectivities. Secondly, they perceive the problem of oppression of disabled people rooted in discriminatory attitudes of non-disabled people. They imply that if we change those attitudes, suddenly we will have a world with equality and social justice with no disability oppression. Russell and Malhotra (2002) argue that this model makes invisible structural barriers and inequalities that are created by concrete social relations and modes of production.

Moreover, post-structuralists, post-humanists, post-conventionists, and postmodernists oppose materialistic analyses of disability by labelling them as ableist. Materialist analyses are not new to disability studies. Several British disability studies scholars, who are also the founders of the social model of disability, have utilized this materialist framework extensively (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999; Morris, 1991; Oliver, 1990; Thomas, 1999). However, their so-called materialism has either been ahistorical or mechanical, as opposed to historical and dialectical. For example, Gleeson (1997), whose historical materialism is mechanical, attributes the aggression toward disabled people in the job market to the competitiveness of the market. He implies that a less competitive market will end the oppression of disabled people. This analysis, as Gorman (2005), as well as Russell and Malhotra (2002) argue, fails to consider the processes (even thought processes or the ways in which we think about disability) in which the labour market is structured to operate as an axis of the capitalist system.

In this study, I employed DHM and attended closely to the concepts of ideology, nation building, class-based society, theocratic nationalism, and nation expansion as core dynamics of capitalist social relations (Hassanpour, 2015). Marx believed that history is not just a combination of events that form the past. Instead, he argued that ideas have social origins and can be manipulated for political purposes (Bannerji, 2015). Marx defined historical materialism as a way to understand the material conditions of humans through history (Marx & Engels, 1932/1998). I chose DHM, because it can map out the dialectical relationship of individuals to social structures as determined by their

locations in the social division of labour. On the other hand, the social division of labour

per se is determined by the social organization of economy within specific historical

contexts (Erevelles, 2011). I adopted this way of thinking, that is, dialectically (not

relying solely on what is apparent, but digging deeper to understand the real motive and

relations behind phenomena that have extended through history) examining what

constitutes reality in any given time and space. In this way, DHM was used as an

umbrella encompassing several lenses to unpack capitalist, imperialist, and nationalist

social relations and to discover how they produce and maintain disability in global

contexts. It is important to note that ideology and class are crucial components of the

nation-building process and nationalism (Hassanpour, 2015). It is the nation-state,

formed by the ruling class, which enforces its ideology upon society. In this process,

Marx thought, the ruling-class/bourgeoisie uses cultural ideology (superstructure in

Marxian terms), such as religion to control/guard the economic base (natural resources)

(Hassanpour, 2015). In the case of Iran, the "ruling class" is the clerics who

uphold/promote their religious ideology (Shi'a-Nation Building) and control all natural

resources (economy). If the ruling class feels threatened, they will use any potential

ideology to destroy ideas of peace, transnationalism, or coexistence (Hassanpour,

2015). The core capitalist logic, Hassanpour (2015) argues, is "expand or die." I argue

that Iran, Iraq, and the countries that helped Iraq, were all engaged in the core capitalist

dynamic of "expand or die."

How is Disability Perpetuated after being Produced?

After 28 years, Iran is still haunted by the effects of chemical weapons (Wright,

2014). 221,682 Iranian people were killed during the war with Iraq, while 554,858

Iranians (including unarmed women and children) were rendered disabled (MehrNews,

2012). There are 800,000 disabled Iranians with injuries and severe health problems,

who have received no acknowledgment whatsoever from the international community

(MehrNews, 2012). This is another indication that disability is produced and maintained

transnationally by global class relations and geopolitics both gendered and raced. There

are many veterans in Iran who must live with post-traumatic stress who then often "face

marital maladjustment, which predisposes them to sexual disorders". (Ahmadi et al.,

2006, p. 5). Moreover, the number of "mentally disabled" veterans (with acquired brain

injury due to shrapnel shells or explosion shocks) and those who must deal with post-

traumatic stress is increasing (Samimi, 2014). A phenomenological study conducted by

Najafi Mehri, Ebadi, Heravi Karimooi, Foroughan, and Sahraei (2012) suggested,

"victims of mustard gas experience fatigue differently from patients with acute and

chronic diseases" (p. 185). And poignantly, "[d]ue to the occurrence of late respiratory

complications of mustard gas exposure, 20 years after this incident, the number of

chemically injured victims has been reported to be at least 45,000 people" (Ghanei &

Harandi, 2008, as cited in Najafi Mehri et al., 2012).

According to the Iranian veterans' own words, their immediate caregivers (usually

their wives), and their children face financial hardships accessing medication and

adequate care every day (Entekhab.ir, 2016; Defapress, 2016; Fashnews, 2016a,

2016b, 2016c; Quds Online, 2015; Samim, 2014). Disabled veterans who have inhaled

or touched chemical agents need expensive medications to survive the pain, breathing

problems, and the restlessness that they experience on a daily basis (Fashnews 2016a,

2016e). Since 2004, new economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States and

the European Union have meant that the veterans' medications are scarce, and even

double the price (Bajoghli, 2015; Kasaiezadeh, 2015). Some veterans, on the other

hand, complain about being overmedicated in psychiatric ward and nursing homes

(Soleiman nia, 2012). Sometimes, if they complain about the existing welfare system,

they would be given an injection or electric shock to remain silent. This is especially the

case with the mentally disabled veterans who are institutionalized. Some of them are

overmedicated so that they remain silent or fall asleep (see Soleiman nia, 2012).

Unfortunately, many disabled war veterans are afraid to voice their discontent

with the economic and social conditions that they are forced to endure, because the

Iranian state immediately silences them by cutting their minimum social welfare benefits

and often imprisoning them even before they voice their complaints publicly. There have

even been veterans who have committed suicide as a result of extreme poverty or when

their minimum funding has been blocked after they have voiced their dissatisfaction with

the system (see e.g., Fashnew, 2016b, 2016d; Ir.voa.com, 2017; Namehnews.ir, 2013;

Nasr, 2014; Soleiman nia, 2012). Survivors, with physical injuries are mostly cared for

by their wives or mothers at their homes and sometimes in nursing homes. The same

thing applies to the veterans with an acquired mental disability (brain injury) as a result

of coming in contact with explosions, shrapnel shells, and high- pitched sounds. The

mentally disabled veterans are the most vulnerable ones. For some, even their families

sometimes refuse to deal with them at home (Kasaiezadeh, 2016). They are usually

institutionalized in places that are nursing home for disabled veterans, which are called

sanatoriums (āsāyeshgāh[8]). Even in there, they mostly live in very poor conditions in

terms of nutrition, sanitation, and welfare. The current long-term care, sponsored by the

Iranian state for the disabled veterans and civilians, is very much inadequate and

inefficient (IranPressNewsTube, 2012). Bajoghli (2015) reveals that Iran has the largest

population of disabled war veterans in the world. She states:

> In addition to veterans who suffer from collapsing lungs, blinded eyes, and
> melted skin from those chemical bombs, tens of thousands of veterans have
> been confined to wheelchairs since the war, legs blown off by bombs, limbs
> mangled by land mines, and spines crushed under tons of concrete. (n.p.)

Toward a Transnational Disability Model

I argue that the emerging TDM can be a point of departure that includes myriad

ways in which disabled veterans and civilians experience *becoming* disabled. This point

of departure can provide a powerful locale for expanding the notion of experience within

the field of DS toward to include connecting disabled people's resistances and struggles

globally as an oppressed group. TDM has its roots in DHM, which is based on the unity

of thought and action, because it does not conceal the connection between individual

subjects and the material world (Allman, 2007). Therefore, I propose that the emerging

TDM is also capable of unveiling the social relations behind disablement on a global

scale. This unveiling/defetishizing process, I argue, has a revolutionary capacity to

produce non-ideological forms of consciousness, knowledge, and praxis. My proposed

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[8] For proper pronunciations, see ijmes transliteration system for Arabic, Persian, and Turkish at
hhttps://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/docs/transchart.pdf

disability model aims to understand the complexity of the current global political power

structure in the context of the history of capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism. This

model goes beyond textual and discourse analyses and understands these relations as

concrete exercises of political power affecting disabled people's living conditions

globally. It also makes visible the invisible context of violent transnational racial-, ethnic-

, and religious-relations that cause wars and armed conflicts to happen, which are then

followed by disability, poverty, displacement, environmental destruction, dispossession,

and more violence. Understanding disability and disablement by this model is a form of

resistance against the unipolar capitalist world. This world has emerged after "third

world" socialist/communist and national liberation struggles were strangled (Bannerji &

Mojab, 2003). Simultaneously, it resists cultural nationalism usually driven by theocratic

ideologies and/or religious fundamentalism, cultural chauvinism, and the launch of

sectarian wars (Bannerji & Mojab, 2003).

Transnational(izing) DS can create a major shift in our thinking around disability

and difference in global contexts by raising class consciousness and setting the stage

for people to take a stand against imperialist, capitalist, and nationalist violence. TDM is

capable of leading us from visible to invisible, from evidence to explanation, and from

case study to theory. In this theory-building process, I went beyond induction, where

phenomena can be explained. Instead, I set the ground for new forms of consciousness

(e.g., imagining a world with no borders, in which disabled people can connect to each

other through their experiences as an oppressed group) to emerge. I believe this

emerging model/theory can become a transformative power in "the fabric of social

relations engulfed in the violent ideological net of religious fundamentalism and

imperialism threatening the world today" (Bannerji & Mojab, 2003, p. 11). Inspired by

Bannerji (1995, 2005), I argue that if we, as DS scholars, want to mount any

revolutionary opposition, our political attempts should be class-conscious, anti-racist,

anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-ideological. Critical DS theorists should move

beyond the insufficient theories, which reduce oppressive social relations, such as

racism, colonialism, and imperialism to conceptual problems of dualism/binarism and

cultural difference.

How do we transnationalize disablement and DS, especially in relation to

disability-production mechanisms that are mediated by exploitative social relations (e.g.,

war, poverty, environmental destruction)? What is the relationship between borders,

state, and DS? What does it mean to have DS without borders? Mojab and Gorman

(2007) argue that "transnationalism" must be understood as historical and political

categories of social organization. Transnationalizing disablement and DS must be

understood in relation to "third world" people's consciousness and political struggle—

both gendered and classed. Mojab and Gorman (2007), in their analysis of wars in the

Middle East, theorize that "labeling cultures and communities 'transnational' while

conceptualizing the state as a de-stabilized, localized, and diminishing entity,

encourages the perception that contemporary wars and crises are manufactured locally

rather than geopolitically" (p. 60). Inspired by their conceptualization, I argue that

disability should not also be seen as a local phenomenon, for it is manufactured globally

by geopolitical forces that start and perpetuate wars. Using a concept of

"transnationalism" that has been separated from an analysis of the structure,

organization, and social relations of the state (i.e., colonialism and imperialism) has

particular consequences for understanding disablement.

Gorman (2016) states, "It is clear that disability studies cannot be decolonized

without uncovering how it is itself already part of a colonizing/colonial project" (p. 2).

Transnational disability, or what I call "disablement without borders" is different from

what DS has been teaching us, which centres "whiteness" and the "west" as its

inseparable norms (Bell, 2006; Chen, 2012; Dossa, 2008; Erevelles, 2011; Gorman,

2016; Meekosha, 2011). Transnationalism, however, urges us to hear the voices of

Indigenous people, people of colour, and residents of the "third world." I believe that the

emerging TDM is not just an opportunity for stories to be told, but also an avenue for

research, resistance, and struggle against capitalist, nationalist, and imperialist

violence. This is a conscious effort on my behalf to contribute to revolutionizing the DS

context, as there is an active critique about how it has been established as a colonial

tool of the state. Althusser (as cited in Allman, 2007) believed that education is a tool of

indoctrination of next generations by the nation-state. DS is barely less than what he

described. DS has been an active tool of knowledge as a path that reproduces

imperialist and capitalist social relations in text, teaching, and enquiring.

Furthermore, to transnationalize DS, one should take into account the oppression

of disability in relation to capitalist modes of production (Gorman, 2005). On the other

hand, transnationalizing without analyzing the state can lead us into a mystic

understanding of a ghost called capitalism that constantly haunts our dematerialized

understandings of disability. The emerging TDM, partially means that we imagine a

world with no borders, but do not try to impose a universal disability identity upon all

disabled people. Additionally, it means that we can start imagining disability rights

movement(s) that are not stuck between borders, states, and their approval. Through

the emerging TDM we can start imagining having an organized and diverse group of

people with no universal disability identity and no necessary ties to the state.

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