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## Disability and social justice

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the significance of disability for social justice, using Nancy Fraser's theory of justice as a guideline. The article argues that the disability perspective is essential for understanding and promoting social justice, although it is often disregarded by critical thinkers and social activists. The article looks at three prominent strategies for achieving social justice under conditions of capitalism: economically, by decommmodifying labour; culturally, by deconstructing self-sufficiency; and politically, by transnationalising democracy. The disability perspective reveals that decommmodification of labour requires enhancement of disability support, deconstruction of self-sufficiency requires valorisation of disability-illuminated interdependence, and transnationalisation of democracy requires scrutiny of the transnational production of impairments. The article discusses each of these strategies in theoretical and practical terms by drawing on disability studies and Fraser's analyses.

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### KEYWORDS

Disability; social justice; Nancy Fraser; decommmodification; interdependence; transnational democracy

### Points of interest

- This article looks at social justice from the perspective of disability.
- The article argues that a society is just only when it provides accessible and adequate disability support.
- The article also argues that a society is just only when it does not stigmatise disabled people's 'dependency' but recognises that everyone is interdependent.
- Finally, the article argues that a society is just only when it is possible for people impaired by global economy and violence to have a say in the policies that have affected them.

### Introduction

My initial idea for this article was to explore the usefulness of Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice for critical-theoretical analyses of disability. However, after some further reflection, I decided to turn the question upside down and to focus instead on the significance of studying disability for social justice, using Fraser's theory as a guideline. This reversal of

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questioning is motivated by two observations. The first is a trivial one – the usefulness of Fraser’s theory for disability research has already been highlighted and ‘tested’ elsewhere. For example, Danermark and Gellerstedt (2004, 342) have utilised Fraser’s approach as a promising ‘point of departure to analyse and understand disability in modern society’; Dodd (2016) has drawn on Fraser’s theory of justice in order to explore and criticise the agenda of austerity and its impact on disabled people in the United Kingdom (for an earlier but conceptually thinner attempt at such theorisation, see Mladenov 2014); Hugemark and Roman (2007) have used Fraser’s theory to analyse divisions and tensions within the Swedish disability movement; Mladenov (2016) has applied Fraser’s framework in a critical analysis of disability injustices in the postsocialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe; Soldatic and Grech (2014) have supported their proposal to develop transnational disability studies and politics with reference to Fraser (2005); and Vehmas and Watson (2014, 647) have made recourse to Fraser (2000) in order to criticise the disregard of the ‘economic basis of disability’ in contemporary critical disability studies.

The second observation that underpins the reversal of my initial questioning on Fraser and disability is a critical one – disability has consistently been marginalised by critical theorists and social activists alike. Most thinkers and campaigners concerned with social justice have perceived their work as unrelated to what has routinely been regarded as a specialist domain of research and campaigning. This point about the side-lining of disability has previously been made by disability scholars – for example, Davis (2002, 147) lamented the widespread assumption that disability does not constitute ‘a serious category of oppression’, contrasting the progressives’ indignation with racism and sexism to their indifference towards ableism. Let me provide two recent examples of such disregard of disability taken from the domains of critical theory and activism.

In a radical critique of contemporary capitalism, Jonathan Crary (2014) characterises our technologically interconnected world by the injunction to perform that incorporates people into homogeneous space and time of uninterrupted and constantly accelerating production and consumption. Crary regards sleep as the last frontier before the total submission of humans to the profit-making imperatives of the globalised techno-capital. He conceptualises sleep as a vulnerability that defies the instrumental calculus of the 24/7 world of contemporary capitalism: ‘Sleep is the only remaining barrier, the only enduring “natural condition” that capitalism cannot eliminate’ (Crary 2014, 74). I find it remarkable that Crary does not see disability in similar terms, considering disability’s resistance to instrumentalisation that, although far from ‘natural’, has nevertheless been repeatedly highlighted by disability scholars (for example, Hartblay 2014; Mitchell and Snyder 2010; Mladenov 2015a). The only place in the book that includes a discussion of disability is Crary’s brief recourse to autism. Yet autism is used by Crary as way to condemn television that, according to a quoted study (2014, 86; original emphasis), ‘might have a catastrophic *physical* impact on the developing human being – ... it could produce extreme, permanent impairments in the acquisition of language and in the capacity for social interaction’. In this account, autism is a pathology created by techno-capitalism rather than an impediment to its total instrumentalisation of life, as sleep is argued to be.

My second example concerns the side-lining of disability in contemporary social activism. The case in question is the Leap Manifesto,<sup>1</sup> a campaigning tool promoting social and environmental justice in Canada. It was written in 2015 by Canadian activists and has been supported by Naomi Klein and other well-known public figures (Klein 2016). The document

weaves together measures intended to rectify injustices suffered by the planet, indigenous peoples, women, workers, migrants and refugees. Accordingly, it insightfully highlights the intersections between the issues of climate change, economic inequality, racism, sexism, economic exploitation, globalisation and migration. Yet despite this impressive intersectionality, the Leap Manifesto does not mention disability or injustices of ableism.

In this article I will explore the importance of disability for accounts concerned with social justice, be they critical-theoretical as the one provided by Crary (2014), or practical-activist as the one advanced in the Leap Manifesto (Klein 2016). To this end, I will focus on what I consider to be the most powerful critical-theoretical conceptualisation of social justice produced in recent decades – that of Nancy Fraser. In the mid-1990s, Fraser (1995) developed an account of social justice intended to bring together in a synthesis the two main left-wing strands of twentieth-century thinking and acting on justice – the socialist strand that had focused on issues of economic redistribution, and the postsocialist strand that had focused on issues of cultural recognition. This account was later expanded to accommodate issues of political representation (Fraser 2005), thus creating a comprehensive theory and a versatile instrument for critique of present-day injustices.

Fraser has meticulously explored injustices of gender, class, race and sexuality, but has so far hardly ever mentioned disability. In the early 2000s, Michael Bérubé (2003) highlighted this omission of Fraser's and insisted on the importance of 'mak[ing] disability central to our theories of egalitarian social justice'. Taking this suggestion as my point of departure, I will argue that the mechanisms which produce and maintain injustices along other axes of difference such as class or gender cannot be completely understood nor fully dismantled without taking disability into account. First, I will briefly present Fraser's theory of social justice. Then, I will explore the significance of disability for the formulation and advancement of some prominent transformative strategies for social change aimed at economic redistribution, cultural recognition and political representation. The conclusion will emphasise the interrelations between these three spheres of action.

## Fraser's theory of social justice

Fraser's theory of social justice (Fraser 1995, 1996, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2013; Fraser and Honneth 2003) has been summarised by disability scholars on several occasions (Danermark and Gellerstedt 2004; Dodd 2016; Hugemark and Roman 2007; Mladenov 2016). These reviews have been devised in view of applying Fraser's framework to disability, whereas the summary provided here is tailored to the purpose of looking at social justice from the perspective of disability. With this intention in mind, the first thing to note is that for Fraser (1996) social justice means 'parity of participation' and that this normative standard has been central for disability campaigning and thought at least since the 1970s (UPIAS 1976). From the perspective of parity of participation, a society is just only when it enables all of its adult members to interact with each other as peers, and this necessarily includes disabled people.

According to Fraser's (1996) initial formulation, parity of participation requires economic redistribution and cultural recognition. Later, Fraser (2005, 2007) added political representation to her originally two-dimensional framework in order to take into account the impact of transnational structures and processes on social justice. Fraser expanded the familiar scope of the terms 'redistribution', 'recognition' and 'representation'. In her theory, redistribution is not reduced to 'the sort of end-state reallocations that are associated with the

liberal welfare state. Rather, it also encompasses the sort of deep-structural economic changes that have historically been associated with socialism' (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 95–96, n. 8). Accordingly, a strategy of redistribution could be either affirmative or transformative – it could promote surface reallocations of economic outputs without touching the underlying structures that generate economic inequality, or it could attempt deep-level economic restructuring. Fraser's understanding of recognition is similarly broader than usual – in her usage, the term is 'not limited to the sort of valorization of group differences that is associated with mainstream multiculturalism. Rather, it also encompasses the sort of deep restructuring of the symbolic order that is associated with deconstruction' (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 96, n. 9). Accordingly, a strategy of recognition could seek to affirm, on the surface level, previously devalued differences or commonalities that transcend differences; or, alternatively, could attempt to transform culture in-depth by deconstructing the underlying frameworks that produce differences in the first place.

As far as representation is concerned, for Fraser (2005, 2007) this term encompasses both ordinary-political democratic processes such as political association within national civil society or voting in national elections, and meta-political processes that determine who is entitled to participate in ordinary-political processes. Fraser (2005, 12) points out that strategies of political representation which limit democratisation to the bounded polity of the nation-state reproduce the seventeenth-century principle that 'the territorial state is the appropriate unit within which to pose and resolve disputes about justice'. In the context of contemporary globalisation, such strategies are bound to remain affirmative. In contrast, transformative strategies of political representation seek to democratise decision-making on a transnational basis, recognising that the principle of the nation-state is 'out of synch with the structural causes of many injustices in a globalizing world, which are not territorial in character' (2005, 12). Such injustices include global division of labour, global inequalities in access to communicative power and global biopolitics of climate, weaponry, cure and biotechnology that take lives and injure bodies (2005, 13).

Fraser's distinction between redistribution, recognition and representation forms the backbone of the discussion that follows. Because of institutional differentiation that accompanied the development of capitalism (Fraser 2000), the three dimension of justice have become relatively autonomous – therefore, they require different but equally important strategies for overcoming associated injustices. Indeed, Fraser (2005, 10–11, n. 9) has acknowledged that, for tactical reasons, struggles for justice are sometimes justified in emphasising one of the dimensions at the expense of the other two. However, in general, 'struggles against maldistribution and misrecognition cannot succeed unless they are joined with struggles against misrepresentation – and vice-versa'; therefore, 'efforts to overcome injustice cannot, except in rare cases, address themselves to one such dimension [of justice] alone' (2005, 11).

Thus if we overemphasise economic maldistribution and de-emphasise cultural misrecognition, we risk one-sided economism that could (indirectly) enhance injustices of misrecognition. In the 1990s, Shakespeare (1994) criticised historical materialists within disability studies for being implicated in such a disregard of culture, and more recently this argument was reiterated by Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009, 50). On its behalf, the overemphasising of culture at the expense of economy risks one-sided culturalism that could (indirectly) enhance injustices of maldistribution. Recently, Vehmas and Watson (2014) and Dodd (2016, 158) criticised 'critical disability studies' for being implicated in such a disregard of economy.

Finally, disregarding the political dimension in one's critique of economy and culture risks methodological nationalism that could (indirectly) enhance maldistribution and misrecognition by side-lining injustices of globalisation. Highlighting this problem, postcolonial disability scholars (for example, Meekosha 2011; Soldatic 2013) have accused contemporary disability theory of 'scholarly colonialism' (Meekosha 2011, 668) because of its disregard of the transnational dimension of disability (in)justice.

Besides the distinction between redistribution, recognition and representation, the following analysis also relies on Fraser's (1995) distinction between affirmative and transformative strategies for overcoming injustice. Affirmative strategies correct the outcomes of social arrangements while transformative remedies correct social arrangements themselves (1995, 82). Therefore, affirmative strategies are less likely to produce substantial change because they leave the underlying structures intact; they can even enhance injustice. Transformative strategies are more promising because they reach deeper and change structures and frames, although they may be harder to implement because they are removed from the immediate concerns of the oppressed (Fraser 1995, 90; Fraser and Honneth 2003, 77–78). In the following three sections, I will explore the significance of disability for three prominent transformative strategies for achieving parity of participation – decommodification of labour in the dimension of redistribution, deconstruction of self-sufficiency in the dimension of recognition, and transnationalisation of democracy in the dimension of representation.

## Disability and economic redistribution

On the level of economy, capitalism generates maldistribution through commodification of labour. This is not the only way in which capitalism impairs distributive justice, but it is nevertheless a key one. Capitalism commodifies labour by putting pressure on people to work for a wage (Marx 1978). The stronger the pressure to sell one's labour, the less room one has to negotiate conditions of employment and the more unequal society becomes. Therefore, a transformative strategy of redistribution would seek to decommodify labour (Esping-Andersen 1990; see also Mladenov 2015b) – for example, through the introduction of a basic income:

According to proponents, if the level of the grants were set high enough, Basic Income would alter the balance of power between capital and labor, creating a more favorable terrain on which to pursue further change. The long-term result could be to undermine the commodification of labor power. (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 78)

But in order to be truly transformative, a strategy of redistribution that aims to decommodify labour needs to improve the access to disability support. The structural reasons for this could be clarified by drawing a political-economic comparison between gender and disability.

In their analyses of capitalism, feminist thinkers have emphasised the centrality of gender for this political-economic system. Capitalism requires gender division of labour for its smooth functioning – both a division between paid and unpaid (caregiving and homemaking) labour and a gender division within paid labour (Fraser 1995, 78). The coding of an activity as 'feminine' legitimates its exploitative incorporation in the system of capital accumulation – keeping overfeminised activities such as caregiving, homemaking and certain kinds of service provision unpaid or underpaid is an essential tool for value appropriation: 'Women who care are thought to be exercising their natural proclivities to nurture and this invidious assumption translates into low wages' (Watson et al. 2004, 338). Disability is equally

important for capitalism, as Marxist and neo-Marxist thinkers within disability studies have argued (Finkelstein 1980; Oliver and Barnes 2012; Russell 2001, 2002; Stone 1984). For example, according to Abberley (1987, 17), ‘a theory of disability as oppression will attempt to flesh out the claim that historically specific categories of “disabled people” were constituted as a product of the development of capitalism, and its concern with the compulsion to work’. The category of disability is a major instrument used by the capitalist state to regulate the supply of labour in the interests of capital accumulation. So if gender (in addition to class and race) is key for division of labour, disability is key for commodification of labour.

In her book *The Disabled State*, Deborah Stone (1984) has shown that tightening of eligibility criteria which allow a person to be officially recognised as ‘disabled’ makes access to need-based distribution harder, thus putting additional pressure on workers to accept unfavourable conditions of employment within the system of work-based distribution. Notably, this regulation of eligibility concerns all workers and non-workers in capitalism (rather than only disabled ones), which allows Stone to argue that:

The very notion of disability is fundamental to the architecture of the welfare state; it is something like a keystone that allows the other supporting structures of the welfare system and, in some sense, the economy at large to remain in place. (1984, 12)

The more difficult the access to the disability category (and therefore – to the need-based system of distribution), the more pressure there will be on both actual and potential workers to sell their labour for a wage irrespective of the conditions of employment:

Enlarging the active reserve army of labour [by decreasing disability support and pushing more people into employment] is ‘good’ for business because it disciplines labour. Having more people desperate for work keeps competition for jobs high and workers’ wages down, thereby protecting the corporate profit margins and class privilege, which are sacred to the interests of capital. (Russell 2002, 125)

In contrast to the tightening of eligibility, the liberalisation of eligibility criteria makes it possible for some unemployed or underemployed people to be reclassified as disabled people, which could potentially reduce the pressure of commodification. However, liberalisation of eligibility is not enough for effective decommodification because meagre, conditional or stigmatised benefits deter people from seeking exemption from work-based distribution by way of the disability category (Russell 2001, 93). The point about stigma suggests that the economic mechanisms of commodification are intertwined with the cultural mechanisms of ableism (explored in the next section) – nevertheless, the two have autonomous causal force. Therefore, economic mechanisms need to be addressed in systemic rather than communicative terms (e.g. in terms of creation and appropriation of value rather than construction of meaning) and require a distinctive strategy of redistribution that could correspond to but does not coincide with the strategy of recognition (see Vehmas and Watson 2014, 647). What does such a strategy look like?

The foregoing analysis suggests that a transformative strategy of redistribution which seeks to decommodify labour should necessarily take disability into account. Labour could be effectively decommodified only when: the access to disability support is improved by liberalising disability assessment; the access to disability support is decoupled from means-testing, prior contributions and workfare conditionality; and disability support is expanded to ensure proper standard of living for those who rely on it. An actual benefit approximating this ideal type was the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in the United Kingdom (Roulstone and Prideaux 2012, 162). The DLA was designed to cover the additional



costs of living with impairment in present-day society and, according to Morris (2011, 4), was 'the only aspect of the benefit system [in the United Kingdom] which [was] implicitly based on creating a "level playing field" for disabled people'. Notably, the DLA was non-means tested, non-contributory and free from workfare conditionality. As such, it was based on 'a mixture of welfare and rights thinking' rather than 'simple compensation' (Roulstone and Prideaux 2012, 53).

A transformative strategy of redistribution that seeks to decommodify labour would thus advocate for public provision of disability support based on principles approximating those incorporated in the United Kingdom's DLA. Since 2013, the DLA for people of working age has been gradually replaced by the more restrictive Personal Independence Payment (Roulstone 2015). This transformation has been part of a wider programme of austerity (Dodd 2016; Mladenov 2014). Disabled people in the United Kingdom have been amongst the 'disproportionally affected' (Taylor-Robinson, Whitehead, and Barr 2014) by the cuts to public services systematically implemented since 2010. The impact of these cuts on disability policy in the United Kingdom has been described as 'systematic retrogression' by disability organisations (Inclusion London 2015) and a 'great leap backwards' by policy analysis (Taylor-Robinson, Whitehead, and Barr 2014). Besides the already mentioned retrenchment of the DLA, disability-related austerity has also included the retrenchment of the Employment and Support Allowance, the closure of the Independent Living Fund<sup>2</sup> and the cuts to local authorities' funding for social care (Mladenov 2014). As an urgent priority, a transformative strategy of redistribution that seeks to decommodify labour needs to address these cuts to disability support advanced by the agenda of austerity.

## Disability and cultural recognition

On the level of culture, capitalism generates misrecognition by promoting self-sufficiency.<sup>3</sup> Although self-sufficiency is not the only term that confers cultural value within capitalism, it is certainly a key one. The paradigmatic subject of capitalism is the rational utility maximiser who is free from social and natural restraints or external interferences. In the era of neoliberal capitalism, this subject is sleepless, tireless, hyper-able, flexible and mobile, continuously enhancing one's capacity to produce and consume (Crary 2014):

A subject of (market) choice and a consumer of services, this individual is obligated to enhance her quality of life through her own decisions. In this new 'care of self,' everyone is an expert on herself, responsible for managing her own human capital to maximal effect. (Fraser 2003, 168)

This overvaluation of self-sufficiency has a negative recognitive impact on those involved in caring relationships such as women and disabled people (Hughes et al. 2005); it forces the latter 'to embolden the ability side of the dis/ability complex in order to survive, hopefully thrive, but definitely make do and mend' (Goodley, Lawthom, and Runswick-Cole 2014, 981). Therefore, a transformative strategy of recognition would seek to deconstruct self-sufficiency – for example, by exposing self-sufficiency as rooted in relations of interdependence. This point could be clarified by juxtaposing critiques of self-sufficiency focused on gender with those concerned with disability.

Utilising the perspective of gender, Fraser and Gordon (1994) point out that in pre-industrial societies dependence was a nearly universal and therefore normalised condition that did not entail moral-psychological stigma. Pre-industrial women were dependent but so were most pre-industrial men, which precluded feminisation of dependence. On this

basis, Fraser and Gordon (1994) argue that, in the pre-industrial phase of historical development, to be economically, socio-legally and politically dependent did not entail stigma. But what about dependence on assistance, be it physical, emotional or cognitive? Histories of disability suggest that premodern societies in Europe stigmatised disabled people for their appearance or behaviour but not for their reliance on external support: 'There is significant evidence that people with disabilities used networks of support in their communities to survive in times that were harsh for nearly everyone' (Braddock and Parish 2001, 21). In other words, similarly to economic dependence, dependence on support was widespread and was therefore equally normalised in premodern Europe. Consequently, at least until the onset of modernity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it was uncommon to construct disabled people as deviant due to their perceived dependence (Finkelstein 1980; Oliver and Barnes 2012) – in this regard, disabled people were not only like women, but also like most of the men.

With the advance of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, self-sufficiency gradually became the norm and dependence – a deviation. The (hitherto strong) association between wage labour and dependence was weakened and, eventually, effaced: 'Radical workingmen, who had earlier rejected wage labor as "wage slavery," claimed a new form of manly independence within it' (Fraser and Gordon 1994, 315–316). This shift allowed male workers to (falsely) perceive themselves and be perceived as self-sufficient, but the corollary was the feminisation, marginalisation and, eventually, stigmatisation of dependence (in all its forms, but now excluding wage labour). The demise of welfarism and the rise of neoliberalism in the post-industrial age further devalued dependence. The pressure to engage in wage labour extended towards women, as well as towards disabled people. Two-earner families became the norm, public campaigns stigmatised 'dependency culture', receipt of benefits became conditional on labour market participation and eligibility criteria were tightened. 'In this context, the worker tends to become the universal social subject: everyone is expected to "work" and to be "self-supporting." Any adult not perceived as a worker shoulders a heavier burden of self-justification' (1994, 324). This analysis suggests that the cultural norm of self-sufficiency is intrinsically related to the economic mechanism of commodification of labour explored in the previous section. However, it would be a mistake to reduce self-sufficiency to a superstructural manifestation of underlying economic forces – as a cultural norm, self-sufficiency is relatively autonomous and should be analysed and challenged in its own right. With the development of capitalism, self-sufficiency has become deeply embedded in public and private discourses that, on their behalf, have become sufficiently differentiated from the economic order of society to merit separate analysis (Fraser 2000, 118).

Fraser and Gordon's (1994) 'genealogy of dependency' exposes the stigmatisation of dependence as a historically contingent cultural construct, highlights the disparaged experience of women as traditional caregivers, and on this basis valorises interdependence. Their analysis thus engages in a transformative politics of recognition that deconstructs self-sufficiency. This approach is highly relevant to disability because the experience of disabled people as care-receivers has been similarly disparaged by the capitalist overvaluation of self-sufficiency. Until relatively recently, both caregivers and care-receivers were completely excluded from wage labour and with this also excluded from the opportunity to acquire the status of self-sufficient individuals, however fake this status has been in the case of wage labourers. In consequence, both female caregivers and disabled care-receivers have

maintained strong experiential and cultural links with interdependence – links that have been broken in the case of allegedly self-sufficient (male, able-bodied) wage labourers, and links that could provide the excluded with a common ground for deconstructing self-sufficiency. Unsurprisingly, several disability scholars have recognised the value of Fraser and Gordon's feminist 'genealogy of dependency' – Christensen (2009) has used it a comparative study of cash-for-care policies in the United Kingdom and Norway; Hartblay (2014) in an analysis of disability in post-Soviet Russia; and Watson et al. (2004) in a critical review of feminist and disability perspectives on care.

Seen from the perspective of disability, the feminist valorisation of interdependence informed by the experiences of caregivers risks an ableist slippage without taking into account the position of care-receivers. Activists and thinkers within disability studies have been suspicious of the term 'care' because of its historical association with paternalism, benevolence and charity: 'For many disabled people the concept "care" is both patronising and oppressive' (Oliver and Barnes 2012, 66; see also Watson et al. 2004, 335). Sharing these concerns, in my own work I have abstained, as much as possible, from talking about 'care' and instead have used terms connoting contract such as 'support' or 'assistance' (Mladenov 2015a). The discourse of contract is favoured by the Independent Living advocates because it challenges paternalism (Watson et al. 2004, 336–338), but it also tends to cover up relations of interdependence (Mladenov 2012). Feminist ethics of care, as opposed to capitalist work ethic, is a more promising way to illuminate and valorise interdependence (Watson et al. 2004). That said, the perspective of the caregiver endorsed by feminists needs to be complemented by the perspective of the recipient of care highlighted by disability scholars – otherwise, the citizenship of the former could overpower the citizenship of the latter. A reconciliatory fusion of perspectives is proposed by Hughes et al.:

the parties involved in the caring relationship are perpetually invalidated because the value of care is measured against the autonomous adult male who neither requires nor delivers care. To be a carer or cared for – male or female, disabled or non-disabled in either role – is to be found wanting, to be other in relation to the masculine subject of modernity, to be reduced to 'the other of the same'. Those who give and receive care are marginalized, 'used and wasted' bodies, existing, by and large, on the margins of what counts as the truly human community. (2005, 265)

A transformative strategy of recognition that deconstructs self-sufficiency 'think[s] past or beyond a world in which women and disabled people are constituted as the "negative of the positive", as inferior or defective men' (Hughes et al. 2005, 269). Thus it reconciles the interests of caregivers, the overwhelming majority of whom are women, with the interests of care-receivers, a great number of whom are disabled people. Critical disability studies emphasises that all humans rely on infrastructures and relations of support (Mladenov 2015a). We are just temporarily able-bodied, but even when able-bodied we are still interdependent – it is just that in such periods, the infrastructures of support and care that we depend on remain invisible or unrecognised, receding in the background of familiarity or hidden in the realm of the 'private'. Finkelstein's seminal phenomenology of 'hand washing' clearly illuminates this point:

The fact that an able-bodied person requires a wash-basin, tap, plumbing and so on, as well as an army of people to plan, build and maintain the water works so that he or she can wash indicates that *dependency is not unique to disabled people*. (1980, 25; original emphasis)

The disability studies perspective complements the insights of feminists into care by suggesting that self-sufficiency could be effectively deconstructed only when: the

interdependence illuminated by disabled people's lives and experiences is universalised and normalised; and the self-sufficiency experienced by able-bodied people is unmasked as underpinned by infrastructures of support and caring relationships. This task requires confronting mainstream cultural patterns that overvalue self-sufficiency and devalue interdependence. In the United Kingdom, right-wing think tanks such as the Centre for Policy Studies and the Centre for Social Justice, in tandem with conservative media, have engaged in a widespread stigmatisation of 'dependency' through the discourse of 'welfare dependency'. Take, for example, the following excerpt from an article in *The Telegraph* titled 'The Destructive Effect of Dependency on the State':

The CPS [Centre for Policy Studies] estimates that under the levels of state spending envisaged by Labour there would be an additional 750,000 households in *dependency* by 2020. As the report observes, this is an economically and socially destructive phenomenon which blunts work incentives and has the pernicious effect of engendering a *culture of low aspirations* in some communities. The welfare state should be about protecting the vulnerable in their times of need and helping them back to *self-reliance*.<sup>4</sup> (Emphases added)

A transformative strategy of recognition which seeks to deconstruct self-sufficiency would confront this talk about 'self-reliance-sapping culture of welfare dependency'<sup>5</sup> that has already penetrated the common sense of the general public. As with the undermining of social support highlighted in the previous section, the 'welfare dependency' discourse has been an integral part of the austerity agenda imposed on the British society in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008. This agenda has relied heavily on stigmatisation of disabled people as welfare 'burdens' and 'benefit scroungers' (Dodd 2016; Mladenov 2014). As an urgent priority, a transformative strategy of recognition that seeks to deconstruct self-sufficiency needs to address the cultural devaluation of disability incorporated in the austerity agenda.

## Disability and political representation

On the level of political participation, misrepresentation is generated by keeping democracy national in a capitalist system that is transnational. This is not the only mechanism for undermining democratic justice under capitalism, but it is a key one and its salience has increased with globalisation. Restricting the opportunities for democratic participation to the citizens of the nation-state makes it impossible for many of those affected by the economic and cultural injustices generated by transnational capital to make claims for redistribution and recognition. This disjunction between national framing of political membership and transnational socio-economic structures, although far from being new, has become especially pronounced since the onset of globalisation in the late twentieth century. The ensuing political injustice has been termed 'misframing' by Fraser (2005, 8; original emphasis): 'Here the injustice arises when the community's boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly exclude some people from the chance to participate *at all* in its authorized contests over justice.' In order to redress the injustice of misframing, a transformative strategy of representation would seek to transnationalise democracy – for example, by reconstituting the public sphere along transnational lines (Fraser 2007). My argument is that disability has a central role to play in such efforts.

This argument is supported by research in the emerging field of transnational disability studies (for example, McRuer 2010; Meekosha 2011; Sherry 2007). Building on this expanding

body of work, Soldatic (2013) and Soldatic and Grech (2014) have suggested that the production of impairment – which they conceptualise as the bodily component of disability – makes visible the structural violence of colonialism and globalisation, the otherwise ‘invisible debts of the global North that are owed to the South’ (Soldatic 2013, 749). In this account, produced impairment is a material trace left by the capitalist world-system on subaltern people’s bodies. As such, it becomes a ground for challenging, in a uniquely powerful way, the national misframing of political contestation and decision-making in view of its negative implications:

for the free movement of disabled people across borders, whether this is forced migration such as disabled refugees and asylum seekers, for disabled citizens who are seeking to make claims against a nation state to which they are not a citizen, or for disabled citizens residing within the South who wish to make claims against transnational institutions such as the World Bank, WTO, and the IMF for the devastating impacts of their economic and social restructuring programs on local livelihoods, communities and environments. (Soldatic and Grech 2014, n.p.)

For disability studies and activism, the significance of embracing a transnational perspective is potentially as far-reaching as was the significance of embracing the social model of disability in the 1980s and the 1990s (Oliver 1996). The social model challenged the individual or medical model on the basis of a paradigmatic shift from methodological individualism to methodological holism. Similarly, what could be identified in the work of transnational disability scholars as an emerging transnational model of disability challenges the national framing of disability issues by promoting a paradigmatic shift away from ‘methodological nationalism’ (Beck 2006, 24). Such a shift is pivotal when it comes to exploring disability in the Global South, because disability here ‘is firmly linked to northern imperialism, centuries of colonisation and globalisation’ (Meekosha 2011, 671). Considering that the overwhelming majority of disabled people reside in the Global South, it follows that only a transnational model of disability could effectively address the issues faced by most of the disabled people in the world.

The importance of transnationalisation for disability studies seems undeniable, but what could disability add to the transnational perspective? In the approach proposed by Soldatic (2013) and Soldatic and Grech (2014), the bodily component of disability is historicised, contextualised and foregrounded to underpin transnationalisation of democracy. Here, produced impairments provide a unique and powerful justification for including non-citizens in the public sphere according to the ‘all-affected principle’. This principle holds that ‘what turns a collection of people into fellow members of a public is not shared citizenship, but their co-imbrication in a common set of structures and/or institutions that affect their lives’ (Fraser 2007, 22). In brief, produced impairments illuminate transnational ‘affectedness’ like no other personal characteristic and in this sense are central to a transformative strategy of political representation that seeks to transnationalise democracy.

Let me provide an example. The collapse of the Rana Plaza building in 2013 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, killed more than 1100 garment factory workers and injured over 2000 (Human Rights Watch 2015). These people – mostly women from rural areas – produced clothes for prominent international fashion brands. They lost their lives or were injured as a result of an accident precipitated by unsafe and grossly exploitative working conditions. Their injuries illuminated the ways in which workers in Bangladesh are negatively affected by the profit-seeking activities of the international garment industry:

Some of this [abuse of workers] can also be blamed on the branded retailers who place bulk orders and say ‘Scale up production lines because it is a big order, and improve your margins.’ Even 2–3 cents can make the difference, but these companies don’t want to factor in [labor rights and safety] compliance into costing. (Bangladeshi garment factory owner as quoted in Human Rights Watch 2015, 9)

The public recognition that garment factory workers in Dhaka were (bodily) affected by global structures of capital accumulation justified demands for redistribution on a transnational scale. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, a global fund was set up to secure financial support for the victims<sup>6</sup> and international retailers were publicly admonished to contribute (Human Rights Watch 2015, 66–67). In 2015, the General Secretary of the British Trade Union Congress wrote in an open letter to the Chairmen of the Benetton Group: ‘Benetton was one of the companies with a relationship with at least one of the factories housed in the Rana Plaza building. As such *your company has a responsibility for ensuring those families affected receive the compensation they need*’ (TUC 2015, n.p.; emphasis added).

The produced impairments of the workers in Dhaka illuminated transnational affectedness, shaped transnational public opinion and justified demands for transnational redistribution (albeit an affirmative rather than a transformative one). It may be argued that the motivation of international companies to compensate affected workers boils down to fears of falling profits due to reputational damage. However, such an explanation does not justify a reduction of ‘the political’ to ‘the economic’ because it still admits that economic pressure on international retailers has mounted as a result of political pressure underpinned by transnationalisation of democracy.

More difficult is the question of whether the rendering of disability in terms of a produced impairment that illuminates transnational affectedness reduces disability to a sign of individual inferiority, a conventional metaphor of personal tragedy, an individualised and medicalised ‘symbol of the evils of colonialism’ (Sherry 2007, 14). Jonathan Crary’s (2014) recourse to autism in his critique of techno-capitalism summarised in the Introduction to this article is illustrative of such a reduction of disability to individual pathology for the purposes of critique. According to Mark Sherry (2007, 16), ‘[r]ather than simply bemoan disability as a symbol of the horrors of imperialism, a far more interesting approach is to unpack the power dynamics which link the two experiences, both in practice and in rhetoric’. Responding to Sherry (2007), Soldatic and Grech (2014, n.p., n. 3) argue that their recourse to impairment is socio-political and material rather than cultural or symbolic. Still, the condemnation of the material production of impairment advanced by Soldatic and Grech remains in tension with the cultural celebration of disability favoured by Sherry. A suggestion for how to overcome this tension while advancing a transformative politics of representation on the basis of produced impairments could be found in the work of Abberley (1987). I will summarise his approach in the final section of this article.

## Conclusion

Let me recap the arguments so far presented. According to Fraser, social justice means parity of participation. Parity of participation requires strategies of economic redistribution, cultural recognition and political representation. Such strategies are either affirmative or transformative, but only the latter achieve real change. Capitalism could be transformed economically

by decommodifying labour, culturally by deconstructing self-sufficiency, and politically by transnationalising democracy. Yet to be really transformative, decommodification of labour needs to enhance disability support and deconstruction of self-sufficiency – to valorise interdependence illuminated by disabled people's lives by emphasising its universality and highlighting the ways in which interdependence underpins self-sufficiency. On its behalf, transnationalisation of democracy needs to make recourse to produced impairments in order to reveal affectedness, but this strategy bears the risk of devaluing non-conforming bodies and experiences and should be approached with caution.

The redistributive enhancement of disability support interacts with the recognitive valorisation of disability-illuminated interdependence in a mutually reinforcing way. Improving the access to disability support and increasing the entitlements associated with it strengthen the understanding of disability-illuminated interdependence as universal and natural. On its behalf, universalising and naturalising disability-illuminated interdependence legitimises the expansion of disability support. This interrelationship is key when addressing the austerity agenda because the latter brings about material deprivation and cultural devaluation in similarly mutually reinforcing loops (Dodd 2016, 154; Mladenov 2014).

Using the perspective of gender, Fraser (2013, 133–135) has argued that social justice could be achieved by transforming public policy and attitudes according to a 'universal caregiver' model. This model promotes the caregiving of men, thus providing the conditions for men to become more like women have traditionally been. The disability perspective espoused by this article suggests that social justice requires complementing 'universal caregiving' with the principle of 'universal care-receiving'. The latter would normalise and facilitate care-receiving, thus emphasising the (routinely disavowed) common ground of interdependence that underpins the lives of disabled and non-disabled people alike. An integrated 'universal caregiver/care-receiver' model could pave the way to 'think[ing] past or beyond a world in which women and disabled people are constituted as ... inferior or defective men' (Hughes et al. 2005, 269). The practical measures that promote 'universal caregiving' – for example, shorter working week, publicly supported care work (Fraser 2013, 134) – are commensurate with the practical measures promoting 'universal care-receiving' – for example, liberalised access to disability support, elimination of means-testing and workfare conditionality, adequate benefit levels. Both advance decommodification of labour and both presuppose deconstruction of self-sufficiency.

The transnationalisation of democracy 'on the grounds of produced impairment emerging from the South' (Soldatic and Grech 2014, n.p.) provides subaltern people with the opportunity to have a say in the governance of global economic and cultural affairs. On this basis, it becomes possible to advance claims for redistribution and recognition along the lines of 'universal caregiving/care-receiving'. However, the risk of devaluing non-conforming bodies should be taken into consideration when using impairment to shed light on global injustices. In other words, illumination of transnational affectedness or, to use a sharper term, colonial violence should not overshadow the violence of ableism. A potential way out of this dilemma is Abberley's (1987, 9) 'attitude of ambivalence towards impairment' that allows one to perceive impairment simultaneously as something bad and something good: 'Impairment must be identified as a bad thing, insofar as it is an undesirable consequence of a distorted social development, as the same time as it is held to be a positive attribute of the individual who is impaired.' Abberley links his 'attitude of ambivalence' to a distinction between prevention of the social production of impairments and treatment of impairments that have already

been produced – from the perspective of the former, impairment is bad; whereas the perspective of the latter calls for a positive attitude towards impairment. Note also that for Abberley (1987, 11), the overwhelming majority of impairments are produced by conditions of work, consumption or maldistribution under capitalism, and therefore are socially (or, to be more precise, politico-economically) produced.

My final point is that the three disability-informed strategies for social transformation promoted in this article, when pursued together, bear the potential to improve parity of participation not only for disabled people, but for everyone else as well. Conversely, disregarding disability risks enhancing injustice for all.

## Notes

1. <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/> (accessed October 6, 2016).
2. After the closure of the UK-wide Independent Living Fund (ILF) on 30 June 2015, the responsibility for supporting the existing ILF users was transferred: in England, to local authorities; in Wales, to the Welsh Independent Living Grant; in Scotland and Northern Ireland, to the newly created ILF Scotland. In the case of England, there have been concerns that the funding has not been ring-fenced and has therefore become vulnerable to cuts.
3. Within the liberal framework that ideologically underpins capitalism, ‘self-sufficiency’ is synonymous with ‘independence’. However, within disability thought and activism, the Independent Living movement has shifted the meaning of ‘independence’ from liberal-individualist self-sufficiency to a particular type of interdependence (Mladenov 2012). In order to avoid confusion with the revised ‘independence’ of the Independent Living advocates that has a strong (albeit sometimes implied rather than explicitly stated) emphasis on interdependence, in this text I use the term ‘self-sufficiency’ instead of ‘independence’.
4. *The Telegraph*, 15 February 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/11414430/The-destructive-effect-of-dependency-on-the-state.html> (accessed October 6, 2016).
5. *Daily Mail*, 22 June 2015. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3133927/DAILY-MAIL-COMMENT-Welfare-reforms-benefit-Britain.html> (accessed October 6, 2016).
6. <http://www.ranaplaza-arrangement.org/> (accessed October 6, 2016).

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