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# RADICAL DISABILITY POLITICS

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### Introduction

**A.J. and Liat:** Like all radical politics, disability politics are always in flux as social contexts shift. Unlike many strands of radical politics, however, disability issues have often been ignored or marginalised within (other) radical theory; and, disability oppression has, at times, been repeated or reinforced by many radical theories and praxis. There are many complex reasons for this, including ableism/disablism on the left as well as the tendency towards liberalism (and with it), white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism and cissism within mainstream disability organising. It is because of the diversity of thought about and approaches to disability that, as editors, we felt it would be most useful to demonstrate that diversity. When we were approached by the Handbook editors, therefore, we decided to showcase the voices of a variety of radical disability/social justice activists (or activist/scholars) residing in the US and Canada in a conversation rather than provide our own partial assessment of where these politics are at.

Before getting to the roundtable conversation, which took place in the spring of 2017, we want to provide some context regarding the history of radical disability politics and some of the ongoing debates within and between disabled communities. While there are many sites of contention within radical disability politics, we will focus here on disagreements around language, who can or is considered to be disabled and what the suggested paths to liberation might be.

Radical disability theory (emerging from and then influencing social movements) is often understood as emerging in the 1970s from the lived experience of disabled people in the Global North. It was a shift in thought that diverged from, at least to some degree, the hegemonic views of disability as tragic, individual and part of the medical domain. This hegemonic understanding is commonly called the individual model (Oliver 1996) or the medical model (Elliott and Dreer 2007; Withers 2012).

The 'radical' frameworks emerging at that time include the social model and the rights model of disability. The social model was primarily developed by physically disabled white Marxists, many of whom were living in nursing homes and other residential institutions. They theorised impairment (the physical condition that differs from the norm) as being separate from disability (the physical/access and social barriers imposed on impaired people)

(Oliver 1996; Thomas 2004). In the US, around the same time, the rights model was developed by groups of primarily physically disabled white people. Understanding disabled people as a minority group, as influenced by strands of civil rights movements, the disability rights framework emphasises social inclusion and legislative protections against discrimination (Fleischer and Zames 2001; Jaeger and Bowman 2005). This framework also birthed the independent living movement (DeJong 1979). Both models (social and rights) were later applied, with differing success, onto people who were psychiatrised or labelled as intellectually disabled.

For their time, both models marked radical paradigm shifts in some important ways. However, they have been thoroughly critiqued for imposing their model of physical disability on other groups (Beresford 2004; Nabbali 2009), being patriarchal (Morris 1992; O'Toole 2004) and maintaining white supremacy (Bell 2006; Ferri 2010). The disability rights model also critiques disabled people's lack of access to capitalism rather than capitalism itself. Rights frameworks in general can be described as assimilationist rather than radical (radical in the sense of transforming the root causes of oppression).

Other less discussed frameworks take a much deeper intersectional and transformative approach to understandings and organising around disability. Frames of thought and activism (such as disability justice, Berne 2015; or radical disability theory, Withers 2012)<sup>1</sup> stress the centrality of anti-capitalist, intersectional and cross-disability organising and the necessity of valuing interdependence and the intrinsic value of disabled people (and everyone) outside of market labour economies. These frameworks also call for community-based, organic (rather than universal) accessibility, calling them 'collective access' (Berne 2015), 'access intimacy' (Mingus 2016) and 'radical access' (Withers 2012).<sup>2</sup> Community-based accessibility, however, is about meeting the needs of community members in intersectional ways. This includes, for example, creating 'safer spaces' that combat oppression, ensuring financial access, having child care, having active listeners, etc.

These transformative approaches also describe the social construction of disability (although what has been termed 'the radical model' stresses the significance of this much more). These intersectional radical frameworks call for people who are directly affected by particular injustices in intersecting ways (mostly people of colour, gender non-conforming people and those disabled and otherwise marginalised) to frame the demands and be the leadership.

Within all these approaches of disability organising and theory, there is no consensus with respect to a number of basic issues, as evident in the roundtable conversation later. These issues include how to call/name ourselves and our oppression. The terms 'disabled people', 'non-disabled people' and 'disablism' are preferred by those who emphasise the social model of disability (Oliver 1996) and are the dominant terms used in the UK (with, at times, the exception of 'people with learning difficulties'). Those who emphasise rights and inclusion tend to use 'people with disabilities', 'able-bodied' and 'ableism'. These are used in the US, which has a tradition based in the disability rights model (Goodley 2010). Those advocating for the use of 'people first language' (as in 'people with disabilities') do so because they want to emphasise personhood over disability status (Enns 1999), especially in relation to people with intellectual disabilities (referred to in the UK as people with learning differences), who aren't often counted as equal citizens/persons.

Proponents of 'disabled people' terminology argue that 'people first language' unnecessarily separates disability from the people who embody it (Sinclair 2013). They also critique the terms 'able-bodied' and 'ableism' for confusing ability (function or capacity) with disability (a socially imposed label) (Oliver 1996). Some also critique the term 'able-bodied' because it is physical disability-centric while, at the same time, erasing the actual capacities

and capabilities of disabled people's bodies (Withers 2012). Some scholars, however, differentiate between ableism and disablism. 'Ableism' through this view is the imagined ideal of 'the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human' that we are all measured against (Campbell 2008: 44) and not only the oppression that disabled people experience. Crip is also a term that is used by some, especially those with physical disabilities or mobility impairments who are a part of disability culture. The term comes from the derogatory name 'cripple' but had been reclaimed to indicate a sense of community and pride in disability identity (Kafer 2013). Some also use 'crip' in a similar way to queer, as a systemic way of critiquing and resisting normativity (McRuer 2006). It is therefore a self-identification (and a form of critique as in the verb 'cripping') that is distinguishable from mainstream disability identities and rights (Sandahl 2003).

Who falls under the disability umbrella is also a site of contestation within radical disability theory and politics. Deaf (Lane 2008), trans (e.g. Withers 2013) and psychiatric consumer/survivor/ex-patients/mad people (Beresford 2000), to name a few, have all had a contentious relation to the category of disability. In the roundtable below, we use 'disabled' expansively to also refer to Deaf, mad and other communities and identifications.

Within radical disability organising and theory, there has been an important shift away from the single-issue politics of the 1970s towards intersectional organising. A number of the authors in the roundtable talk about the necessity of this because, as Fellows and Razack describe it, 'systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another' (1997: 335). Furthermore, as a number of the authors discuss, disability isn't a discrete identity; disabled people are also people of colour, queer people, women, trans-people and poor people. Single-issue organising misses this intersectional component, as the contributors reflect in regards to incarceration and institutionalisation, for example (for more on disability and incarceration writ large, see Ben-Moshe, Chapman and Carey 2014).

The mainstream disability rights movement/s is often nationally focused, if not a part of nation-building projects – legitimising the state as a just entity as certain disabled people are brought into the fold of full citizenship (Withers, 2012; Spade, 2015). However, a focus on disability justice also calls on radical activists to work transnationally (Gorman 2013). Disability organising should not simply stop at national borders, especially if we perceive a rights framework as insufficient. There are many reasons to work transnationally, including the reality that poverty and war are the dominant causes of disability globally (Erevelles 2011; Puar 2017). Both of these are fed or led by colonial and imperial programmes of the Global North. In addition, a decolonial framework that connects with Indigenous struggles would also critique the legitimacy of nation states (such as Canada and the US) to grant rights as a continuation of settler colonialism.

All of the roundtable contributors agree that social justice movements need to meaningfully include disability and this inclusion will make radical organising more meaningful and relevant. Lydia Brown argues that some radical politics use disability as 'a prop' and ableism within movements, including 'patterns of abuse, erasure, and gaslighting', is violence. In response to this exclusion, Loree Erickson calls for the recognition of disability 'as a necessary and generative part of our lives, movements and social organization. It opens up vital alternative ways of living and being'. Lateef McLeod calls on movements to recognise that 'we can all contribute to the ultimate goal of liberation'; this, according to Mia Mingus, 'necessarily change[s] our work and our goals'. There are, however, different (although not mutually exclusive) approaches to end the oppression of disabled people. Talila Lewis calls for 'advocacy framework that cuts across identities and across movements' in relation to state violence, while Rachel Gorman argues that it is 'material change' that is needed.

There are many active debates around language, identity and paths to liberation. Rather than being a weakness, we hope that the below discussion demonstrates the vibrancy and utility of intersectional and variant disability politics. Radical disability politics, although often in flux and sometimes contested, can have significant contributions to make to broader radical organising and radical thought.

What is (or what could be) so ‘radical’ about disability, disability politics and/or disability organising (or Deaf culture/ neurodiversity/ madness/ crip or other related locations)? How can disability be utilised as a radical political position and for what purposes? How does it play out in your life, in your organising/activism?

**Loree:** When we recognise disability outside dominant frameworks not as a deficit, but as a necessary and generative part of our lives, movements and social organisation – vital alternative ways of living and being are opened. Radical disability politics and practices allow us to interrupt violent and damaging ideologies about bodies, difference, vulnerability and power. Interdependence, as an example, a way of being and caring with and for each other that operates from the belief that we all have needs, we all need each other and we can all provide care, centres and celebrates difference and needs in a way that interrupts the individualism, isolation, and normalisation so key to the operation of oppressive logics. Individualism, isolation and normalisation join together to ensure that we remain disconnected from ourselves and each other. One of the most insidious ways movements are undermined is through the propagation of cultures of undesirability which create policies, environments, structures and ideologies that tell marginalised people that we are disposable unless we are consumable (e.g. rehabilitative and prison labour, medical and social work professions). These cultures of undesirability manifest everywhere from immigration and reproductive policies to who is deemed sexy. We are told that we are ‘less than’ and/or ‘too much’ to encourage us to turn away from the very things about us that are different from the dominant culture and hold the most potential for doing things differently.

**Mia:** Radical disability politics are inherently radical because it asserts that disability and disabled people are important in our work for liberation. In an incredibly able-bodied supremacist and ableist society, challenging the deeply entrenched belief that disability and disabled people are not disposable, tragic and ugly burdens is radical – including within our movements for social justice. Social justice movements do not take place in a vacuum and many of our movements continue to support and actively perpetuate ableist notions and practices. No matter who you are working with, you are working with disabled people and/or you are working with people who will become disabled. Disabled people are one of the largest oppressed groups on the planet and we are part of every single community; the potential for mass mobilisation is profound.

Even within radical politics, disability continues to push the envelope and challenge us in our thinking of what justice and liberation mean; what leadership means and what kinds of bodies and minds get to be understood and respected as leaders; what political ‘work’ is and how to reimagine ‘work’ and ‘labour’ that is not rooted in capitalism and ableism; and what ‘healing’ and ‘sustainability’ mean outside of able-bodied supremacy.

Radical disability political organising is liberatory, not only because of its political content, but even in the pragmatic and concrete work of simply bringing, for example, queer and trans-disabled people of colour together to organise. The cross-disability work it takes to navigate ableism and access to simply get disabled people in a room together is both a practice in resistance and resilience. It is both resisting against the world we don’t want and simultaneously creating the world we long for. In a world that not only segregates disabled people from society at large, but also intentionally divides people with different kinds of disabilities,

the work to build disabled organising and community is nothing short of revolutionary. To me, this is one of the most profound aspects of radical disability politics: it requires that we not only fight against the dangerous systems in place (e.g. white supremacy, misogyny, colonisation), but that we also have to – quite literally – build anew because the world we live in was never built for disabled people. The work it takes for disabled people to simply create home is a study in creativity and building alternatives.

I think the political knowledge being put forth by radical disability political work is cutting edge and gives us a political perspective that is deeply unique and that has so much to offer to our broader work for liberation. Much of this knowledge is coming directly out of disabled people's everyday lived experiences and survival. The work to fight ableism has implications for *everyone*, not only disabled people. The places where disability cuts across and is at times indistinguishable from age, gender, race, mortality, class, trauma or sexuality are ripe for cross-movement building work and has the potential to deepen and expand our understanding of oppression and violence like never before. How can we live in such a violent and traumatising world and *not* talk about disability and ableism?

**Rachel:** In many ways, the concept of 'disability' – as it is mobilised through law, state policy, education, workplaces and social services – marks the limit of inclusion. For example, when dealing with the law, people who are declared 'mentally incompetent' cannot make decisions about things that affect them, including the right to refuse potentially harmful and violent treatment. In education, students who are found to have 'an exceptionality' can be segregated for all or part of the day. Educational streaming, which is based on the premise of dis/ability (although it closely mirrors class and race inequality), determines whether a student can go on to further and higher education, and whether they can access work opportunities after graduating. So from the perspective of policy equity and formal rights, a radical political position would take disability as a start point, as it is often the mechanism of formal disqualification. At the same time, people who look or act in ways that are different from social norms may experience exclusion in family and community contexts. So a radical reimagining of family and community could start from the perspective of disability.

If we talk about embodied experiences of social inequality and social violence – for example, settler colonialism, racism, poverty, precarious work and gender-based violence – we find that one of the ways that people live in inequality is through differential outcomes in health and well-being (including access to healthcare itself). So if we are talking about any kind of radical politics, we are talking about people's embodied experience of inequality, and we may also be talking about disability and disablement.

Finally, disability discrimination through medicalisation and medical violence is a particular way in which disabled people and/or people labelled with disability experience violence through unnecessary, and/or coerced medical treatment. Reimagining healthcare and social services from a disability-positive perspective would be quite radical, and it would get us closer to having services that more people would find helpful and supportive and healing.

**Talila:** For myriad reasons, Black people, Indigenous and Native nations, people living with little or no income, womxn and LGBTransQI people are all disproportionately represented in the class of disability. And so, the state's systematic targeting of these communities means that disabled people are being targeted – more specifically, multiply marginalised disabled people are being targeted.

Too many move through politics, advocacy, life without acknowledging that it is impossible to address the perennial crisis of state violence without addressing society's systematic failure to provide equal access to education, resources, healthcare and justice to people with disabilities and people who are deaf. Indeed, the structural and systemic state violence

perpetuated against communities of colour and educationally and economically disenfranchised communities has always been deeply rooted in *at least*, race, class *and* disability. As such, ending this violence has always required not only an understanding of disability and disability-based oppressions, but also a keen understanding of how disability exists and arises in, and interacts with marginalised individuals and communities. More to the point, ending this violence has always demanded that we understand how race-, class- and disability-based oppressions interact with one another; and precisely how seamlessly each is interwoven into social, political, economic and legal mores and codes – written and unwritten.

For example, many have begun important discussions about the grave harms our ‘education’ and criminal legal systems visit upon many marginalised communities. However, there is very little attention devoted to the injustices visited upon people with disabilities and deaf people by the same systems. And it is a very rare treasure to witness political or advocacy conversations about disabled or deaf people whose bodies are home to multiple marginalities. And yet, people with disabilities are particularly susceptible to unjust encounters with and in our education and criminal legal systems.

As an educator and attorney, I am horrified and heartbroken by just how little educational institutions, ‘law enforcement,’ lawyers, judges and carceral administrators understand about disability and care about disabled people.

Education institutions define education for some students as ‘special’ – cementing very early on, that fundamentally flawed understanding of education, disability and humanity: that such a thing as ‘normal’ exists. This enshrines ableism, audism and sanism into the very fabric of society and into the hearts and minds of the youngest among us. Similarly, our legal institutions profess to seek and mete out ‘justice’, but no marginalised or multiply marginalised community has *ever* experienced justice therein.

Radical disability politics means naming that justice demands that we abandon education and legal systems as we know them.

**Lydia:** Disability is about the body, perhaps more directly and explicitly than other categories of identity or experience. It’s possible to theorise gender while attempting to work away from the body, for example, but you can’t do that with disability. You cannot engage disability without confronting the body – the frail, vulnerable, traumatised, precarious, neurodivergent, unpredictable, unruly, unstable, incoherent or noncompliant body. (I discuss the ‘body’, but I mean a ‘bodymind’. Mind and body are not separate. As an autistic person navigating anxiety and trauma, folks talk about my kind of disability as mental, meaning non-physical, but autism, anxiety and trauma are woven into my physicality and embodiment. I only avoid using the word ‘bodymind’ because it feels too academic.) Disabled, neurodivergent, mad folks are in every community and movement. Whether explicitly and intentionally political or not, our survival in a world literally out to kill us – particularly disabled folks targeted by multiple oppressions – is resistance and political.

We can’t talk about any oppression – like racism, transmisogyny, classism and ableism – without addressing ableism. Ableism is both dependent on and necessary for every other form of oppression to exist. Attending to disability is radical because it allows us to grapple with our own and others’ bodies in all their complexities. That means rethinking whose (and what types of) labour we consider valuable versus lesser, disposable and forgettable; whose performance of radicalness is praised versus inadequate or insufficient, whose traumas we centre versus dismiss or erase; whose bodily narratives we consider acceptable versus whose we consider threatening and undermining.

Lack of access, isolation and stigma – that is violence. Speaking out against state violence while ignoring the role ableism plays in its justification – that is violence. Recreating

traumatising patterns of abuse, erasure and gaslighting (denying someone's experiences) in activism, community organising and social change movements (spaces supposedly committed to social justice) – that is violence. All of these violent patterns are tied to ableism, and depend on marginalising people targeted by multiple forms of oppression. White supremacy, rape culture and replication of capitalist hierarchies in organising all thrive on ableism. Silencing and marginalising people who can't access college don't know critical theory vocabulary, can't navigate toxic social dynamics and struggle to participate – these patterns depend on ableism. (I say that as someone who experiences many privileges while also experiencing many oppressions.)

We cannot do justice by anyone without working towards disability justice – there is no reproductive, economic, racial or transgender justice; no dismantling white supremacy or settler colonialism; without disability justice.

**Lateef:** Disability politics should be incorporated in the radical politics framework because the liberation of disabled people calls for the dismantling of the capitalist system. The reason why we need the abolishment of capitalism is because it forces people to conform to an able-bodied model to enter the workforce, to which some people with disabilities cannot do. This creates a divide between the disability community and the rest of the populace who are stigmatised for not being a worker in this economy. Specifically being someone with cerebral palsy, I have seen how our system of capitalism has relegated me to a marginalised position. As a black man who does not speak orally and communicates with an AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) device, I have been read as less competent and autonomous than I actually am many times.

In the last few years, I have networked with other disability justice activists in the artist collective, Sins Invalid, in developing a disability justice platform. We are trying to develop an anti-capitalist philosophy that centres on the experiences of LGBTQIA people of colour with disabilities. In our collective intersectionality, we hope to address a pathway for liberation for our communities. This is the same work that I also try to pursue in my graduate programme. My main reason for entering my graduate programme at California Institute for Integral Studies in the Anthropology and the Social Change Department is to find ways to challenge and hopefully dismantle systems of oppression such as white supremacy, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia and ableism that we face in this country. I feel fortunate to be dedicated to do this work in a department that is dedicated to an anti-capitalist critique of society and the liberation of marginalised people in society. It is my aim to centre people with disabilities in my study and to start to devise ways in which we can incorporate disability justice in our cultural practices.

In what ways can non-disability-specific struggles for liberation from oppression be informed by a radical disability politics? What about vice versa – what are some affinities and also tensions or omissions between disability politics/culture/activism and other forms of activism or political movements?

**Loree:** Just as we cannot peel apart the layers of who we are and the multiple and contradictory meanings assigned to those differences and ways of being, we also cannot and should not organise without attention to our complex personhood (Gordon 1996). The ways that structural inequality targets us are always acting in concert. As Eli Clare (1999; 2003) so elegantly captures in much of his work, we rarely know what exactly it is that the gawkers are gawking at. How many of us have witnessed or felt the breaking apart that occurs with single-issue politics? Audre Lorde (1984) reminds us that we do not live single-issue lives; therefore, we must organise in a way that recognises our multiplicity and the interlocking nature of structural inequality. One only needs to look at the harm and violence inherent

to the Prison Industrial Complex and the overrepresentation of disabled people, Black, Indigenous, people of colour, poor people and sex workers, which many in this roundtable have spoken to, to recognise that white supremacy, colonialism, disablism and capitalism are powerfully interconnected systems.

We can also look at what happens when disabled organisations organise from a rights-based approach and work towards integration, without transformation. We see organisations that specifically target the experience of incarceration within a given institution, for example, nursing homes or psychiatric wards (sites that absolutely need dismantling), without challenging institutional thinking and carceral logics that support the current flow of power. People are moved from one oppressive institution to another. We can also see what happens when mainstream disability rights organisations ignore the operation of white supremacy, erasing the experiences and expertise of racialised disabled people and simply achieve conditional improvements for those with relative privilege. Or, when anti-poverty organising does not recognise the connections between inaccessibility, job discrimination and compulsory able-bodiedness in the life-crushing capitalist ideology of productivity above all else. Disability, rather than limiting our movements, adds necessary texture and complexity. Radical disability organising recognises that all of our liberation is connected and keeps us, and our movements, messy and whole – moving together.

**Mia:** I think many of our movements are grappling with this very question. Especially as more and more disabled people disclose their disabilities and as more and more activists and organisers become disabled or embrace their disabilities, they have always had, but never felt comfortable enough to claim. Disabled people are already in social justice movements and often we have learned to individualise and depoliticise our disabled identities and experiences because of how effective ableism continues to be. Because the stigma around disability is so incredibly intense, many people who are disabled do not identify as disabled. This is especially true for those of us who have multiple oppressed identities because it can be impossible to identify as disabled when your survival depends on you denying it.

As the radical disability political community grows and more and more disabled people of multiple oppressed identities refuse to leave our disabilities at the door, our political movements will be forced to contend with their histories of exclusion, stigma and avoidance. To me, it is vital that politically disabled people, not only descriptively disabled people, be at the centre of this shift to be informed by radical disability politics.

It is important to remember that many movements may already be doing ‘radical disability work’, but not calling it as such and are more well versed in ‘justice’ than ‘disability’. Work with poor communities and/or addressing domestic violence within immigrant communities and/or prison abolition work are already very much at the intersection of radical disability politics, given that poverty, violence, trauma and prisons are key sites in not only *how* people become disabled, but also where so many disabled people are located. So, for many of these movements what is lacking is a strong analysis and understanding of disability, ableism and able-bodied supremacy, as well as the practice of access and access intimacy.

I think about the example of healing justice work and how there is a growing number of healers within that work who understand that there is no liberatory healing work without a deep and historical understanding of how healing, cure and health have been used as weapons against so many of our communities, including disabled communities, and how ableism is a key part of the intersectional core of this.

In much of the cross-movement and cross-community works I have been part of, there are so many similarities that different communities and movements share that can bring us together. The work of interdependence, for example, has been crucial to, not only disability,

but also building queer chosen family or kinship networks for poor and/or immigrant and/or communities of colour to survive and has informed our organising.

I think one of the main tensions in all of this is the need for practice. Even though disabled people are everywhere, disability is so segregated and individualised that many people either don't have experience with disabled people or are with the diversity of disability experiences out there; or they also may not understand their experiences as 'disabled experiences' because of how absolute the stigma surrounding disability is and how oblivious their able-bodied privilege makes them.

**Lateef:** Black liberation can definitely be informed by a radical disability politics. Organisations like Black Lives Matter can definitely implement a disability justice framework in their practices. Especially because a good portion of state violence and murder against people of colour are committed on people with disabilities. Emmitt Thrower, working with my friend, Leroy Moore, has documented this several times and has even wrote a documentary about the matter entitled *Where Is Hope: The Art of Murder* (2015). To fully address this attack on our community, organisations like Black Lives Matter need to have people with disabilities in their membership and leadership to fully advocate for the victims. See, for example, the statement from the Harriet Tubman Collective regarding 'The Vision for Black Lives' platform statement and its omission and dismissal of disability (Harriet Tubman Collective, 2016). Likewise, there should be more networking and collaboration between disability organisations and people of colour organisations to deal with the state oppression that we experience. An example of this is when I was a part of a Sins Invalid's disability justice tutorial presented to the Brown Boi Project, which is a social justice organisation dedicated to politicising and organising LGBTQIA people of colour in the Bay Area with their headquarters located in Oakland. That built a good working relationship between the organisations with the Brown Boi Project learning strategies of how to organise in the disability community.

There still needs to be more education about how the disability identity is a politicised identity in African American community. Many people see disability as an individual problem and not connected to a larger historical struggle. If people can make the connection of how black people with disabilities contributed to the black liberation struggle in the past, it can make a stronger argument about how temporarily able-bodied people and people who have disabilities can come together in the African American community to work for all of our liberation. However, from my perspective, this can only come about if African Americans in the social justice arena get rid of some of their fear and ignorance around people with disabilities and disability issues. As with all communities under capitalism, there is some shame and uneasiness fellowship with people who do not easily pair up to the ableist image of what a 'typical' human is pictured to be. Only with honest dialogue within our community can resolve these rifts and fears and work together for the liberation that we all need to acquire.

**Talila:** Important and necessary conversations on race and justice cannot be fully had without disability justice at their centre. People of colour with disabilities are hardest hit by the overlapping structural inequality that exists within all of our institutions. We, therefore, cannot avoid the fact that our communities experience common and overlapping oppressions that require an advocacy framework that cuts across identities and across movements.

Common and interrelated struggles and liberation goals are just two of the reasons why marginalised communities should be in constant communication and solidarity. For instance, state-imposed and sanctioned violence including forced familial separation, enslavement, genocide, mass incarceration, institutionalisation, theft of resources and criminalisation of

existence is not new to marginalised communities in the US. Moreover, each of these communities has been engaged in near-constant struggle against oppressive and violent systems. As such, Black, Latinx, Indigenous, LGBTransQI and Disabled communities, among others, should be strategising and mobilising together because each community has unique perspectives and contributions to continue to make to the freedom struggle.

Mia's depiction of communities unknowingly being already deep in the trenches of radical disability justice work is so apt. Take mass incarceration, for instance. Disabled people and advocates/attorneys have long since battled otherising, criminalisation and violence that invite institutionalisation, forced labour, forced sterilisation and medical procedures, and abuse of disabled people in 'institutions'. So too have other disenfranchised communities been long engaged in this same struggle – under the guise of 'prison abolition' – where we find yet another brand of 'institution' swallowing up whole communities of disabled people, committing all manner of violence against them, and creating disabilities in non-disabled individuals en masse. It bears noting that these individuals are disproportionately people of colour and otherwise marginalised individuals.

So much of most marginalised communities' historic and present work regarding deinstitutionalisation, justice and healing already is steeped in the creation of innovative and transformative policies and practices. Often however, some of the staunchest race, trans, economic, immigration justice advocates unintentionally further disability-based oppressions because of their failure to understand what I term 'critical intersectionality' and to foreground disability justice.

This brings me to why it is so important to approach our advocacy in a more holistic way – to understand disability justice as quintessential to reproductive, economic, racial and transgender justice, as Lydia noted. We will never dismantle any oppressive institutions if advocates, community builders and others who are in struggle do not name, analyse and dismantle ableism. Ableism undergirds, depends upon and reifies every other oppression. So, we will never deconstruct *white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal imperialism* if we are not constantly working to unpack our own privileges around ableism, audism and other disability-based oppressions. Ironically, those who attempt to dismantle oppressive systems without acknowledging and unpacking these disability-centric privileges are contributing to violence and oppression within their own communities and society writ large.

We must create disability solidarity within every movement, such that disability rights organisations are working to advance intersectional justice, and non-disability rights civil rights organisations are showing up for disability justice. Policy-wise, the same is true. When will we see disability-positive and race-responsive education and legal policies? When will education institutions engage in trauma-informed practices that centre the whole humanity of our youth? When will we see actual innocence legislation that is disability-responsive, requiring automatic review or overturning of convictions of Deaf or disabled individuals who had absolutely no access to police, legal counsel or the court?

Until we can say *now* to these and many similar questions, we will continue to see shameful injustice within education and criminal legal systems; and violence, poverty and mass incarceration will continue to live here.

**Lydia:** As Mia Mingus discussed earlier, movements and work tackling disability already exist, whether or not they're using the language of disability justice. But, as Talila Lewis reminds us, we desperately need our movements to be cross-identity and cross-community, because those of us at the intersections (particularly Black, Brown, Latinx, Indigenous or People of Colour; Queer, Trans, Asexual or Intersex disabled and deaf folks) are most targeted by interpersonal and state violence.

I often notice (usually non-disabled) folks in policy work talking about the crisis of mass incarceration impacting folks with psychosocial disabilities/mental illnesses. After noting disproportionate representation, they'll insist that because prisons aren't the right place, we need to build psychiatric treatment facilities – completely missing the connection: institutionalisation is incarceration. Psychiatric institutions and prisons exist for surveillance and control, and engender the same violence.

Similarly, with increased reporting of mass shootings, and the usual rhetoric about 'mentally unstable' perpetrators (especially when they are white and non-Muslim, making it impossible to Other them directly through white supremacy or Islamoracism), even people on the left often blame gun violence on mental disability, neurodivergence or madness. They take an issue about violence and impunity for similar acts (like police gun violence against Black, Latinx and Indigenous disabled and deaf folks), and blame disability for it. Ableism uses disability as a convenient tool for othering – ableism says that if we fix the 'pathology', we excise the problem without having to grapple with racism, misogyny or police.

In reproductive justice, disability should be central, but is usually only a prop. If the narrative is that pregnant people need abortion access in case of disabled fetuses; that the tragedy of the Zika virus and Flint, Michigan's lead-poisoned water lies in the possibility of causing new disabilities; that disabled people are incapable of sexual consent, but neither capable of desire nor of being desired; that disabled people are automatically unfit to parent; that it's better to be dead than disabled ... then we are failing. Reproductive justice must mean disability *justice*, honouring our bodies as they are and not mourning or fearing the shadows of undesirable, disposable bodies.

As Loree mentions, it is equally imperative for disability movements to examine how we fail. I am often the only person of colour in a disability-related event, and that's a problem. I'm a fairly class-privileged, college-educated, light-complexioned East Asian from a nearly all-white family. None of that makes me a less genuine person of colour, but it does mean that white supremacy considers me more palatable, less scary and closer to whiteness – which makes white people eager to tokenise me for those reasons. This reality is, however, only part of a much broader white supremacy problem.

When resourced disability organisations (usually white-led) discuss police violence, they focus on stories of white people like Robert Ethan Saylor or Kayden Clark while ignoring or only mentioning disabled or deaf Black, Brown, Latinx, Indigenous or other People of Colour killed by police. I often only notice discussion of race, disability and other identities of folks like Tanisha Anderson, Korryn Gaines, Alfred Olango, Natasha McKenna, Kajieme Powell, Tawon Boyd, John Williams, Terence Crutcher, Chieu Di Thi Vo, Mohammad Usman Chaudhry, Reginald Thomas, Michael Cho or Stephon Watts (and many others) when among other disabled and deaf people of colour. And despite my relative privilege, I am still threatened when I dare speak in the face of erasure. This violence informs my work constantly.

We as disabled folks can and should talk about how every social movement erases disability and ableism, but we have to clean our own house too. Disability justice means we have to hold ourselves accountable – liberation happens when we all get free.

**Rachel:** I don't know about radical disability politics per se, but having disability in my life – in my own life, and in the lives of people in my close community – has taught me a lot about resilience and long-term thinking. From my own involvement in liberation struggles in the North American context, I see that we think only in the short term, and immediate, and that we haven't been able to sustain communities in struggle over the long term. Part of the consequence of that is that we are missing even the most short-term history – we don't build on what happened twenty, ten or even five years ago.

People in my life who I met in disability organising eighteen years ago are still in my life – and while we are more or less dejected about the state of the world and disability politics, we have learned a lot from each other about long-term strategies for individual and collective survival. We have also learned that symbolic rights are no substitute for material change – state disability supports are far too low. From loved ones who have been accessing these supports over the long term, I have learned that the stress is cumulative – the stress of not quite making ends meet, the stress of constant administrative harassment and the stress of random programme cuts all have real impacts on people’s long-term health.

If we are going to make radical change in the Canadian context, broader non-Indigenous social movements have to learn how to be in it for the long haul. Many Indigenous and Black organisers, and organisers in many national contexts in Africa, Asia and Latin America know this already.

How does/can disability (again, writ large, including Deaf culture/neurodiversity/madness/crip, etc.) affect the goals but also the *form* of radical politics? How does the presence or absence of disability from radical policies transform the ways we organise, strategise and push for liberation?

**Lateef:** Disability can redirect our radical politics focus to where we fight and advocate for a society where all our identities are fully accepted. Radical politics will not advocate for the lives of people with disabilities until people with disabilities get involved with radical politics. We as radical scholars with disabilities have to direct the conversation among our colleagues on imagining the society where people with disabilities can prosper. Our able-bodied colleagues will not work on our liberation without us, only we can develop the way to our freedom.

There has been a disturbing trend where temporarily abled people decide policies for people who have disabilities without talking to us to find out what we want. This follows the culture troupe that is still prevalent in society that people who have disabilities are incompetent and needs a temporarily able-bodied person to do most things for us. We do not need able-bodied saviours to rescue us from our situations, but allies that can work with us to accomplish the goals for our community. We need to refuse and dismantle these cultural tropes and develop policies to change society to one where our bodies and contributions are valued properly. We need temporarily able-bodied people to see that the liberation of people with disabilities is in their best interest as well. So we have to work for liberation together, which means that all the ways that we organise and strategise for our liberation must be accessible and fully welcoming to those of us with disabilities. What I mean is that not all of us can go in the street and protest, but we can all contribute to the ultimate goal of liberation in other ways.

**Talila:** In arguing for solidarity, many people like to note that ‘disability is the only protected class that everyone will join at some point in life’. While this is true, it misunderstands the foundational underpinning of collective liberation – namely that you need not identify with an oppressed community to fight to dismantle systems that impose violence against them; and that all of our liberation is inextricably linked to the next person’s. We all have a vested interest in ensuring equal and adequate protections for all people *not* because we are like them or because our unborn child may be like them. We have an interest in dismantling oppressions and systems of oppression because we exist.

I push back on the notion that the inclusion of disability is something ‘radical’. It should not be considered radical to assert that we should consider disability in all things – all actions, all systems, all reforms, all dismantling. The fact that this framework is considered ‘radical’ illustrates precisely how radical (i.e. extensive, total, far-reaching, complete, exhaustive, etc.)

ableism is in our society. So central is ableism that the very assertion of the need to dismantle ableism often is met with untold vitriol – even within ‘social justice’ and ‘deaf/disability rights’ spaces. Several of the authors have made mention of this phenomenon.

All the contributors discuss dreaming, reimagining and reclaiming. These are part and parcel of radical politics and disability justice. That is why this conversation is so important.

Disability justice allows us to re-envision the world – to remind people that like race, class and crime, disability is a social construct. Disability justice reminds all of us that there never has been and never will be a ‘normal’. Disability justice allows us to define education and justice; decriminalise disability; disarm the police; divert all people away from jails, prisons, institutions; deinstitutionalise those who are presently trapped in the violent, unforgiving clutch of our institutions because society failed to provide meaningful support in the first instance. Disability justice is deliverance, healing, love, liberation. Justice.

**Lydia:** Toxic ‘call-out’ culture (as the call-out tactic is so often co-opted and misused by people with privilege and power) and privileged, fragile critiques of more marginalised people’s rightful anger (leading to silencing and further outcasting); the hierarchy of activism replicated from capitalism; and activist burnout and suicides – these are disability problems. Addressing disability and ableism means addressing classism, racism and (trans) misogyny. We’ve got to do the hard work to make space for harsh, emotional call-outs – especially, as Ashleigh Shackelford (2016) reminds us, by those often prevented from expressing themselves – *and* practice compassionate accountability that rejects instant disposability (which also has its most pernicious effects on the most marginalised, as Porpentine reminds us) and punitive criminal justice mentality (Heartscape 2015). We’ve got to affirm devalued, erased and minimised labour, and recognise that our labour, whatever it is, is necessary, radical and militant – just as being in the streets, testifying at a hearing, presenting at a conference or leading an organisation (Anderson et al. 2014). As my friend Mikael Lee constantly reminds us, *crip survival from bed is also resistance*.

We’ve got to resist the binary of abused/abuser, and recognise that we all have capacity to harm. We’re all learning and growing. Forgetting or not knowing doesn’t excuse harm but shouldn’t necessarily mean further isolation and disposability either. We’ve got to recognise all contributions and multiple tactics as vital. This means not attacking the person who found solace and empowerment the first time they discovered academic words that matched their life experiences, but no longer privileging their language and access over the work done by folks who’ve never had the privilege of formal education either. It means being careful to recognise who our movements and communities welcome and who those same movements and communities exclude, because it’s always a question of access. Centring disability is critical to sustaining our movements and addressing our own systemic problems, just as anti-ableism is necessary to end all oppression. Talila has it precisely – refusing to address ableism is complicity in oppression.

**Mia:** There is no liberation without disabled people. There is no collective justice if it does not take into account the needs and realities of people with disabilities. I don’t know how a disability analysis could *not* inform a radical politic. As someone who was disabled since I was an infant and never was able-bodied, I have supported countless people who become disabled as adults. Disability changes their lives – how could it not? So too, this is true for radical politics. The literal presence (either in person or skyping someone into a meeting) of disability and disabled people *necessarily* change our work and our goals because disabled people are constantly navigating a world that does not want us to be part of it. The presence of disability forces able-bodied people to confront their own internalised ableism whether it is fears about mortality and dependence, or ugliness and undesirability, or unproductiveness

and pace, or simply need and interdependence. And this is true on both an individual and collective level for communities, movements, countries and entire regions of the world. Organisers would need to rethink their protests and make them more accessible, change their goals to better reflect ‘all queer people’ or ‘all women’, create conference schedules and spaces that allow for many different kinds of bodies, energy levels and learning styles.

A true integration of radical disability politics requires us to move slower and to create more accessible language and to not turn away from the complex, often very challenging, reality of disability within an ableist world. It is not a coincidence that just as disabled people have been (and continue to be) denied access to the public sphere (e.g. employment, education, community), we have also been denied access to political movements and communities. If radical communities are serious about their commitment to a radical disability politic, then they must be committed to the cultural, interpersonal and systemic changes needed to fight and end ableism. As with any solidarity work, it requires a full commitment not only in words, but in deeds as well, and not only when it is convenient. This, of course, changes, not only your goals, but who you are as well because any true solidarity is simply another word for love.

**Rachel:** One striking and enduring absence of disability in radical organising, including disability organising, is the absence of people labelled with intellectual disability. Often, parents of labelled people stand in for people labelled with intellectual disability – even when they are adults – both in Canada and internationally. Even with the recent emergence of the neurodiversity movement, the focus has been on arguing that people labelled with autism do not have an intellectual disability. If disability movements centred people labelled with intellectual disability, we might finally be able to take on the legal and social domination of people who have been declared incompetent – including children, people labelled with certain mental health conditions and people labelled with intellectual disabilities. We would also have the opportunity to imagine more meaningful relations of community interdependence, and to reimagine deinstitutionalisation so that it includes people living in group homes, and half-way and rooming houses, as well as psychiatric and long-term care facilities, and prisons.

**Loree:** A key component to radical politics is disruption of the status quo, of the taken for granted organisation of things that benefits those with relative power and privilege. Disability is disruptive. It forces us to rethink everything and to keep revisiting and rethinking because bodies and needs are always changing. As Mia discussed earlier, disability changes us, radicalism changes us. One really important and powerful change that disability can offer, particularly when politicised, is the opportunity to listen to our bodies and centre our needs. Dominant ideologies all push us towards ignoring or covering over the very things about us that make us different from the status quo. Needs not recognised as typical are seen as limitations and tragedies rather than as possibilities.

As someone who has a body that needs other bodies to help me get out of bed, go to the bathroom, organise my glittery things, eat and so much more has changed me and how I think about care, bodies and needs. Also as someone who because of various structural limitations (inadequate state funding, homophobia, etc.) has gotten my care needs met through a collective of people from the various communities which I am a part of I am reminded on a daily basis of how powerfully connected community building and care are and how necessary it is to build relationship building and needs into the justice work we are doing.

Needs are actually quite central to most organising, after all the goal of most organising is to envision and bring into being a world where all of our collective needs are met. And yet, outside disability organising and theorising needs are rarely explicitly acknowledged or

discussed. One of the most useful gifts radical disability organising offers is practice and skill in thinking about and incorporating needs and care into everything we do. A thread running through many of the contributions is the overwhelming presence of isolation, silencing and divisiveness in our movements. We need to build into our organising care and relationship building. This can include changing the pace of our organising so that we make sure to build in time and resources for self and collective care so that our movements are sustainable as well as devoting resources to creating immersive accessibility that leaves no one behind. Radical accessibility is crucial to creating movements where we move together.

## Notes

- 1 While these are the published texts, both frames emerged out of ongoing, collective activism in the US and Canada that began years earlier and cannot be attributed to a single author.
- 2 Universal accessibility, coming from universal design, creates a design standard for environments and products that can be used by all people to the greatest extent possible (North Carolina State University College of Design; see Hamraie (2017) for elaboration and critiques).

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