Disability, social movements and radical theory: An anthropological approach

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Abstract

This article analyses how the development of theorisations of disability has been influenced by social movements. Firstly, it includes an analysis of the evolution of explanation models of disability, from the Medical Model to the Social Model. Secondly, it shows how the practice of social movements – especially, albeit not only, the movement for independent living – has been a key factor in the production of new concepts and theories to explain, and to act upon, disability. Finally, it selects a set of contributions from new social movements and contemporary radical theory in order to outline an anthropological perspective that surpasses the limitations of the Social Model, placing the axis of the reflection on the power devices and domination mechanisms that construct disability.

KEYWORDS: anthropology of disability, disability, ethics, social movements, radical theory

Introduction

This article has a dual objective: first, it aims to analyse how the social movements of people with disabilities have influenced the evolution of theoretical models of disability; second, it outlines an anthropological approach based on radical and antiauthoritarian theories that attempts to go beyond the so-called Social Model.

Effectively, progress in the understanding of disability and its theorisation are not processes isolated from reality, taking place in the realm of ideas. This article demonstrates that they are closely related to and promoted by socio-political, cultural and economic events. Thus, especially in the US, the UK and Scandinavian countries, several oppressed groups (such as black people, ethnic minorities, women and people with disabilities) have launched social movements that denounce their situations of marginalisation and demand the recognition of the social causes of their oppression. In the case of disabled people, the *Independent Living Movement* rose in the US, and other groups with similar features quickly emerged in other countries. These movements arise from and are fostered

by persons with disabilities who refuse to live in isolated institutions and be subject to medical rehabilitation programs, losing control over their own lives.

In general terms, the movements of people with disabilities, which have varied according to the contexts in which they have emerged and acted, have produced most of the ideas and conceptual innovations of the most recent lines of research and theories on disability. This is a theoretical and ideological milestone since these contributions are taken as a conceptual basis for reinterpreting their own experiences, defining them as a group and undertaking collective action. It has been precisely the double role of some persons as researchers and activists that has favoured the development of new research paradigms and approaches in order to study the complex and multifaceted reality that affects the lives of people with disabilities (López González 2007).

This article addresses several issues related to this problem. Firstly, it includes a brief genealogy of the theoretical and epistemological understanding of disability. Secondly, it highlights the key influences of certain social movements on the conceptual shift in the analysis of phenomena related to disability. Finally, it reflects on the possible contributions of radical theory and contemporary social movements to outline an anthropology of disability, that is, a situated analysis in which power becomes the key explanatory category and which connects individual subjectivities of the experience of disability to social structures and domination relationships.

Genealogy of explanatory models of disability

The socially legitimised sense of the conceptualisation and interpretation of disability, since the beginning of Western modernity, comes from biomedical science, which determines and stipulates the standards for *normal* functioning, which are then extrapolated to social norms.

From this perspective, the set of theories that constitute what has been called the Medical Model of disability has been characterised as viewing disabled persons as incomplete and pathological, who become socially deviant exclusively by biological determination. This model had its peak in the final stages of World War Two with the expansion of the medical movement and rehabilitation psychology.

The Medical Model, which for decades held hegemony in the explanation of disability, suggests that people with disabilities can make some contributions to society, but only to the extent that they are rehabilitated and normalised. In this sense, such subjects must enter into "normalisation processes" in order to achieve from society a certain value as individuals and a recognition of their citizenship. This social treatment is based on a paternalist and charitable conviction, which focuses on the deficiencies of such persons and consequently considers them to be less fitting to society. Here, persons with disabilities become "medical objects" and, hence, their realities are perceived and explained from an exclusively medicalised view. This is the reason that, for most of the 20th century, the norm was to create overprotected and isolated institutional spaces for these "types of people" (Arnau Ripollés & Toboso Martín 2008).

Thus, from this perspective, it can be seen how the discourse of disability was monopolised by the power spheres of medical science experts, which extirpated any

capacity to change the segregation and exclusion of these persons. A scientific discourse was constructed, presumptuously universal, by which disability was divested of its social conditions and reduced to a problem that affected isolated individuals, originating in individual health conditions and the deficiencies of certain subjects whose bodies are distanced from the canons of normality.

For this approach, which was rooted in the functionalist paradigm, disability was conceived in terms of personal tragedy or social deviance and had a clear social function (Rosato et al. 2009). Conceptualising disability as social deviance implies ascribing it a devaluated social identity and condition, which becomes a key element of people's lives. Here, persons with disabilities are condemned to a sort of devaluated citizenship or are regarded as minors permanently, while the exercise of certain rights is suspended or it requires the guardianship of others (Oliver 1998).

At the end of the 1960s, this conception began to change because social movements pointed out the need to analyse disability in connection with the capitalist system and the social structure. They paid attention to the function played by those people who could not participate under the same conditions in the labour market. This change fundamentally affected two directions. On the one hand, a political and ideological transformation took place among activists, as there emerged a social movement formed by people with disabilities. This movement began to think of disability as an issue of social production and power relations, and it highlighted that the collective suffered certain social inequalities that were not borne in mind by other social movements. On the other hand, and as a consequence of the tendency above, there was a profound epistemological shift in the understanding of disability. The uni-causal and essentialist character of the Medical Model began to be questioned.

Thus, the so-called Social Model of disability began to be sketched out under the influence of Marxism on social sciences (especially the materialist theories of Marx and Engels (Barnes 1998)) and lately of feminist theorisations. The Social Model is based on the conceptual distinction between biology (deficiency) and social (disability) and is connected in a general manner to materialist perspectives. Disability adopted a different form in the modern context of capitalist social relations: industrial capitalism excluded people with disabilities from the possibility of participation in the (production) system. As the activist and scholar Mike Oliver (1998) stated, the production system played a key role in the sense that with the rise of capitalism and later of the individualised workforce in factories, people with disabilities were disadvantaged. In fact, there were enough people who could not keep their jobs that they became a social problem for the capitalist state, which initially responded to these problems with the severity of dissuasion and committals (Barton 1998).

The main values of liberal ideology, such as individual responsibility, competition and work, acted as a measure to qualify as deviant those who did not fulfil socially required functions. Consequently, subjects were labelled as *disabled* in a context that set the patterns of behaviour and functioning that are socially valued (Oliver 1998).

The role of social movements in theories of disability

The Social Model as a new set of theories and practices was born in the 1970s, initially separate from scientific and academic fields, and related to the explanations and analysis of activists with disabilities and to transversal movements such as feminism. The evidence of the similarities between the traditional subordination of women and people with disabilities, and the coincidences between the dilemmas and challenges faced by feminists and disability movements, has underlined that feminism has been an unavoidable movement for the formulation of critical theories in disability studies. The feminist movement has been the primary driving force of a research theory and methodology that since the 1980s has been highlighting the complex entanglement between sex, ethnicity, social class and disability, since all shape the social position of women and men in a transversal manner. These contributions from militant circles began to materialise in the new critiques of disability in social sciences after the 1990s. Thus, the ideas of the movements of persons with disabilities that emerged in the 1970s in the US and the UK cannot be understood without studying their alliances with other important movements of this context: the civil rights movement and feminism.

It can be said that the most vibrant movement of persons with disabilities is the Independent Living Movement. This was initially characterised by the collective realisation about an identity constantly devalued and by the radical critique of the interpretative monopoly around the ideas of disability that promoted the Medical Model. The activists of the Independent Living Movement argued that individual limitations are not the origin of the problem of social inequalities that affect people with disabilities, but the limitations of society to provide proper services and to guarantee that the needs of these people are considered within social organisations. The Independent Living Movement opposed both professional domination and the bureaucratic provision of social services while demanding opportunities for people with disabilities in the labour market. In this regard, social oppression became the main category of analysis, and this contributed to showing that a *disabling culture*[1] that excludes those subjects who do not fulfil all the hegemonic socioeconomic standards exists. One of the most significant contributions of this movement to social sciences is the use of disability as a transversal category: it began to claim that disability should be analysed in connection with patriarchal, racist and class structures since they are constructed as oppression categories that operate with similar mechanisms.

Certain ideas and organisational forms influenced by the anarchist movement, such as self-determination, autonomy, mutual aid, horizontality and self-management, gained importance in this movement. Self-determination means a clear new point of view that reinforces the social character of disability and the assumption of the self-control and decision-making power of the person (García Alonso 2003). Self-management refers both to the control of certain basic social services and to one's own life because, traditionally,

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[1] This concept used to be understood in the frame of cultural materialism, which was initially formulated by social scientists such as Raymond Williams (1958), for whom the disabling culture seems to be precisely with contemporary capitalism.

the life of a person with a disability has been dominated by the logic of institutionalisation and segregation. Activists with disabilities have insisted that it is necessary to have the appropriate services and help in order to manage and control their lives independently from paternalist and medicalising institutions. Self-organisation in this movement has crystallised in the construction of mutual aid networks among persons with disabilities, which have significantly promoted individual and collective empowerment. Here, disability is accepted as a real fact that implies certain eventual or constant limitations in the performance of certain activities in a societal model organised for "optimal" and "standard" subjects.

For this reason, the concept of independent living challenges the paradigm that views people with disabilities as patients or sick people and encourages them to take the power to make their own decisions. A Spanish activist and researcher with a disability explained it in this way: '[We] The persons with disabilities have the right to think and to speak on our own, and also to decide how to live our lives without the interference of others' (Arnau Ripollés 2003: 7).

This is related to the participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of social life, and it includes the deinstitutionalisation process and confrontation with the social and institutional systems of healthcare. It constitutes a process of taking power, of personal autonomy and of raising awareness, and it has notably influenced the new research approaches that pay attention to the contextual experiences of people with disabilities (García Alonso 2003).

In contrast to the social policies designed and led by public administrations or the third sector, the Independent Living Movement has proposed new measures founded in self-management, counselling among equals, self-organisation for personal assistance and the creation of aid structures very close to individuals and opposed to institutionalised systems related to hospitalisation methods. According to this philosophy, the role of the personal assistant[2] is essential and overcomes in an overwhelming manner the "home help service" well known in the environment of European social policy. In this sense, it is necessary to point out the initiatives in several countries known as Centres for Independent Living (CILs) (in Spain called Offices for Independent Living (*Oficinas de Vida Independiente*)[3]) since they have meant a radical change as spaces for self-organisation and the promotion of legal, political and social tools to make autonomous living a reality for many people with disabilities. These initiatives have their origin in the US at the end of the 1960s when, with the effervescence of civil rights mobilisations, a group of students with disabilities at the University of Berkeley joined together for personal assistance and housing services within the campus in order to exercise their right

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[2] The personal assistant is a person hired (and paid) who is selected, trained and evaluated by the user of the service himself. This service counters the assistentialist connotation of these services, which have traditionally been linked to religious charity.

[3] This proposal was defined by activists as a 'model of self-government, cooperation, training and self-management that focuses on the creation of solidarity networks among equals. A way of freeing themselves from the dependence of the family, professionals, disability experts and the forced tuition of institutions' (Gómez & Arroyo 2013: 86).

to study[4] (Gómez & Arroyo 2013). Today, this organisational model has been extended, and there are almost 400 CILs throughout the world (García Alonso 2003: 21). These services are legally constituted as non-governmental and non-profit organisations or as cooperatives of consumers.[5] They are organisations designed and ruled by people with disabilities, and their structure is inspired by the cooperative model.

To summarise, the idea of independent living, as understood by this social movement, is a radical concept, strongly rooted in the ideological, cultural and pragmatic traditions of Western society. This idea has imbued the most critical sociological and anthropological theories on disability. It is a radical concept that advocates for the dismantling of the structures of hegemonic thought and directly challenges conventional ideas on disability, combining ideological and practical solutions to both the everyday and the cultural problems faced by people with disabilities and their immediate environment (Barnes 2003).

Barton (1998) suggested that the concept of independent living was misunderstood because, in the Anglo-Saxon context, its first exponents were aligned with the radical consumerism of the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, it is important to offer an attractive complement to the ideological proposals of capitalist development, such as economic freedom, consumer sovereignty and market self-regulation. This reflection provoked some critiques, which pointed out that the philosophy and politics of the Independent Living Movement favoured only a relatively small proportion of those with disabilities: white men from a certain socioeconomic class and young intellectually "capable" people. This, in any case, as Barnes (2003) affirmed, is a partial interpretation of what the concept of independent living has become in practice. In this sense, aware of the danger of misunderstanding, some activists with disabilities (particularly in the UK) began to use the terms of *integrated* or *inclusive* life in order to define the philosophy that inspired their activities. Such terms are far more attractive to the left since they recognise that human beings are social by definition, and that all, regardless of the nature and range of their disability, are interdependent, and, therefore, a way of life that is completely *independent* is inconceivable (Barnes 2003).

In the Spanish case, the change and politicisation of disability is a recent phenomenon because the militant tradition in these issues is scant (Planella, Moyano & Pié 2012). It was not until 2001, with the creation of the *Foro de Vida Independiente y Divertad* (FVID),[6] that people with disabilities launched new organisations separate from the official associative movement. This step towards the radicalisation of the movement responds to the need to visibilise the constant discriminatory and violent situations with which this collective tends to live. It must be added as well that the state was unwilling to move beyond the paternalistic and charitable policy that turns people with disabilities into dependent and subsidised individuals.

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[4] This ground-breaking group moved its demand and experiences out of the borders of the university, with the creation in 1972 of the first CIL in the city of Berkeley, which became a community resource for persons with disabilities to defend their civil rights (Gómez & Arroyo 2013).

[5] For more information about these initiatives in other countries, see ULOBA (Norway) at http://www.uloba.no/, STIL (Sweden) at http://www.stil.se/, and OVIs (Spain) at http://www.forovidaindependiente.org/.

[6] This concept was coined by the group in an attempt to join the meanings of dignity and freedom.

In the Spanish state, the current growth of organisations and initiatives for self-representation is noteworthy, and these tend to have much more political autonomy than traditional ones. They are also characterised by giving more importance to protest than to service provision, and by the control of persons with disabilities over the organisation. An example of this is the aforementioned FIVD, which was constituted as a community for philosophical reflection and struggle for the rights of persons with disabilities, inspired by the paradigm of the Movement for Independent Living:

> We do not accept institutionalisation as a way of life because we understand that "we are the wealth" and, hence, we must have the necessary human and technological support in order to exercise our citizenship in equal conditions, and in order to contribute to our society.[7]

This group marked a milestone for the movement in Spain. It carried out significant collective actions such as the occupation of buildings, the Network of Marches for Visibility (which began in 2007 and remains valid today[8]) advocacy campaigns. It is characterised as being especially critical of official organisations in the field of disability and of the system of representation and social dialogue that those entities have shaped.

A distinctive factor in the Spanish state was the emergence of the M15 movement in 2011 as a collective response to the obsolescence and inefficacy of social institutions, which challenged the traditional structures of collective organisation. It is a new movement that constitutes a genuine political dissidence illustrating the limits of these institutions, a dissidence defined by its radicalisation and the refusal to be negotiated and integrated into the institutional frame (Irigoyen 2012). The irruption of the M15 subverted the foundations of Spanish society (Castells 2012) and had substantial effects on the movement of people with disabilities since there were significant similarities between some ideas and the organisational models of the M15 and the FVID. In fact, some M15 circles launched commissions on functional diversity (Arenas Conejo & Pié Balaguer 2014). Some examples of these new assambleary groups were *Diversidad Funcional Sol* in Madrid and *Diversitat Funcional*[9] in Barcelona, which were created from the permanent and massive M15 tents in these cities.

Although several groups and militants with extensive experience in the field of disability participated in the M15 commissions, the FVID ended up playing a key role due to both its radical positions and independence and the similarities of its horizontal and assambleary organisational models. The commissions for functional diversity were a space constructed by people with disabilities to raise their voice and express their particularities, making them visible and locating them in the public sphere:

> We are a group of individuals who aim to be citizens and that is the reason why we demand our right to have rights and duties from the concept of functional diversity, a concept which is not the same as disability. We

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[7] See http://www.forovidaindependiente.org/filosofia_de_vida_independiente.

[8] See http://www.forovidaindependiente.org/campanas_FVI.

[9] Their evolution can be consulted at http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/category/grupos-de-trabajo/g_social/diversidad-funcional/ and http://diversitatfuncional15m.wordpress.com.

are interested in talking about *capabilities* and *human diversity*, of bodies working in a social environment which we want to transform. The point is to think from which place the other is constructed. We demand that the differences should not be seen as a problem but as another way of being, staying and contributing to the community.[10]

This permitted opening new lines of significance and discussion about the politics of disability for people who previously had not been not familiar with these issues (Arenas Conejo & Pié Balaguer 2014: 237). In this sense, it revealed that one of the common elements of the vast array of profiles that gathered the M15 was precisely the generalisation of precarity. The economic crisis evidenced how global capitalism is imposing increasing social inequality and marginality (Arenas Conejo & Pié Balaguer 2014).

To summarise, these movements have attained indispensable achievements such as the construction of a critical discourse and their imaginary that questions the status quo. They have fostered a social debate that cannot be avoided any longer and that affects everybody. This debate is not only about technological aspects (who takes care, how to take care, with which resources, etc.), but also, and mainly, about its political dimension (Cerrillo Vidal 2007).

Beyond the Social Model: Towards an anthropological and radical view of disability

This article has thus far shown that advances in the explanation and management of disability have been marked, among other factors, by the social movements launched by people with disabilities. The Social Model, today widely accepted, was proposed by authors such as Gerber de Jong, Hunt and Oliver, who participated actively in the Independent Living Movement in the US and the UK and, in addition, had a substantial background in political economy (Barnes 1998). Marxism, feminism and the civil rights movement triggered the evolution of theories on disability, opening new questions and formulating innovative explanations and concepts from the visions and experiences of persons with disabilities. There was a shift from speaking about *disabled persons* to *disabling societies*. The postmodern turn in the 1980s favoured the extension of a culturalist perspective, a variety of the Social Model that emphasises disability as a cultural construction (McDermott & Varenne 1995), paving the way for an anthropology of disability.

This social anthropology is concerned about how the responses of individuals are incardinated within the productivist and meritocratic American culture (Cameron 2010), the cross-cultural comparison of the treatment of disability (Holzer, Vreede & Weigt 1999) or the ethnographic study of people with disabilities, attempting to surpass the therapeutic character of medical anthropology, which focused on concepts such as illness, recovery forms and the interaction between patients and healthcare professionals (Whyte & Ingstad 1995).

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[10] Statements available at http://diversitatfuncional15m.wordpress.com/quienes-somos/.

Anthropologists also suggested that certain conceptions of culture had the effect of categorising particular individuals as *disabled*:

> When culture is understood as the knowledge that people need for living with each other, it is easy to focus on how some always appear to have more cultural knowledge than others, that some can be part of everything and others not, that some are able and others not (McDermott & Varenne 1995: 326).

Disability, thus, is not a matter of personal problems but about the power of culture to disable. In other words, the anthropologist is interested in the study of the forms by which disabilities are constructed and institutionalised in cultural systems. This perspective can be emancipatory, because it provides people with disabilities the tools for describing their own experiences of discrimination beyond individual handicaps.

In this sense, it must be added that the Social Model (and the Socio-cultural Model) described until now presents, from our perspective, two important limitations: firstly, the tendency to ignore the experiences and knowledge of people with disabilities; secondly, the inclination to omit the power mechanisms that operate over disability. We are not saying that the experiences of subjects and power relations are absent in the Social Model, but that these questions do not have the significance that they deserve. Moreover, it is precisely these limitations that can be surpassed by means of an anthropological approach including contributions from certain new social movements and radical political theories.

In relation to the first limitation, some studies that fit with the Social Model emphasise the "social" tending to displace into a secondary position the experiences, subjectivities and subaltern knowledge of people with disabilities. This is the case with the work of authors that have proposed materialist approaches to disability (Oliver 1990; Finkelstein 1980). Although they have made essential contributions, they tend to underestimate the impact of deficiency in the lives of people with disabilities. The feminists of disability were the first to address these questions (Morris 1997; Crow 1997; Shakespeare 1994, 1996), and they were invited to share their experiences in order to widen our understanding of the everyday lives of persons with disabilities, politicising the personal with the objective of giving sense to discrimination experiences (Morris 1997).

Social anthropology has a rich tradition in the use of narrative, ethnographic and biographic methods, which have "given the floor" to social actors. The studied subjects, in most monographs, have explained their experiences, feelings and worldviews in their own words. They have found in such ethnographic study a sort of loudspeaker for a set of discourses that the rest of the society has tended to silence. In disability studies, one of the ground-breaking authors in this direction was Joan Ablon, who, influenced by Sol Tax and his action anthropology, developed a type of radical applied anthropology that aimed not only at giving voice to social actors in his ethnographic reports, but also at producing useful knowledge for improving their quality of life and defending social justice (Shuttleworth & Kasnitz 2004).

The arrival of the 21st century and the new cycle of protests started by the Zapatistas and the movement for global justice (which was followed, among others, by the

Spanish M15 and Occupy movements) have favoured deep social and political debates, which in the anthropological discipline have had substantial effects on epistemological positions. In particular, it has fostered an anthropological debate that emphasises the roles and knowledge of social actors.

Under the rubric of "world anthropologies", Restrepo and Escobar (2005) proposed an exercise of discussion about the hierarchies of anthropological knowledge. The purpose was building a heteroglossic and transnational science (Ribeiro & Escobar 2008) in which knowledge production is made by means of horizontal dialogue among national scientific communities, theoretical currents, religious and spiritual traditions and social movements (Narotzky 2011). What James C. Scott (1998) called *mētis* or practical knowledge, which is produced by social actors in their everyday lives, should also be part of this dialogue.

Clearly, social anthropology is currently experiencing a set of transformations and epistemological debates that can help rescue the subaltern knowledge and experiences of people with disabilities. These debates and changes have been favoured by the action of a new generation of social movements (Nash 2008), which have been deeply influenced by radical and anarchist ideas (Graeber 2004). In the case of disability, it is clear that those *others* (people with disabilities) know and construct reality by means of imposed mechanisms and that their knowledge must be borne in mind in any explanation formulated about them.

The second limitation of the Social Model refers to the issue of power. The reports and experiences of subjects show that disability works as a power mechanism. Some explanations represent disability as a mere form of "cultural diversity",[11] ignoring those domination mechanisms that oppress people with disabilities. Some authors related to the disability movement have pointed out that the oppression suffered by them is no different to the social pressure exercised over women or racial minorities (Shuttleworth & Kasnitz 2004). Disability, like gender, ethnicity, social class or sexual identity, is part of a structure of domination (Barton 1998) that uses the same ideological dynamics: first the naturalisation of differences and then the interpretation of these differences as socio-political inequalities (Stolcke 2000).

Disability, as a social phenomenon, illustrates an imposition of identity-based on socially defined determinants. This is why the label of 'victim' is refused, and attention is directed towards the structural causes that produce this condition. The term *disabled* can become subversive, turning into an insignia of identity and insubordination (Gómez Bernal 2013). In this ambit, the new generation of social movements and radical political theory can make significant contributions to an anthropology of disability that permits us to surpass these limitations. In

[11] This is the case for the Functional Diversity Model proposed by the Spanish Independent Living Forum, which defines functional diversity as 'a reality in which the person functions in a different manner to the majority of the society. This term considers the difference of the person and the lack of respect of the majority, which in their construction processes do not bear in mind functional diversity' (Palacios & Romañach 2006). Defined in this way, the concept of functional diversity is so general that it becomes useless and cannot be translated into concrete strategies. It also seems to ignore the theoretical necessity of paying attention to the entanglement among certain psycho-physical constitutions and the situations of discrimination and inequality (Moscoso 2011). The use of the term diversity has extended and been naturalised as an absolute euphemism within the frame of liberal multiculturalism. Diversity is a synonym of disability, poverty, difference, and inequality, and can include gender, ethnic, cultural and class differences. Diversity, in this sense, is constructed as a politically correct discourse that is difficult to question (Almeida et al. 2010).

particular, one of the main contributions of the anarchist anthropology is that it replaces 'the social' with 'power' as a central explanatory category and that it allows us to connect the microphysics of power with domination macro-structures (Ssorin-Chaikov 2012). The distinction of John Holloway (2002) between "power-to", as *capability*, and "power-over" as a force that subordinates and limits others' capabilities, can be used to describe how the dynamics that operate in the field of disability are closely connected to the functioning of domination relations in other social fields. This "power turn" favours the identification of social mechanisms that stigmatise and marginalise persons with disabilities. It also permits us to think about the forms of social organisation for resisting these domination dynamics and about the construction of new horizontal social relations based on solidarity, which Holloway calls "anti-power" spaces.

Thus, a radical anthropology can make significant contributions to this field. For example, several contemporary anthropologists have considered the uses of anthropology in anarchist movements (Graeber 2004; Roca 2008; Robinson & Tormey 2012); however, from our point of view, an anarchist perspective can help develop anthropological theory and practice and thus improve our insights into disability. In the field of disability, we have found three major contributions: firstly, the questioning of the hierarchy of knowledge and the defence of situated knowledge, which have fostered the ontological and epistemological debate of world anthropologies; secondly, the introduction of power as an explanatory category for the situation of people with disabilities; and thirdly, the exploration of horizontal forms of relations and organisation, practicing mutual aid and avoiding dependency on expert systems, corporate and state powers, and even their own families.

Mitzi Waltz (2007), an author who has been working on autism for years, provided key ideas in this respect. She wondered how an anarchist perspective of disability could be developed. She pointed out that this approach would face two critical challenges: on the one hand, the lack of references in the anarchist tradition, which had previously advocated eugenics, and on the other, the difficulty creating spaces of mutual aid in a field highly controlled by for-profit entities and the state. Thus, she emphasised that it is not about completely rejecting healthcare professionals' expert knowledge, but about preventing these inequalities of knowledge from generating hierarchies and power structures. From our point of view, this is only possible by recognising the value of the situated knowledge of people with disabilities, a knowledge that, generally, used to be produced and socialised by means of collective action. Waltz (2007) identified some experiences influenced by feminism and radical healthcare groups carrying out anti-authoritarian practices. She mentioned, for example, self-help groups, the independent living movement, the Icarus project, and aid circles.[12] All these experiences have enormous potential, since they are based on the needs of autonomy and community involvement.

To summarise, the knowledge produced in these spaces of self-organisation of those persons who live this sort of oppression must be vindicated within a radical anthropology of disability in order to surpass the limitations of existing theoretical models.

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[12] For more information, see: http://www.theicarusproject.net/, www.independentliving.org, http://www.chicagowomenshealthcenter.org/, http://www.womenshealthspecialists.org/.

Conclusions

This article analysed how social theories of disability, from the 1970s onwards, could not have been formulated if people with disabilities had not passed from complete social invisibility to demand their place in the public sphere, as a collective that fights for its rights and, hence, as producers of a new discourse. This article showed that the collective action of people with disabilities (frequently allied to other social movements) provides evidence that speaking about disability means referring to a way of social construction that locates certain persons in conditions of superiority over others. That is, it turns into a power device that regulates all the ambits of their lives.

The Social Model of disability, as a dynamic and collective theory, is constantly under revision, critique and transformation. The critiques and contributions formulated by authors who participated initially in this theoretical model are precisely those who have favoured the opening to new approaches and interpretations of disability. In this sense, we have emphasised that an anthropological analysis of disability implies adopting a critical position to the manner in which the concept of disability has been produced and, also, with the implications of the atomisation of what is meant by disability under essentialist medical-biological categories and under exclusively constructionist categories that entail the risk of fostering a "sociological naturalisation", detaching disability from its contexts and domination relationships.

Both structural and material conditions of disability, and the symbolic representations and everyday experiences of the people living under exclusion and inequality, must be studied. To this end, we understand that the contributions of radical theory (especially anarchist anthropology) are fundamental. A radical anthropology can provide meaningful progress in the field of disability studies: firstly, by emphasising the value and usefulness of the situated knowledge of subaltern and peripheral groups; secondly, by putting the analysis of domination and power at the centre in order to explain and understand the situations lived by persons with disabilities; thirdly, by exploring new horizontal and anti-authoritarian forms for both the organisation of social movements and the production of knowledge. These issues have an emancipatory potential for the field of disability since they can prevent knowledge inequalities from turning into power structures that enhance the dependency of people with disabilities on expert systems.

In the contemporary context of neoliberal restructuring, there is a clear increase in the challenges faced by people with disabilities. Disability is disgracefully used in order to hide the disabling effects of global capitalism. Therefore, contemporary disability studies demand an urgent shift that permits us to both capture the socioeconomic and cultural constraints that make the context manifestly disabling and to find practical and theoretical strategies for the collective action of people with disabilities.

Acknowledgements

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Povzetek

Prispevek analizira, kako so družbena gibanja vplivala na razvoj teoretizacij invalidnosti. V prvi vrsti proučuje evolucijo razlagalnih modelov o invalidnosti od medicinskega do družbenega modela, kot drugo pa prikazuje, kako so bile prakse družbenih gibanj – še posebej, čeprav ne izključno, gibanje za samostojno življenje – ključni dejavnik v nastanku novih konceptov in teorij, ki pojasnjujejo in obravnavajo invalidnost. Analiza obravnava niz prispevkov novih družbenih gibanj in sodobne radikalne teorije z namenom orisa antropološkega vidika, ki presega omejitve socialnega modela ter os razmisleka postavlja na sredstva oblasti ter mehanizme dominacije, ki gradijo invalidnost.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: antropologija invalidnosti, invalidnost, etika, družbena gibanja, radikalna teorija

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