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Transnational history of Disability : Reflections.

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Abstract

Transnational history is a research perspective that has been widely legitimized and popularized over the past decade, but few disability historians have adopted this approach to date. This article aims to review the first transnational studies in the history of disability, highlighting the interest of such a historiographical approach, its benefits and disadvantages. The approach to transnational history continues to be promoted mainly by young historians working in non-Western fields (Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa) or with a global approach. This innovative historiographical approach generates considerable contributions in terms of knowledge and research perspective. It offers a new reading of history, less national-centric and Western-centric, by shifting the focus to other countries in the world whose experiences in disability public policy must not be ignored by Western historians. It highlights the role of NGOs, private foundations, transnational activist networks, intergovernmental organizations, and new figures (international experts, missionaries, etc.). It thus requires recognition of the foreign contribution to the construction of domestic norms and realities, and thus the hybridity of policies pursued at the national level. It also leads to relativizing the singularity of national social movements and national public policies, by pointing out convergences (and divergences) with other national realities. The adoption of such an approach also leads to situating local or national experience in a more global historical context (international or regional scale), thanks to a better knowledge of the "field of possibilities" of disability policies at the international level.

Keywords : transnational history, entangled history, global history, disability, public policies, intergovernmental organizations

Transnational history is a research perspective that has been widely legitimized and popularized over the past decade, and has been the subject of methodological articles, historical dictionaries (Iriye and Saunier 2009), handbooks (Saunier 2013) and specialized journals (*Yearbook of transnational history*). However, there is no single definition of transnational history among historians. One of its main promoters, Pierre-Yves Saunier, defines it as a history that is focused on interactions, connections and flows between and across nations over the last 200-250 years, and that it is not a history of nations (Saunier 2013). This historiographical trend has already spread widely among gender historians, childhood and ethnic minorities historians, but few disability historians have adopted this approach to date. For instance, the recently published collective syntheses on disability history (Hanes, Brown, Hansen (eds.) 2018; Rembis, Kudlick, Nielsen (eds.) 2018; Walmsley Jan and Jarrett Simon (eds.) 2019) are organized as juxtapositions of articles with national or local points of view. Only a few authors adopt a resolutely transnational perspective by considering transnational flows and transnational actors (Murray 2018; McCarthy 2018; Brégain 2018a).

The history of medicine and public health already took a transnational turn more than a decade ago. Several works note the influence of international conferences, intergovernmental organizations (Hygiene Organization, World Health Organization, Pan-American Health Organization, etc.) or private American foundations in the establishment of policies to combat endemic diseases (polio, leprosy, typhus, etc.) at the international level

(Weindling 1995; Borowy 2009; Vollse 2013), or more specifically in some European countries (Piana 2009; Vargha 2018), Latin American countries (Cueto y Zamora Mesia (dir.) 2006; Palmer 2015) or North American countries (Inglis 2014). Similarly, several works document the transnational dimension of the promotion of Atlantic and Latin eugenics (Mitchell and Snyder 2003; Kühl 2013; Turda and Gillette 2014).

The fields of the history of psychiatry and, to a lesser extent, deaf history, seem to be ahead of other areas of disability, with the publication of books that demonstrate a progressive "transnational shift" (for psychiatry, see Ernst and Mueller 2010; Ernst 2013, and for deaf history, see Murray 2007; Kusters and Friedner (eds.) 2015). Some older works deal with transnational movements for the rights of persons with disabilities (Driedger 1989; Groce 2002), but they do not meet all the criteria to be considered as works of transnational history of disability, because they are mostly based on a single archive or on data provided by members of a single NGO, and therefore contain many approximations. They are also characterized by a hagiographic tone.

This article aims to review the first transnational studies in the history of disability and to shed light both on the richness and benefits of such a historiographical approach as well as its disadvantages. I will first examine the emergence of this field of research on an international scale over the last decade (I), before highlighting the many innovative results of this research perspective (II). I will then analyse the very complex methodology that needs to be implemented (III).

I. A field of research that has emerged internationally over the last decade.

Transnational disability history has been developing since the early 2000s, and has become stronger in recent years. This timing can be explained by the conjuncture of two factors: on the one hand, the rise of transnational and global approaches in the historical sciences (stimulated by the internationalization of research), and, on the other hand, the adoption of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* by the UN in 2006, which led many sociologists and political scientists to point out the importance of the internationalization of public disability policies.

At the dawn of the 2000s, new historiographical trends were emerging, all affirming the need to write histories that go beyond the framework of states and nations: connected history (Subrahmanyam 1997), entangled history (Werner and Zimmermann 2003), transnational history (Iriye and Saunier 2009). The methodological boundaries of these different historiographical trends have not yet been definitely established. These different historiographical trends seek to distinguish themselves from the older currents of world history and global history, which became institutionalized in the 1980s and 1990s (Maurel, 2009). Those currents claimed to embrace the history of all parts of the world in the case of the former, and the study of *globalization* and international issues for the latter. Their work is often criticized for its hasty generalizations, heavy reliance on secondary sources, its western-oriented worldview, and the fact that they tend to perceive contact between actors in an asymmetrical way (Bertrand 2013). Some works, however, are more subtle, cover only two or three locations, and attempt to combine games of scales with phenomena of interdependence and connections. Sebastian Conrad proposes for example to consider the global history as a perspective, which "is often more a matter of writing a history of demarcated (i.e. non-"global") spaces, but with an awareness of global connections and structural conditions" (Conrad 2016: 12).

An advantage of connected or entangled histories over world or global history is that they do not presuppose that the actors studied are aware of the existence of the world as we currently perceive it, and that they perceive their life experiences or problems as belonging to the global scale. The actors studied may also be indifferent to what is happening in other parts of the world (Bertrand 2013). The writing of an entangled history is demanding in terms of method: it requires adopting a comparative approach that considers the historical variability of the categories studied, as well as the existing variations between the different geographical scales, and adopting a reflexive approach (Werner and Zimmermann 2003). The connected history approach affirms the need to look at non-Western societies, to play with scales (local, state, etc.) and to highlight the trans-state, inter-imperial and intra-imperial flows (people, objects, knowledge or political ideas) and interactions. In line with this approach, Romain Bertrand insists on the researcher's obligation to pay the same attention to non-European sources as to European sources, to reconstruct the framework of thought, discourse and practices of each actor at the moment when the connections occur, and to ensure that vernacular statements are translated in a comprehensive manner (Bertrand 2013: 195). He wishes to construct a history "in equal parts" by attributing equal dignity to the points of view of actors from different cultural areas. The comparative work carried out is relatively flexible, allowing for the highlighting of existing discontinuities between societies. This method thus accepts the idea of a possible irreducibility of the historiographies of the societies studied, and the absence of common points in their worlds of thought (Bertrand 2013).

While authors of transnational history often employ a variety of methodologies, they always place particular emphasis on individuals, ideas, markets, and organizations that act between and across nations (Iriye and Saunier 2009: 20). They focus in particular on the work of intergovernmental organizations, international NGOs and international scientific networks. Nevertheless, the field of transnational history is not free from legitimate criticism. In fact, it may seem inaccurate to speak of transnational history before the 1960s, given the predominance of the imperial form in Europe until that decade (Cooper 2010: 190).

The transnational disability history approach is mainly promoted by European scholars (Baár, Brégain, De Schutter, Stoll, Van Trigt, Derksen, Walmsley, Ernst, Cleall, etc.) or North American scholars (Murray, Hanes, Commend, Galmarini) and more rarely by Latin American researchers (Ramacciotti) working on the 19th or 20th centuries. They are generally younger historians working in non-Western fields (Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, Soviet Union) or with a global or imperial approach (Cleall for example). These various researchers analysed intra-imperial, transnational and international circulation of individuals (association leaders, intergovernmental experts, missionaries, blind or deaf students, disabled athletes, etc.), objects (prostheses, Braille books, etc.), money, ideas, concepts (the idea of the rights of disabled people, the concept of independent living) and practices such as the segregation of people with leprosy (Edmond 2006). These researchers have examined the exchanges that take place in international conferences and meetings (Séguillon 2002; Benvenuto and Séguillon 2014), NGOs of disabled or Blind (Galmarini 2021) or deaf persons (Murray 2007), the migration plans of some deaf people in the nineteenth century (Cleall 2016), the construction of international or European disability policies, as well as international or foreign influence on the construction of national social movements or on the construction of national disability policies (Ramacciotti 2015; Brégain 2018b; Báár 2020).

The low interest of historians who specialize in Western countries (i.e. the case of the United States, Canada, England, Australia, or Western European countries) in this transnational approach can be explained especially by two reasons: on the one hand, they do not feel that public policies and the life experiences of people with disabilities in their countries have been influenced by intergovernmental organizations or foreign experiences; on

the other hand, they wrongly consider the internationalization of public disability policies to be a post-1980s event. On the contrary, researchers working on non-Western countries are quick to perceive the influence of intra-imperial and international flows of NGOs and intergovernmental bodies at the local level. Does this mean that the transnational disability history would be more relevant in non-Western countries than in Western countries, because of the distinct historicity (and supposed lateness) of their public disability policies? The answer is no, for several reasons. For one, if Western countries have indeed been the promoters of models of public disability policies at the international level, it would be wrong to think that the public policies that have been developed there owe nothing to transnational exchanges of information, at least since the 19th century. Many Western actors (doctors, missionaries, nursing sisters, etc.) travelled abroad to visit assistance or care institutions and participated in international conferences. In this way, they built up scientific and social expertise based on a broader horizon of experience than just their national territory. This supranational expertise enabled them to establish their legitimacy at the national level among their peers and with political leaders. Even without going abroad, associations and political leaders often used foreign examples or international texts to develop their projects in the field of disability (new legislation or institutions). The institutions created were generally equipped with new technologies purchased abroad (Iron lungs, orthopedic control for cars, etc.). In addition, intergovernmental bodies had a direct influence on the construction of national disability policies since the 1950s, by sending international experts to advise governments, or by adopting binding standards (in particular the CRPD and ILO Convention 159, as well as the market opening and austerity policies imposed by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission) or non-binding standard (like the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons)".

Transnational exchanges (cultural, economic, material, etc.) therefore contributed to transforming local realities on many levels: that of public disability policies, life experiences, but also subjectivity and hopes. Indeed, the transnational circulation of the idea of the rights of persons with disabilities contributed to nourishing and strengthening the idea among persons with disabilities that they hold rights, thus creating a feeling of injustice with regard to a situation deemed intolerable. This circulation transformed partly the subjectivity of individuals, which are fundamental to understanding the dynamics of claims and protests.

II. Unexpected and surprising results, which lead to changing the way we look at the scales of public action and social movements.

This innovative historiographical approach generates considerable contributions in terms of knowledge and research perspectives. It offers a new reading of history, less national centric and Western-centric, by shifting the focus to other countries in the world (particularly those in the Global South and in Eastern Europe) whose experiences in disability public policies must not be ignored by Western historians.

First, it highlights the role of NGOs, private foundations, transnational activist networks, intergovernmental organizations, and new figures (international experts, missionaries, association leaders, migrants, etc.) in the construction of international or regional policies. In my book *Pour une histoire du handicap au XXe siècle. Approches transnationales (Europe et Ameriques)*, I detail how these different actors contributed to the construction of international standards on disability until the 1980s. In the inter-war period onwards, many NGOs (Fédération internationale des mutilés du travail, Association internationale des Etudiants aveugles, International Society for Crippled Children, etc.) mobilized themselves to defend the rights of the various categories of disabled persons at the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization, but their mobilization largely failed. After the Second World War, other NGOs (World Council for the Welfare of the

Blind; the International League of Societies for the Mentally Handicapped, the *Fédération internationale des mutilés, invalides du travail et invalides civils*, etc.) had a considerable influence on international disability policies, particularly in getting the International Declaration of the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons approved by the United Nations, and ILO Recommendation No. 168 on the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons in 1983. I also pointed to the role of intergovernmental organizations (United Nations, International Labour Organization, World Health Organization) in promoting a North Atlantic project for modernization of rehabilitation from the 1950s onwards. This project was characterized by a very comprehensive approach to the question of disability (taking into account all problems, prevention, psychological adaptation, legislation, etc.); the equalization of the rights of all categories of disabled persons and the need to coordinate public disability policies; and a very liberal economic approach to occupational integration (refusal of quotas, creation of sheltered workshops, selective placement, etc.) (Brégain 2018b). Susanne Commend also documented the participation of Quebec philanthropists in the transnational mobilization in favour of disabled children during the inter-war period, demonstrating the sometimes contradictory aspect of their discourse, which included the promotion of a social conception of disabled children and the legitimization of certain eugenicist values (Commend 2019). Paul Van Trigt has also shown the growing influence of several NGOs (Disabled Peoples' International, European Disability Forum) on European public action, on the development of the Community action programme for disabled people called Helios I (1988-1991) and Helios II (1993-1996) promoting integration and equal opportunities for disabled people, as well as obtaining the inclusion of disability in Article 13 of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, which stipulates that "the Council (...) may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation" (Trigt 2019).

Second, this historiographical approach requires recognition of the foreign contribution to the construction of domestic norms and realities, and thus the hybridity of policies pursued at the national level. Katharina Heyer examined how activists in Germany and Japan were inspired by the US Disability rights movement and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to demand and achieve significant changes in the direction of national policy (Heyer 2015). She studied the travels of German activists to the United States, as well as the travels of US activists to Japan, which facilitated these transfers. This very interesting work deserves to be put in perspective by two remarks: she focused on American influence (thus prejudging that it is the only foreign influence), and presupposed that there was no transnational circulation of information prior to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). In my research, I analysed the way in which experts commissioned by intergovernmental organizations (ILO, WHO, UN) advised the governments of Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil) on disability issues during the 1950s and 1960s. These experts encouraged governments to coordinate or unify their sectoral policies in the field of disability. They facilitated and participated in the establishment of national rehabilitation centres, and reoriented the modalities of occupational integration of persons towards economic liberalization (rejection of the quota principle applied to private companies, creation of sheltered workshops, selection of candidates for professional rehabilitation, etc.). They also promoted a new distribution of medical specialties in the field of rehabilitation (physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychiatrists) and adapted sport. Their intervention favored the partial convergence of national disability policies toward the principles of the North Atlantic rehabilitation project; this convergence was not complete because of the resistance of certain local actors and the low investment of governments. In all three countries, the imperative of coordinating public disability policies led to the questioning of the fundamental characteristics of previously established sectoral policies: the allocation of

specific rights to a subcategory (blind, war-disabled, etc.), as well as the existence of administrative bodies responsible for conducting a sectoral policy (rehabilitation, specialized education, assistance for the blind, etc.). Indeed, during the 1970s, there was a partial desectorization of sectoral disability policies, with the disappearance of certain administrative bodies dedicated to a specific disability (war-disabled and Blind in Brazil), and the partial disappearance of rights previously given to a subcategory (in particular the blind in Argentina). Other studies have shown that the influence of international organizations on national policies was very heterogeneous and depended on the countries concerned, the local actors, and the times. It often proved to be complex, sometimes very weak and sometimes strong. The historian Monika Baár, for example, has shown that the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) organized by the UN did not result in a strengthening of the British government's action in this field, quite the contrary. The British royal family was very much involved in the organization of the IYDP at national level, but media campaigns were mainly aimed at increasing the resources of large charitable and private organizations (Baár 2020). British governmental actors were turning away from the concept of Independent Living to pursue neoliberal policies, rejecting demands for social justice that accompanied the concepts of Independent Living. They reduced the social benefits of people with disabilities to discourage what they perceived as an attitude of social dependency. They only adopted measures that promoted accessibility and challenged discriminatory attitudes, thus eclipsing the demands of associations in the economic and employment spheres. The measures adopted by the government then led to the aggravation of poverty and the increasing marginalization of persons with disabilities. On the other hand, Sam de Shutter showed that local Kenyan actors did not question the content of the World Programme of Action (1983-1992) put in place by the UN, or the universal language used in it (De Shutter 2019).

Third, the approach of pointing out the convergences (and divergences) with other national realities also leads to relativizing the singularity of national social movements and national public policies, as well as to pointing out the existence of transnational conjunctures (economic, social, political, climatic) in the field of disability history. The study of sources in several countries and the consultation of foreign bibliographies lead us to qualify - and sometimes contradict - the assertions of associative or administrative sources, which generally overvalue the originality and pioneering character of their actions by underestimating the existence of similar projects abroad. By investigating the treatment of intellectual disabilities in France and Germany during the first decades of the twentieth century, Valentine Hoffbeck thus relativized the supposed German advance in their treatment (Hoffbeck 2015: 114). She showed that the support for German reforms was not universally shared among the French alienists, who were also interested in the experiences of Switzerland, Belgium and England. She also identified similar dynamics in the two countries (rhetoric of sorting in the treatment of intellectual disabilities, development of a eugenics programme, etc.), but Germany stood out radically on an international scale with the introduction of the euthanasia policy in August 1939. Conducting transnational research has led me to observe that the phenomenon of the gradual firing of blind people from teaching posts in ordinary educational institutions and in specialized institutions for the blind observable in the French metropolis during the 1930s (Brégain 2019) was also observable from 1931 onwards in Spain and in 1944 in colonized Tunisia for blind Muslims teaching in Koranic schools. Observing the frequency of this phenomenon prompts the identification of a transnational trend of expelling blind people from teaching posts, linked to the desire to professionalize this specialized education and the gradual devaluation of the teaching capacities of blind people since the beginning of the twentieth century by transnational networks on the education of the blind.

Moreover, Anne Klein has emphasized the importance of the circulation of Western knowledge (notably through the translation into German of the writings of several English and

Italian psychiatrists) in the construction of criticisms of psychiatry in West Germany during the 1970s (Klein 2015). She has therefore shed light on the construction of the anti-psychiatric protest dynamic on a European scale, showing its eminently transnational character. Other research has enabled me to put into perspective the originality of the Anglo-Saxon protest movements of disabled people in the 1970s by insisting on the existence of similar and equally intense protest movements in other countries such as Spain and Argentina, linked to the international promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, which accentuated the sense of injustice felt by persons with disabilities in many countries of the world (Brégain 2013). In these cases, it is possible to consider each national experience as a possible variant of the same international dynamic.

Other researchers have studied the borrowings and exchanges between national social movements and national organizations, such as the connections that associations of people with physical disabilities in Hungary had with organizations in other European countries, and with DPI (Baár 2015), or the support of German disability movements to Nicaraguan disability movements (Stoll 2015).

Fourth, the adoption of such an approach also leads to situating local or national experiences in a more global historical context (international or regional scale), thanks to a better knowledge of the "field of possibilities" of disability policies at the international level, and of the international standards that regulate this field of possibilities. It therefore becomes possible to situate the national or local experience as an innovative policy or one in chronological discrepancy with foreign practices or standards legitimized by international organizations. Let us take the example of the teaching of Braille in specialized institutions, which became widespread in Western countries in the 18th and 19th centuries and in countries in the South in the 20th century. This teaching method was legitimized by an intergovernmental organization, the Child Protection Committee of the League of Nations, in 1932 (Brégain 2018b). The legitimization of this teaching method was accompanied by the marginalization of other experiences of teaching blind children that existed at the same time, such as the teaching of blind children alongside sighted children in municipal public schools in Scotland since the 1870s and France since the 1880s, and the oral teaching of blind children alongside sighted children in Koranic schools in Muslim countries (a system that existed at least since the twelfth century). The decision adopted by the Child Protection Committee in 1932 therefore represented a reduction in the field of possibilities in favour of the dominant solution in European countries. Of course, this decision alone does not explain the marginalization of the existing alternative in Arab countries. Other factors contribute to it, including: (1) the defense of the system of Braille teaching in specialized institutions by transnational advocacy networks for the rights of the blind; (2) the fact that French people organized a few specialized institutions for teaching French Braille in the empire's territories (like the Algerian colony or Tunisian protectorate) during the first decades of the twentieth century, inspired by the model of metropolitan institutions; (3) the fact that several dozen blind North African students went to the French metropolis to benefit from schooling in these institutions during the first half of the 20th century. The latter logically defended this educational modality once they returned to their countries, even after the conquest of independence. More generally, a detailed knowledge of this field of possibilities makes it possible to better understand the perception of local actors of the "modernity", "backwardness" or "anachronism" of their national or local policies.

It also makes it possible to point out the importance of a country's geographical and geopolitical positioning in relation to the different poles of social innovation in the disability sector at an international scale. Esme Cleall has shown the crucial role of the exchange of educational techniques, deaf students and teachers between the territories of the British Empire, particularly between England, Canada and Australia (Cleall 2015). Maria Cristina

Galmarini has shown the crucial role of the All Russian Blind Union in the circulation of knowledge and materials for the blind between the Soviet socialist countries during the 1950s (Galmarini 2021). In the same way, the geopolitical proximity of some African socialist countries easily explained the choice of new independent governments (like Algeria, Tunisia, etc.) to be inspired by some experiences of the Soviet Bloc countries (Poland, Yugoslavia, etc.) in the field of rehabilitation, like the disabled workers' cooperatives. If circulations of models and experts between socialist countries are perceptible, the attitude of the independent governments of North Africa is characterized above all by their pragmatism. With a great shortage of personnel and equipment, the Algerian and Tunisian leaders sought assistance from many countries, whether socialist or capitalist (USA, Germany, etc.). When asked, the French government refused to send special teachers for the blind to Algeria. Thus, the conquest of independence in Algeria and Tunisia led to the - partly involuntary - break with dependence on France in the field of social protection for the blind, in favour of a multi-polar dependence. On the other hand, the geographical proximity of Mexico to the United States and Canada is a key factor for understanding why Mexico coordinated disability policies in the 1950s by centralizing all the services concerned with disability (including special education) within an administrative department, the *Dirección General de Rehabilitación*, whereas the other Latin American countries did not give impetus to such unification of the rehabilitation and special education sectors until the 1970s. Ultimately, restoring the various possible pasts makes it possible to break definitively with the idea of a linearity of transformations observed on a national scale, and obliges us to renounce any glorious interpretation of the national destiny.

Fifth, this historiographical approach also leads to the revision of established periodizations in disability history, by identifying the existence of paradigm shift at the international level and by insisting on the long duration of certain transnational phenomena. It encourages us to take into account not only international conferences, international standards and international programmes, but also certain national experiences of countries in the North and South as important milestones for understanding disability history at the international and national levels. In deaf history, the *International Congress for the Improvement of the condition of Deaf-mutes* held in Milan in 1880 is already well identified as a major turning point because of its role in the international legitimization of oralism and in the discrediting of sign language. Similarly, the first international conference on leprosy held in Berlin in 1897 legitimized the segregation of all leprosy patients as the only means of fighting leprosy. My own research has enabled me to identify several important chronological milestones, including *The Blind (Education, Employment and Maintenance) Act* adopted in England in 1920, a milestone for the cause of the blind at the international level, and ILO Recommendation number 99 of June 1955, which endorsed a shift towards the economic liberalization of international disability policies under pressure from Anglo-Saxon governments. In fact, during the development of standards on the vocational rehabilitation of the disabled between 1953 and 1955, the United States, the representatives of other capitalist countries and the employers' representatives succeeded in shifting ILO policies on vocational rehabilitation towards a more liberal economic policy (Brégain 2019). ILO Recommendation number 99 legitimated the exercise of a paid professional activity in the context of a liberal market economy. It institutionalized the selective placement of disabled workers in a competitive job market, and symbolically depreciated the use of compulsory employment quotas (by submitting its adoption to “specific conditions” and by drowning it in a high number of different possible measures). This recommendation excluded less-productive disabled workers from ordinary work placement and expected them to work in sheltered workshops, as free-lance workers, or condemned them to the absence of a remunerated activity. Monika Baár and her team of researchers are committed to demonstrating the crucial

role of the International Year of Disabled Persons organized by the United Nations in 1981, a catalyst moment for the politicization of many local and national associations of disabled people (Baár 2015). The work carried out by this team also leads to reassessing the significance of existing "turning points" in the field of disability at the international level. For example, Paul Van Trigt has shown that during the 1990s there was no "paradigm shift" from a social protection model to an Anglo-Saxon model of civil rights and anti-discrimination at the European Union level, but rather a combination of the two models (Trigt 2020). It is important to note that most studies continue to legitimize Western-centric periodizations overall, whereas the transnational history approach aims precisely at questioning the legitimacy of Eurocentric chronologies (Clavin 2010: 627). This persistent flaw can only be overcome once there is a proliferation of detailed studies on the history of disability in the Global South.

Sixth, a transnational approach can lead us to re-examine the originality of the concepts and terms used locally, and invites us to denaturalize and historicize socially accepted concepts and pointing out the importance of linguistic translations. While the French terminology of disability acquired great international renown during the first decades of the twentieth century, the preponderance of the English terminology of disability on an international scale was solidified from the 1950s onwards. Thus, while the French concept of *rééducation* was favoured by officials of the International Labour Office in the early 1920s, it was then the Anglophone concept of *rehabilitation* (with a distinct meaning and a more economic liberalization orientation) that appeared in the ILO recommendations in the mid-1950s and in UN programmes in the sector (Brégain 2018b). From the Second World War onwards, French- and Spanish-speaking actors sought to translate identification (disability, handicapped, etc.) and Anglophone concepts (rehabilitation, etc.) into their languages with varying degrees of difficulty and success. In the Spanish-speaking sphere, disability specialists between the 1940s and 1970s developed multiple proposals for identification inspired by the terminology disabled (*dishabil*, *discapacitado*), handicapped (*handicapeado*), or based on other semantic arguments (*menor-válido*, *minusválido*) (Brégain 2018a).

Seventh, as Ernst and Mueller point out in the introduction to their book on the transnational history of psychiatry, the cross- or transnational approach allows us to cut across and question the relevance of dichotomies such as centre/periphery, eastern/western, traditional/modern and even global/local (Ernst and Mueller 2010: xi) by highlighting the interactions between these categories, and their fluid boundaries. Dóra Vharga, for instance, shows that during the Cold War, Hungarian physicians collaborated with those in the West to find vaccines for the polio epidemic and design appropriate care. In addition, Hungarian hospitals received equipment and vaccines from hospitals in the West and other Eastern European countries (Vargha 2017). My own research has led me to downplay the supposed "modernity" of the North-Atlantic project for the rehabilitation of the disabled promoted by the UN, WHO and ILO in the 1950s, by giving real legitimacy to other conceptions of progress and other political projects in the sphere of rehabilitation, including socialist projects of rehabilitation and projects from developing countries.

III. A complex methodology to implement

Historians have used a variety of archives to carry out their transnational research: the archives of international organizations (League of Nations, ILO, WHO, UN, etc.); the archives of international NGOs, diplomatic archives, administrative and associative archives; journals of associations, conference proceedings, and also sometimes interviews with administrative officials or activists to supplement the gaps and silences of particular sources,

especially in Southern countries like Tanzania (De Schutter 2019) and Argentina (Brégain 2018b).

Writing a transnational history has several methodological advantages. By encouraging the researcher to take an interest in different countries and at the international scale, it allows the researcher to identify differences in the historiographical treatment of the same subject from one country to another, to note inequalities in the preservation of archives from one country to another, and to cross-reference data collected in many archives. An archive that is not available or incomplete in one country can be compensated for by discoveries in another country. For instance, the Brazilian parliamentary archives I examined contained many letters from associative, political or business leaders taking a position on draft laws relating to disability, which was not the case in Argentina. The consultation of international archives (ILO, UNESCO, UN) and some archives of national associations connected in the past to international networks offered great surprises. I have thus found many documents relating to the construction of national disability policies in Brazil, Argentina, Algeria, Tunisia, and Chile in the ILO archives, as well as journals published by associations of blind people in these different countries in the historical collection of the Valentin Haüy Library in Paris.

However, the methodology of transnational history is very challenging to implement. This difficulty is related first and foremost to the complexity of an analytical framework that combines multiple scales, and also to the technical, economic and linguistic obstacles to be overcome, including knowledge of new languages, reading other national historiographies, consulting multiple archives in different countries, significant travel costs, etc. Thus, working on NGO activities during the inter-war period requires the knowledge of several languages (French, English, German) used at international congresses, because communications are rarely translated. Some cases are especially complicated: working on the history of blind people, for instance, entails familiarity with multiple Braille systems (national Braille, abridged, Esperanto Braille).

Moreover, it is not easy to identify all transnational flows (information, mediators, etc.), to pinpoint the regularities in these flows, and to understand their specificities and the issues at stake. It is, for example, difficult to understand the stakes of these journeys for the individuals concerned, and to grasp their impact on their life trajectories and ideas. Ideally, the individual's frame of mind, discourse and practices should be reconstructed at the time when they meet other actors abroad, while giving equal dignity to the points of view of actors from different cultural areas, as recommended by Romain Bertrand (Bertrand 2013). The social origin, personality, professional trajectory, personal and professional strategies, and multiple loyalties of individuals circulating within the imperial or international arena, or working in international organizations, should also be studied. Indeed, these actors often retain multiple loyalties (with a government, a professional or charitable association, a foundation, the Church, etc.) that influence the content of their actions and the documents they write.

Efforts must also be made to spatialize and temporalize transnational flows to avoid portraying a linear and homogeneous diffusion of ideas and individuals in space. To give meaning to the multiple flows of information observable on an international scale, historian Pierre-Yves Saunier suggests reconstructing circulatory and connective regimes or configurations, "conceived as the regularities that frame the possibilities of actors, contents, directions and impacts of flows" (Saunier 2010: 152). The historian must try to grasp the attempts by certain actors to put in order the space of flows, and the way in which these flows constitute resources for local actors. The aim is to identify "the lasting interactions between mutually identified actors who take part in these flows, whether in the form of competition, cooperation or hierarchy" (Saunier 2008: 16). From the time of their creation, intergovernmental bodies have played a considerable role in the organization of these flows (information, experts, scholarship holders, equipment). It is their administrations that

determine, alongside the directorates of the main NGOs in the sector, the circulation regimes in the disability field.

It is necessary to be cautious in interpreting these transnational flows, and not to overestimate their importance in shaping national realities. Sometimes a local phenomenon has no connection with the outside and the transnational approach is not relevant in this case (Conrad 2016: 16). Some transnational flows had a strong impact on public policies, on social movements, on individual or collective memory, while others did not. One of the main reasons for weak influence is the complex process of appropriation of ideas from abroad by local actors. This phenomenon of appropriation "refers to the ways in which the receiving civilization or groups transform and distort inputs to adapt them to their own cultural context and social needs (Ruggiu 2007)". One should not neglect to consider the potential resistance to transfer from one group to another, or the disconnections that result from linguistic difficulties, ideological differences, cultural discontinuities, or pragmatic disagreements. The major challenge is to identify the social and political status of those who take up these ideas or reject them, since their status largely determines the future dissemination of information.

The overvaluing of the information that circulated internationally sometimes leads researchers to make three mistakes. The first is to consider human rights enshrined in international texts as objective and legitimate rights, as universal concepts, when in fact they are social constructs that should be historicized and denaturalized by identifying the conflicts and agreements that have presided over the determination of these rights, and by identifying the limits of the universalist claim of these concepts by exposing other conceptions of human dignity. The second is to consider that the local reality of disability must be studied exclusively or primarily through the lens of these international texts. The application of international texts is therefore considered logical and necessary. There is then a great danger of interpreting "everything else as lack, failure or distortion" (Cooper 2010), and thus of taking a restrictive and simplifying view of reality. This bias is perceptible in many studies, including my own to some extent. While I have questioned the extent to which international disability policies apply to Argentina, Brazil, Spain, and why, I have also interpreted certain local practices that were unrelated to international standards, such as begging and street selling, as practices that were in discordance with international standards (Brégain 2018b), thus positing them as symbolically inferior to these practices. Dipesh Chakrabarty insists on the need to read this "lack" and inadequacy differently, by interpreting it as creativity (Chakrabarty 2009: 77). He also suggests revealing the "ambivalence, contradictions, use of force, as well as the tragic and ironic aspects" of this imposed modernity (Chakrabarty 2009: 89), in order to be able to imagine "the radical heterogeneity of the world" (Chakrabarty 2009: 92). The third is to have a vision centred on state policies and their collaborators (private associations), unwittingly neglecting the study of the alternative practices of organized groups that act without collaborating with the state, including indigenous communities or certain religious groups.

Moreover, one should not only focus on flows, but also question the absence of circulation of certain individuals or elements, the political, economic or social reasons for this lack of contact with the outside world (especially in the case of authoritarian regimes), and their consequences. Transnational history invites here to pay attention to the material aspects of disability history, and to the transnational circulation of new technological objects (Braille printing machines, Braille tablets, adapted car, cochlear implants, etc.). During the 1950s, the manufacture of cars with orthopaedic controls was concentrated in Germany, and their price was very high abroad because of the import taxes at that time. The autarkic economic policies of the Franco regime explain why these cars were not imported from Spain at least until the early 1960s, even though Germany was geographically close. The hermetic nature of Franco's regime is also reflected in the lack of change of terminology related to disability: for example

the term *inválidos* (invalid) was retained by associations under state supervision (*Asociación Nacional de Inválidos Civiles*) until the mid-1970s. On the other hand, although geographically distant, associations imported cars with orthopaedic controls into several Latin American countries from the late 1950s onwards. Because the high price of these orthopaedic orders (including taxes) hindered the purchase and use of these adapted cars, Latin American association leaders mobilized politically to obtain exemption from import taxes for these cars throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The historian interested in transnational dynamics can quickly think of elaborating international comparisons with a multitude of countries from the very rich international archives, digitised sources available online, and secondary sources. This is a temptation to which the historian can easily succumb, but one that I think it is best to avoid, as these different bodies of sources are generally too limited to identify with precision and nuance the characteristics of each national case. It is essential to make systematic visits to the countries under study to search local archives, the local press, or to conduct interviews. This makes it possible to broaden the range of sources consulted and to better understand the local context of knowledge production (Ghobrial 2019: 11). This broadening of sources nevertheless causes another problem: the scope of the subjects to be studied and the considerable quantity of sources (primary and secondary) sometimes obliges the historian, for reasons of time and limited publication space, to synthesise all the data collected and interpreted critically without systematically explaining the conditions of production and transmission of each source.

Another pitfall of most transnational disability history work - including my own - deserves to be pointed out and explained: the scant attention paid to intersectional issues, except in Esme Cleall's works about British Empire (Cleall 2015, Cleall 2016). This lack of attention seems to me to be linked to several converging factors: the enormous quantity of sources to be mobilized in order to construct a transnational history; and the limited presence of clues and sources for studying these intersectional issues in the archives of intergovernmental organizations. Let's take the case of the research I conducted on the construction of international disability policies from the 1920s to the 1980s. The international sources mobilized allowed me to briefly mention the mobilizations for the rights of women with disabilities that emerged during the 1970s, but the over-representation of men among the leaders of NGOs and international civil servants gives the impression that the struggle and action for the rights of people with disabilities at the international level remained a male affair until the mid-1970s. I unintentionally made two mistakes: I did not try to explain this confiscation of decision-making power in the field of disability by men; and I unintentionally overlooked the existence of certain women's movements of the interwar period, which had not succeeded in structuring themselves sufficiently at the European level to challenge the intergovernmental organizations. The sources mobilized at the time did not allow me to have knowledge of them, it is the research in local associative archives that allowed me to bring to light the existence of a transnational network of blind feminist women, visibly structured around two figures, the German Hildegard Mittelshein Scheid, and the Swiss Marguerite Schaffer. Indeed, German-speaking blind women organized themselves into an association and demanded, as early as 1913, that they be able to benefit from domestic education in institutions, as well as work opportunities for blind women, and the creation of single-sex homes (Mittelsten Scheid 1927). Similarly, I have not discussed the interaction between the disability rights and anti-racist movements in my book, as the sources consulted in the archives did not lend themselves to this. Fortunately, I believe that this partial obscuring of other features of social differentiation (gender, ethnic groups, social classes, age, etc.) in the transnational disability history literature is only temporary, as the growing body of work on this topic now provides a comprehensive framework for understanding that allows for more focused studies on these issues (as for example around disabled refugees, etc.).

Another major difficulty in carrying out transnational history work is grasping the nuances of the terminology used in foreign countries, which is necessary to better contextualize the transfer of information. When a study covers several countries, the researcher must generally master several languages. When the study concerns a single country, the researcher may sometimes make mistakes by copying the foreign terminology used in the sources consulted without critical distance. For example, Jan Stoll states in his article that a Nicaraguan organization is called *Organización Revolucionarios Dehabilitados* (Stoll, 2015), probably trusting a wrong German source, since the term *dehabilitados* does not exist in Spanish, while the term *deshabilitados* was used from the 1960s onwards by some authors as a translation of the English-speaking concept of *disabled*, thus proving a strong Anglo-Saxon influence on rehabilitation science in this particular organization. In addition, there are the difficulties inherent in translating historical writing into different languages already pointed out by Waltraud Ernst and Thomas Mueller (Ernst and Mueller, 2010, p. xii). In the case of transnational studies based on international and national sources there are the almost insoluble problems of how to be faithful to the terminology of the national original sources (for example, the term *lisiado* used in Argentina at the end of the 1940s, which literally translates in English as “crippled”); how to be faithful to the terminology used at the time in the English-speaking sphere; or even to be faithful to the terminology used in international texts at the time (*Handicapped* or *Invalids* and their Spanish translation *Impedidos* and *Inválidos*).

These multiple difficulties in adopting a transnational perspective lead us to recommend two possible types of transnational studies:

(1) Transnational studies focused on two or three countries. This perspective is very enriching because it opens up a horizon of experiences, historiographical traditions, and vast sources that oblige the researcher to be very reflexive in the construction of the object of study and the chronological boundaries. However, it also forces the researcher to compare national cases, to study the historical variability of the categories studied in each country, while analysing the relationships, the multiple transfers of information and the resistance to transfers between these countries. As a result, this perspective proves to be very complex to implement and requires many years of research. Above all, it is difficult to construct a coherent chronological breakdown common to several countries, due to the multiple temporalities to be taken into account. Other difficulties may arise, such as determining the representativeness of the phenomena studied at the level of each country, and the "difficulty of establishing the simultaneity or anteriority of phenomena observed in both countries, with a view to cultural and scientific transfers" (Hoffbeck 2015: 43).

(2) Studies based on a single territory, an object, a small group, a single individual or a short period of time, with a transnational approach (but without necessarily taking the state framework as a reference), following the principles of "global" or transnational micro-history (Bertrand and Calafat 2018; Ghobrial 2019; Vries 2019). This research perspective requires the researcher to be attentive to small details or clues, to the diversity of circulation that may be seen, to the criticism of archives and to foreign terminology. This transnational micro-history is concerned with the singularity of the historical contexts (local, regional, national and international contexts), and may lend itself more to a social history approach, because it restores the framework of thought of the actors, their agency, wishes and uncertainties, and describe their concrete social practices. Rather than focusing on exceptional cases or fascinating personal trajectories, this micro-history is based on "an affinity for methods geared towards experimentation - whether it be the cutting out of the object observed under the magnifying glass, the questioning of major explanatory paradigms, close dialogue with the social sciences, narrative inventiveness, attention to the production of social categories and

contexts, or reflexivity with regard to the focal points of analysis" (Bertrand and Calafat 2018: 10).

Aude Fauvel's study of the case of Baron Raymond Seillière is a good example of this approach. It analyses the trajectory of this wealthy individual in France and the United States. Baron Seillière was interned in one of the best French asylums by his sister. He paints a very negative picture of the care he received from the French alienist, a story that was quickly publicised in British, American and French newspapers (Fauvel 2010: 213). While doctors such as Charcot considered Seillière to be suffering from « an excited temper », Raymond Seillière admits that he was only « an eccentric man, but not pathologically so ». The American embassy quickly intervened to demand Seillière's release. The "Seillière Case" contributed to the international media campaign against the abuses of the alienists, and encouraged psychiatrists and administrators of institutions to make international comparisons on how to deal with the mentally ill people.

Conclusion:

The approach of the transnational disability history invites the researcher to observe transnational flows, transnational networks, transnational dynamics, international norms, conjunctures in transnational economics (economic crisis, etc.), politics (wars, etc.) and health (pandemics), that can influence the living conditions of people with disabilities in the various regions of the globe. This approach offers a new reading of history, less Western-centric, which considerably renews our understanding of the construction of international disability policies, of movements for the rights of persons with disabilities, and of the hybrid nature of national disability policies. The transnational history of disability is an extraordinary field to explore, with many discoveries still to be made about disability rights movements, about the transnational construction of categories of disability, about colonialism and imperialism, about the challenges of citizenship, as well as about the migration of disabled people.

The adoption of this transnational perspective does not prevent the researcher from conducting intersectional research, but it does make it difficult to take into account at the same time all the other factors of social differentiation (gender, ethnic groups, social classes, age, etc.) as a local historical study allows. The researcher must therefore always bear in mind that the transnational history he or she is writing will always be fragmentary, but that he or she must strive to uncover these intersectional issues, to make visible the life experiences of people with disabilities in all their diversity, in order to avoid reinforcing all kinds of prejudices (gender, ethnic, etc.).

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