Transnationalizing Disability Policy in Embedded Cultural-Cognitive Worldviews: the Case of Sub-Saharan Africa

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In 2013, the European Union (EU) mission in Zambia made a public statement about its financial support to the LGBTI community. In panic and fear, LGBTI leaders urged the EU office to withdraw the statement and encouraged other foreign missions to instead offer discrete support to the LGBTI community. This anecdote is illustrative of the experiential gap between geopolitical groups confronting a similar policy issue. For the EU, the rights of LGBTI persons are universally important; for the LGBTI community in the Zambian context, safety and discretion are more important. This paradox illustrates the challenges facing the transnationalizing of disability policy. How could we explain the fact that transnational disability actors have for the last two decades been trying to disseminate disability 'knowledge' and norms in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) without corresponding social policy and ideational success? This article examines this policy and ontological discrepancy. Advancing a constructivist argument, the article contends that transnational policy diffusion, largely built on colonial legacies of universalizing Western knowledge paradigms, has preoccupied itself with political institutional engagements at the expense of engaging context-specific sociological and ideological factors, resulting in sterile legislative exercises. To develop a truly SSA-relevant disability policy infrastructure, the article proposes ideational bricolaging and translation, a constructivist process of carefully adhering to and negotiating with context-specific ideational factors that inform the disability experience in SSA countries.

Keywords: Transnationalizing disability policy; Ideation; Neoliberalism; Political institutions.

Introduction

Several disability scholars, particularly those within critical disability theory, have criticized the legitimacy of often homogenizing Western disability ideologies and practices in the global South (e.g. Devlieger, 1999; Meekosha, 2008; Grech, 2011; Meekosha, 2011; Soldatic

and Grech, 2014). Several reasons have been advanced, among them, ideological and experiential fit (Grech, 2011). A more common argument that these scholars have advanced, is that while Western countries seek to universalize their disability ideology and development agenda, they, through their neoliberal capitalist activities such as wars, environmental pollution, and hazardous industrial activities continue to be a major cause of impairment in the global South (see Grech, 2011; Meekosha, 2011; Soldatic and Grech, 2014). These critical disability studies scholars argue that despite accounting for over 80 percent of the global population of disabled people, the global South remains at the periphery of 'development policy, research and programs, and virtually excluded from the Western-centric disability studies' (Grech, 2011:87). In addition, they emphasize how the 'universalization' of Western-founded disability paradigms has negative impacts, especially on the global South where experiences of disability may be profoundly different.

Building on this conceptual thrust, particularly a neocolonial paradigm, this article interrogates the growing transnationalization of disability discourse. The article focuses on geopolitical heterogeneity to advance a constructivist argument for policy design based on epistemological and ideational arguments, and against a purely institutional approach, which the article argues, represents Western-centric neoliberal ideologies and policy designs. While acknowledging its gains, the article argues that the institutional transnationalization of disability discourse simultaneously 'universalizes' Western geopolitical epistemologies, norms and policies, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as in other parts of the global South. Theoretically, the article is built on a constructivist paradigm that stresses the importance of ideas, social meanings, historical and cultural identities in disability policy design and implementation. Therefore, it proposes an Afrocentric approach to disability policy design in SSA, which is more responsive to the unique local ideational and experiential foundations.

I argue, first, that existing transnational disability policy diffusion efforts in SSA are failing to entrench themselves largely because they are modeled on the neoliberal paradigm of hegemonic Western-centric 'political institution engagement' over a balance with, if not prioritization, of the local ideational social contexts. It is these ideational social contexts that are the principal incubators of social meaning, identities and norms that most proximately and significantly spell out the experiential environments of disabled people in SSA. Second, I argue that, due to the sociological significance of endogenous factors that shape the disability experience and understanding, successful disability policy diffusion in SSA needs to consider a more sociologically strategic approach that identifies key transformative policy agents rather than the existing predominantly Western-driven political institution approach. I draw from disability scholarship that demonstrates that disability in contexts such as SSA is uniquely shaped not just by cultural-cognitive and ideational factors (Aldersey et al., 2014; Burck, 1999; Kisanji, 1998), but also by neoliberal power asymmetries (Grech, 2011; Meekosha, 2011; Soldatic and Grech, 2014).

This critical article begins to answer the following questions: why have transnational disability efforts been unsuccessful in producing stable disability social programs and Western-like compliant societies in SSA countries? What alternative policy channels could transnational actors pursue to maximize the impact of disability policy in SSA? Answering these questions would ultimately help bridge the gap between policy and practice. In its totality, my conceptual framework combines critical disability thought and public policy concepts of transnational action and ideational thought built on Parsons (2007) and Campbell (2004).

Transnationalization of disability studies and epistemological contestations

The growing efforts to transnationalize disability policy and politics have yielded some positive results (Soldatic and Grech, 2014). Apart from building bridges of solidarity for advocates who claim rights and justice, including in reparations for impairments caused during war among others, disability actors have also raised awareness of the need for state-driven social protection measures for disabled people. Despite these positive gains, however, the transnationalization of disability discourse faces serious conceptual, normative, and empirical challenges.

In her article entitled 'Decolonizing disability: thinking and acting globally', Meekosha (2011) argues that transnational disability discourse is tainted by colonial legacies, both causal and reputational. She argues that not only was the process of colonization violent and disabling to the populations of the global South, but also that Western economic dominance in the global South continues to cause and sustain impairment, disability, and poverty- what she calls 'social suffering' (671). Grech (2009, 2011) amplifies this argument by putting the neoliberal development agenda in perspective. He argues that this agenda has not only been a primary cause of impairment in the global South, but that its emphasis on individual productivity is exclusionary to disabled people, including on account of their physical impairment. Furthermore, Soldatic and Grech (2014) recount the embodied legacies of colonization in the global South, leaving behind impairment, trauma, and cultural destruction and dislocation. Beyond just an economic agenda, colonialism and its ideological successor, neoliberalism, also replaced institutional, ideological, and political legacies of African societies. The very logic of colonialism was to usurp indigenous socio-economic and political identities and ultimately to establish political and ontological acquiescence. Along with looting of material resources, colonialists replaced pre-existing indigenous epistemologies and structures of political power that were culturally ingrained in most SSA societies.

In political science, there is an argument advanced by realists and those focusing on hegemony, that international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade

Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are primarily tools of the powerful in the global political economy (Krasner, 1976; Waltz, 2000) and that they serve to advance the interests of economically and militarily powerful states. For example, hegemonic stability theory argues that the international system cannot operate without powerful states providing the incentives and rules for cooperation. Krasner (1976) particularly argues that we need hegemony to design and enforce the rules of the system. Similarly, Waltz (2000) confirms that power and interest override any institutional laws in the international system. He goes on to state that international organizations are merely instruments of their founders and those that sponsor their continued existence.

Like colonial domination, the attempts to transnationalize and universalize a Western-centric paradigm of disability discourse, both through academic scholarship and transnational actors' advocacy, are not unrelated to the neoliberal agenda of institutional hegemony. Designed on Western ideals, 'universal' disability paradigms diffused by Western-centric scholarship and transnational actors, have embedded Western-centric views of the world and values of interpersonal relations. As Meekosha (2011) and Grech (2011) note, even among academics, geopolitical intellectual supremacy is rife: mainstream disability scholars seldom reference disability scholars from the global South. While systemic attempts at universalizing disability knowledge and norms through international statutes and norms have successfully established unified transnational disability regimes, they also carry with them ontological and epistemological supremacy and hegemony that serve to trample on deep rooted local values important for designing more locally responsive policies. So, how else could transnational actors facilitate the building of a truly global disability discourse without imposing one geopolitical perspective over others? Before answering this question, and in the quest to consolidate the case for an Afrocentric disability policy design, I present some policy consequences of a Western-centric disability agenda in SSA.

Unified policies, sterile consequences: contextualizing disability policy paradigms

The Western social model of disability is centered on the pursuit of human rights. The general ideology driving global disability norms through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and other transnational advocacy, is the understanding of human equality and entitlement to equal treatment (Devlieger, 1999b; Michalko, 2009). As a result, states adopt protective legislation aimed at controlling negative public and private behavior and attitudes towards disabled people. In her comparative study of Canada and Britain on the reasons that some disability organizations use courts for rights claims while others do not, Vanhala (2010) stresses the centrality of the legal and court systems in the restoration of equality in Western disability advocacy. In other words, the sociological implication of discrimination against disabled people is injustice; the mechanics for redress are therefore restoration of justice.

However, the notion of rights and justice in a SSA context, built more around a normative community than a positivist individualist society, is different. Although adjudication mechanisms have always existed in African societies, the institution of the judiciary as we know it today in the *polis*- an institution of arbitration- is an abstraction of Western civilization that specifies positive individual rights. Meekosha (2011:678) argues that 'human rights are based on the western idea of rational individuals, which raises important issues for a southern theory of disability, given that the concepts and processes embedded in human rights discourse remain culturally Eurocentric'. This ideological incongruence has serious ramifications for disability policy design and transnationalization. As Richard Scott (2005) argues, institutions as models of rationality are cultural systems designed to pursue social purposes. Therefore, the efficacy of one institution created for a particular social context, might not necessarily be replicated in a different context (North, 1994; Fischer, 2003).

One consequence of disability knowledge and policy transnationalization is that judicial systems may well be ideationally irrelevant for disabled people in SSA. Despite SSA countries' adoption of judicial systems and the CRPD, disability is still influenced (and limited) by context-specific cultural, historical, and economic factors. As a result, disability programs addressing real economic, education, health, and employment needs of disabled people in SSA are scarce (see also Grech (2011) on transnational failures in the economic sphere). Almost throughout SSA, disability services are still predominantly provided by Western-funded charity organizations, reinforcing an image of 'pity' rather than pushing for the locally-driven acknowledgement of equality of personhood and state-driven expansion and guarantees of capabilities and freedoms aimed at equality (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993). How do we explain this paradox? Why have transnational actors not worked towards the same social egalitarianism and state-driven socio-economic benefits for SSA countries as they did domestically in Western societies?

Preliminarily, there are two principal factors that would help explain the sterility of the existing models of disability engagement in SSA. First, existing transnational actors' efforts are modelled on a neoliberal paradigm that seeks ideological conquest rather than normative recognition; acquiescence rather than ideational emancipation. This conquest-oriented 'universalization' agenda is oblivious to the fact that the direct adoption of often positivist Western-centric disability models is incompatible with locally existing economic, historical, metaphysical, cultural, and political structural factors (discussed below) that uniquely affect the disability experience in SSA. As Grech (2011: 90) aptly argues:

> The experiences of disabled people are […] embedded in and conditioned by social expectations, ideology, culture, customs and beliefs, which in turn influence the conceptualization of disability within contexts and disabled people's self-perceptions and world views and impact the ways in which people interact with them.

As such, the use of legislation and courts built on Western notions of individual rights to police and combat discrimination has proven unproductive in SSA, rendering the political institutional approach ineffective. Second, disability literature on SSA (e.g. Aldersey et al., 2014; Burck, 1999; Devlieger, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Kisanji, 1995, 1998; Stone-MacDonald and Butera, 2014) indicates that societies are traditionally entrenched in ideational and cultural influences that filter through to attitudes towards people with disabilities at the individual, social levels and also policy levels.

We can hypothetically deduce from the above two factors that Western-centric models of disability policy diffusion are conceptually, methodologically and contextually inadequate. In what follows, I discuss sociological factors that not only impact on the experience of disability in SSA, but also promote the need for an alternative policy approach.

Sociological heterogeneity and impact on disability in SSA Societies

According to disability literature on SSA, social, historical, and cultural factors influence the definition of disability and the determination of who is considered disabled (Burck, 1999; Devlieger, 1995a; Devlieger, 1999a; Kisanji, 1995; Stone-MacDonald and Butera, 2014). What constitutes a disability in the Western definitions of disability would not necessarily hold in SSA contexts. In fact, there is no known umbrella word that captures the concept of 'disability' in most SSA societies (Burck, 1999; Devlieger, 1995a). In some SSA societies, disability encompasses otherwise 'normal' conditions in the West. For example, during my field research among the Tonga people of Zambia in 2016, respondents mentioned that persons with certain physical impairments but who can fulfil the essential social expectations such as childbearing and subsistence work, are not considered disabled (see also Aldersey et al., 2014 on the determinants of personhood in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo). Contrary to the West (e.g. the US), obesity and HIV/AIDS are not perceived as disabilities in SSA. Below, I discuss illustrations (by no means exhaustive) of social and cultural norms and beliefs that contribute to ideational uniqueness in disability knowledge in SSA societies.

"We are, therefore, I am": philosophy of personhood in SSA Societies

Aldersey et al. (2014: 33) define personhood as 'the standing or status that is bestowed upon one human being, by others, in the context of relationships and social being'. Personhood confers 'normalcy' and 'abnormality', categories with direct implications for the sociological treatment of disabled people. The causal connections of personhood are important for policy analysis. In many African societies, personhood is communally defined. Although in some contexts, individuality is strong, and disabled people are subjected to negative attitudes, in

general the family and community is the central organism of existence, support, and livelihood. As such, the disability experience in such societies is shared, and it cannot be understood purely from the individual rights perspective. Grech (2011: 91) makes this point clear when he argues that 'the persistence of communities in the countries of the global South [..] provides a formidable challenge to the focus on rights as well as to the Western assumption that profound individualism has proliferated everywhere.' Challenging the universality of the Western assumption that individuals are autonomous and self-interested political actors, Grech (2011) argues that context matters in determining relevance and applicability on the ground. In some cases, for example, disabled people are more concerned about communal identity; in others, due to the strong overlap between poverty and disability, about the satisfaction of basic material needs for survival (Grech, 2011). In many parts of SSA, both challenges and opportunities for disabled people can, therefore, best be understood from the collective, family and societal perspectives. Consequently, policy designs that ignore this experiential reality or seek homogenization could at best be irrelevant and at worst be impositions and neocolonial despotism.

Disability in the cause-and-effect equation

For many SSA societies, the causes of disability are important (Aldersey et al., 2014; Devlieger, 1995a; Devlieger, 1999a; Mamboleo, 2009; Stone-MacDonald and Butera, 2014). In addition to the physical causes of disability such as war, torture and trauma, the non-physical causes are also important, especially for ontological reasons. For community members born with disabilities, their disabilities are almost always connected with the supernatural world: ancestral spirits, sorcery, broken taboos, and the divine (Aldersey et al., 2014; Burck, 1999). For example, disability could be justified as a result of parents' failure to spiritually appease their ancestors (Stone-MacDonald and Butera, 2014). Stone-MacDonald and Butera (2014) found that people in Zimbabwe people related cerebral palsy and blindness to witchcraft, spirits, or disobeying a taboo. Devlieger (1995) also explains how the Songye people of the Democratic Republic of Congo attribute physical disability to distorted relations with ancestors who, due to improper burial at death, manifest their anger through 'faulty' births.

This has implications for the way we understand disability in SSA. First, disability is a shared reality. An individual may bear the mark of disability for collective causes, for example parents, ancestors etc. In terms of disability, therefore, the experience is often shared among family and community members. Addressing disability policy needs in such circumstances requires respectful and situated ideational understanding and negotiation. Second, understanding the cause of various types of disabilities has direct influence on social attitudes towards any one disability (Devlieger, 1995b). Someone who becomes impaired through warfare or industrial mishap is perceived differently from someone born with a similar

disability. For example, although cultural beliefs still play a role in explaining disability at birth, in his research on effects of landmines in Angola, Tietze (1999) highlights the moral interpretations of disability resulting from injury during the war time. Furthermore, different societies treat the same disability differently. For instance, while albinism is treated as sacred among the Igbo people of Nigeria, among the Songye people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, albinism and dwarfism are considered the worst kinds of disability and, therefore, are expected to die rather than live longer (Devlieger, 1995a). In Tanzania, people with albinism are attacked for body parts believed to possess magical powers for healing diseases and business success. In a 2017 report, the United Nations estimated that since 2000, about 80 people with albinism had been killed in Tanzania alone for their body parts. In Western contexts, disability has no superstitious causation. In the African context, communitarianism, historical experiences of colonialism and war, and the connectivity to the supernatural world, all constitute and contribute to a complex and diverse understanding and experience of disability.

Community responses to disability

African societies have both progressive and problematic responses to disability, hence the need for ideational negotiation through contextual bricolage and translation. As discussed in the preceding two points, communal coherence and collective experiences with disability are important epistemological capital for effective disability policy. However, there are some non-progressive attitudes and beliefs that shape negative disability experiences. For example, due to some mythical beliefs, families sometimes neglect their disabled members (Aldersey et al., 2014; Stone-MacDonald and Butera, 2014). With superstitions around disability, disabled people's lives are sometimes endangered, especially when disabled members of the family become sources of shame or when disabled people's body parts are believed to inherently possess magical powers for wealth creation as seen in the example of albinism above.

From the literature (e.g. Devlieger, 1995a, 1999a; Loeb et al., 2008; Aldersey et al., 2014; Grech, 2011), it is evident that the disability experience in SSA is heterogeneous, and that the notion of disability transcends the Western equivalent of impairment in individualized contexts. More than a physical or intellectual manifestation, disability is largely metaphysical. The human experience that comes with violence, war, poverty and other deprivations far outweighs that which results from exclusion in the Western sense of disability. As Meekosha (2011:670) observes, 'concepts of disability and impairment seem inadequate and the concept of social suffering may be more appropriate' when looking at the experience of disability in the global South. While litigation has helped in the restoration of justice against social and economic exclusion, more culturally entrenched suffering requires a more sociologically hermeneutical response. In addition, policy designs for the SSA context

should acknowledge and build on the capital of social and family ties that already provide crucially needed support mechanisms (Grech, 2011).

For SSA, it is, therefore, important to design policy diffusion strategies that do not start and end with political institutional elites, but ones that target and prioritize cultural support adherence or change. As social constructionist policy scholars like Stone (2002) and Fischer (2002) argue, social positions carried by contextual narratives and social meanings, are the principal means for defining and contesting policy problems. Aldersey et al. (2014) also suggest that any relevant and successful support for disability, either financial or programmatic, should consider social and cultural constructions of disability. Sociological and ideational constructions are gateways to Afrocentric world views. They could either facilitate or stifle exogenous interventions, particularly when those exogenous efforts border on experiential and ideational conquest. Western-centric prescriptions of laws by transnational actors, or institutions such as rehabilitation homes removing family members from their natural family environments, are inadequate in addressing the unique challenges of disability in SSA. There is need, therefore, to re-theorize disability transnational policy diffusion to reflect this ideational complexity and to design impactful disability policies in SSA.

Transnational actors and disability norms transfer

In today's globalized world, transnational actors play a key role as agents of policy transfer and learning (see for example Orenstein, 2008; Hall, 1993). In disability studies, Soldatic and Grech (2014), among others, have championed the critique of transnationalising disability studies. No doubt, transnational actors have mobilized unified efforts for the pursuit of justice for disabled people (ibid, 2014). Soldatic and Grech (2014) provide several examples of positive developments, including transnational coalitions working against colonially-driven impairment and disablement. One of the examples they give is that of the British Court's ruling acknowledging colonial violence on the Mau Mau people of Kenya that resulted in deaths and impairment. Generally, disability advocates internationally, have raised significant political consciousness about the 'social suffering' of disabled people in SSA. Due to transnational actors' campaigns and advocacy, many SSA states have recently started to show some willingness to address concerns about disability (Mamboleo, 2009), most visibly through domestic legislation influenced by the passage of the CRPD in 2006. Prior to the CRPD, the UN declared 1983- 1992 the Decade of Disabled Persons, a resolution that influenced SSA leaders to declare 2000-2009 the African Decade of Disabled Persons and two years later to adopt the Plan of Action at the Pan African Conference on the African Decade of Disabled Persons (African Studies Centre Leiden, 2008; see also Stone-MacDonald, 2014).

Although several SSA states have passed parliamentary acts legislating disability in adherence with Western-driven universalization of rights, there is little evidence of actual policy implementation (Mamboleo, 2009). Disabled people are discriminated against in many ways, and enforcement mechanisms are weak or inexistent. For example, despite the law providing for equal access to education for disabled people in Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, there is no matching provision of learning materials in Braille or sign language services for persons with visual and hearing impairments respectively. In Zambia, use of Braille during an election was realized for the first time during general elections in 2016. In 2005, the 'Third Ordinary Session of the Labor and Social Affairs Commission of the African Union', the key organ that manages the African Union's social security, did not mention disability in its report. In SSA countries, therefore, disability remains marginalized in policy, and is only addressed haphazardly. The existence of legislative provisions, therefore, does not correspond with demonstrable efforts to equilibrate the social, political, and economic environment for disabled people.

The question, therefore, is why despite the evidently sustained and aggressive international efforts to push for protections for disabled people and the apparent political willingness to adopt disability legislation, do the vast majority of SSA states still have less developed social programs for disabled people? Why is this 'political amenability' not matched with concrete social transformation, actions against discrimination and credible structural, financial and programmatic commitment for inclusiveness? In the hope to begin to address this gap, I turn to investigating the relationship between disability and ideational assumptions of disability in SSA, and to examine if they offer any opportunities for reconceptualization of transnational actors' policy diffusion in the region. To start, I demonstrate four empirical and conceptual factors that challenge the universalization of Western-centric disability knowledge. In all four, the universality of Western-centric epistemology is not only questioned by local knowledge, but also counterproductive to engendering locally acceptable and sustainable policy interventions for disabled people in the context of SSA. Therefore, if not carefully conceptualized, transnational efforts at securing rights of disabled people could, as a matter of fact, undermine chances for meaningful reforms (see also Soldatic and Grech, 2014).

Transnational ideology and political/economic power asymmetries

Despite their human rights benefits, transnational actors' policy agendas are neither politically nor ideationally neutral. Ideas and institutions in general are contested. As Grech (2011:88) aptly states, 'there is no possibility of disinterested or neutral knowledge.' As proposal actors, transnational actors have agendas (Orenstein, 2008). Political science realists argue that transnational actors are transmitters of neoliberal political and economic agendas of the politically and economically strong (Krasner 1976; Waltz, 2000). For example, in January 2018, the US, though in futility, used economic leverage over United Nations

members to advance its political interests over its unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital city. In another example, Escobar (2011) argues that the neoliberal development paradigm is hegemonic. He argues that powerful nations and their agents, in particular international organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have constructed the development discourse using Western epistemological views, and intrusively imposed it as a universal fit. The IMF, for example, rebuked the Asian model of development during the 1997 Asian financial crisis, calling it 'crony capitalism' (Escobar, 2011). Using discursive power to demolish the Asian model, the IMF enforced a Western model of development on Asian countries during the crisis (Hall, 2003). However, target countries for policy diffusion are not ideationally or politically neutral vis-à-vis policy receptivity. This reinforces the neoliberal argument about universalizing one-sided Western disability ideologies across autonomous societies with their own intrinsic identities and norms. Perhaps, this raises a more complex question about why countries in SSA, despite their own interests in ontological and cultural autonomy, have historically accepted transnational ideologies and legislative cooperation (even when they have no intentions of implementing them).

From a neoliberal hegemonic perspective, this presents us with the dual problem of political/economic power asymmetries on one hand, and the principal-agent dilemma on the other. First, political/economic power asymmetries create uneven policy contestations where one party acquiesces to the other for political and economic gains. Namibia, for example, does not have the same political/economic capability to stave off policy influence from the US or the UK as Singapore or South Korea. SSA countries are unlikely to refuse (at least not without consequences) UN-driven agendas that have the backing of powerful nations such as the US, UK or France as their main political and economic benefactors. Second, this situation also develops into a very complex principal-agent problem of informational asymmetries between transnational policy carriers and host governments.

The implication for disability policy diffusion is that SSA countries, for political appeasement, could ratify international instruments that transnationalize disability norms without material commitment to implementing such policies. And even if there was material commitment, they would still face ideational challenges (e.g. cultural beliefs, family and social uniqueness, and colonial and historical legacies) at the local level where disability experiential realities are incongruent with transnational propositions. Because of undue power influence and hidden political ends, SSA governments continue to adopt policies, ratify international treaties and protocols, and even domestically legislate transnational principles with no intent to implement or enforce them. It is not irrational for host governments to accept legislative proposals accompanied by economic benefits and other political incentives with no intention to implement them. Nor is it irrational for them, knowing very well the unique policy contexts of their own countries, to not directly apply contextually inappropriate maxims. Despite engaging in transnational relations, domestic

policy actors consider local needs, situational compatibility, and political and cultural interpretive factors before implementing policy lessons from elsewhere. Overlooking this complexity helps neither the transnational agenda nor disabled people that urgently need solutions to their context-specific challenges in SSA.

Norms and institutional legitimacy

Social science scholars have shown that the logic that change of formal rules (through legislation) is sufficient to change human behavior is flawed. North (1994), for example, argues that while it is easy to change formal rules overnight, informal norms, the anchor of beliefs, identity, knowledge, and behavior, usually change only gradually. The logic here is that institutions are birthed through social interactions, and they are often a representation of people's cultural-cognitive values and informal beliefs. Institutions and their enforcement build on and reinforce informal norms and beliefs. They create, because of repeated human behavior in response to them, reciprocal expectations and standards. In other words, they create a culture. Changing formal rules does not, therefore, guarantee simultaneous change of informal norms.

The above point has important ramifications for the transnationalization of Western-centric disability knowledge, norms, and policies to SSA. First, as Grech (2011:89) pertinently observes, when disability knowledge and policy is determined by the West, 'it implies that it is theoretically ill-equipped to deal with majority world views and the nuances of majority world contexts (historical, social, economic and political)'. Brokering agreements at the UN or through political institutions on disability policy for all nations does not guarantee changes in behavior and attitudes towards disabled people in SSA. Given the cultural-cognitive embeddedness of disability in SSA, it is important to understand that whatever policy interventions are made, they must confront the hard reality of disability on the ground. The social challenges of disability in SSA are not merely due to the societal barriers in realizing the rights of disabled people. Rather, disability is a social issue because its very ontology is a constitutive element of how societies have historically perceived the world. As such, any efforts to design disability policies in these contexts, need to employ effective discursive frames towards the public, through carefully selected strategic intermediaries who understand the context and can navigate the ideational terrain. Like any other society, SSA societies have unique cultural idiosyncrasies difficult to change overnight. For example, as highlighted earlier, many SSA societies have an almost domineering adherence to family and communal ties (see also Barker and Murray, 2010; and Grech, 2011).

To illustrate, according to Zambia Police statistics, the greatest challenge to ending problems of physical and sexual violence against women, child marriage, and domestic child sexual abuse has been that families decide to protect violators to prevent 'family shame'. In the

examples above, despite punitive legislative provisions, social norms, beliefs and practices, stifle prosecutorial efforts. Elinor Ostrom (2000), refers to these as evolutionary and cultural social norms, which create reciprocal expectations. While most of the cases remain unreported due to these sociological justifications, in some instances victims report violations but then withdraw complaints yielding to family and societal pressure to avoid 'family shame'. Often, families prefer secret domestic dispute settlement to judicial proceedings that could potentially result in the arrest, humiliation, and prosecution of one of their kith and kin, sometimes the family breadwinner.

This family and social phenomenon has theoretical and empirical implications for disabled people and disability policy design in SSA. First, a disability knowledge paradigm that insists on individual rights supremacy is not only incongruent with the experiences of disabled people, but it is counterproductive to the challenges faced by disabled people in these contexts. With all the social expectations historically created and sustained, it is unlikely that disabled individuals, so embedded within this social fabric, would seek litigious measures against their immediate family or community or nation for perceived violations. For example, in a robust study of social, cultural and institutional factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of persons with disabilities in East Africa, Waddell (2012) outlines factors that render disabled people more vulnerable to sexual violence: beliefs that people with disabilities are asexual and therefore virgins and possible channels for virgin cleansing; women may acquiesce wishing to become mothers in order to gain social acceptance or self-affirmation; and young people perceiving themselves to have low status may enter into risky relationships in order to boost their social status. These social circumstances, among others, keep disabled people reticent over sexual violence against them. Homogenizing disability policy based on Western experience and ideology, defies logic in this context.

Ethnolinguistic fractionalization

One of the conspicuous characteristics of SSA is its cultural heterogeneity. Political scientists have theorized about the implications of ethnolinguistic fractionalization. One of the arguments made, is that ethnolinguistic fractionalization complicates institution building and policy change (Besley and Persson, 2014; Mauro, 1995, 1998). In an ethnolinguistically heterogeneous society, diversity of ideational perspectives makes it hard to impose a homogenous policy with exogenous ontological and normative values. Language has important effects on policy framing. As Fischer (2003:47) argues, 'discourse […] is grounded in the awareness that language profoundly shapes our view of the socio-political world rather than merely mirroring it'. It is widely accepted in policy studies that language, through its framing effects, significantly affects chances of policy acceptability (Mercer, 2005; Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). Policy entrepreneurs use language to frame policies to suit their audiences with a view to expanding cognitive, emotional, and normative responsiveness.

As Mercer (2005:10) argues, 'our feelings can cause us to reframe our choices which, in turn, can cause us to reverse our preferences.' Language, therefore, plays a significant role in evoking emotional and normative resonance to policies. The assumption that disability knowledge, policies, and norms founded in one context would seamlessly localize in ethnolinguistically diverse SSA countries is not only imposition, but conceptually improbable.

Because of their ethnolinguistic fractionalization, SSA societies are ideationally heterogeneous and require more complex strategies of disability policy design and diffusion than a homogenizing Western neoliberal agenda. In addition, unlike Western societies, many SSA countries are still confounded with postcolonial inter-ethnic fragmentations, often exacerbated by exogenously supported militarized conflict in pursuit of raw materials, as is the case in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and more recently Ivory Coast and Angola. Ironically, these neoliberal interventions do not only engender strife; they also cause impairment in SSA (Grech, 2011; Meekosha, 2011; Soldatic and Grech, 2014). Building universal disability regimes that command voluntary multiethnic acceptance, then, is much more complex than transnationalizing unquestioned Western-founded ideologies.

The contested place of the judiciary in a non-individualist African social value-system

In Western democratic societies where, individual liberties and freedoms are central to civilization, court systems and litigation are often effective. In these societies, judicial processes through institutionalized courts, are strong and binding to all parties involved. The judiciary as we know it today is not indigenous to SSA. As an arm of government, it is a colonial inheritance. Like other colonial institutions of governance, the concept of the Western-style judiciary is, understandably, still struggling to establish itself in SSA. This has created two problems. First, in general, SSA populations are not as litigious as Western ones, especially on civil matters. The sense of communal solidarity and collective responsibility and shame are more binding than the doctrine of individual rights. Secondly, judicial impartiality remains a significant problem. Some scholars have argued that judicial systems in developing countries are, in general, weak (Besley and Persson, 2014). In a robust study of adjudication of electoral disputes in SSA, Kaaba (2015) documents the challenges of judicial neutrality throughout SSA. In all SSA countries, constitutions allow presidents to appoint judges, often without tenure of office, leaving judges' security of office to the caprices of politicians. Often, the result has been that judges are politically pliable. In rare cases when judges exhibit independence and rule against government officials, rulings are ignored, publicly ridiculed, or sometimes judges are removed.

In summary, the implications of the above four points for disability policy, are far reaching. First, it means that disabled people in SSA societies, like everybody else, and contrary to

Western civilizations, respect more collective purposes than individual 'rights' (see also Grech, 2011). These social ties, then, shape the disability experience in a way that creates unique challenges and opportunities for policy intervention. Second, the implication of week judicial systems for the transnationalization of disability norms and policies, is that there is no predictability as to whether court systems would act as credible remediation for disability rights violations. In SSA, where government executives frequently influence the judiciary or defy judicial rulings, it is difficult to imagine courts to be, contrary to Vanhala's (2010) arguments for the relevance of courts in Canada and the UK, credible means of guaranteeing disability 'rights' and policies, especially when judicial outcomes have punitive financial and other implications on arms of government.

Given these challenges, how then could transnational and domestic actors alternatively model disability policy diffusion to achieve greater policy impact without implying or intending to subvert local experience, knowledge, values, and societal autonomy? Before I propose an alternative, I turn to discussing the key role that ideas play in policy transfer and diffusion, and how this is important for disability policy transnationalization.

Transnational actors, ideas, and policy transfer

As illustrated in multiple disciplines within social science, particularly in public policy, political science and sociology, the role of ideas is increasingly taking a pivotal role in scholarship (see Campbell, 2004; Parsons, 2007; Béland and Ridde, 2016). Ideational scholarship has made significant inroads in explaining how policies are birthed, transferred and diffused (Campbell, 2004) and how actors' beliefs, interests, and assumptions contribute to shaping policy and institutional outcomes (Béland and Ridde, 2016; Campbell, 2004; North, 1994). There is a large body of institutionalism literature that relies on the role of ideas in explaining institutional change as well as institutional stability (e.g. Campbell, 2004; Hall, 1993; North, 1987). On the one hand, ideas matter in so far as they depict the cultural-cognitive identities of policy communities. As Campbell (2004) and Scott (2004) argue, institutions do not just have legislative or regulative elements; they also have cultural-cognitive identities. Cultural-cognitive factors often act as background normative constraints in policy change.

On the other hand, policy makers, including institutions in general, look to other ideational domains to resolve new social and institutional problems. In their path-breaking theory of decision making under uncertainty, Kahneman and Tversky (1984), argue that human beings are prone to cognitive biases that propel them to use heuristics in determining solutions to current problems. Other ideational scholars have argued for what they term 'bounded rationality': that human rationality is incapable of comprehensive information computation to solve decision challenges and, therefore, that they approximate informational vectors and

rational decisions (Simon, 1955).

The understanding that policy situations are characterized by cultural-cognitive factors and by bounded rationality is an essential foundation for understanding how best transnational actors could approach disability policy diffusion and design. In any disability policy domain, ideas are contested, and proposed changes to norms, values, policies, laws and institutions, create winners and losers (see Meekosha, 2008; Trebilcock, 2014; Weyland, 2008). Because ideational and policy changes are contested, their change must be negotiated to minimize the impacts of loss. The underlying logic of this argument, is that people, organizations, and institutions have preferences and goals, often historically and politically constructed (Béland and Ridde, 2016), such that any change to the status quo, advantages some while disadvantaging others (Przeworski, 2006; Trebilcock, 2014). Critical disability scholars make this point very clearly when they argue against the injustices of colonialism on disabled people in the global South and about zero-sum neoliberal ideologies that disadvantage the poor (see Barker and Murray, 2010; Grech, 2011; Meekosha, 2008; Soldatic and Grech, 2014). The status quo holds very strong in ideational change. But, as North (1994) argues, societies that resist ideational change when it is needed, eventually lose out over time. In the globalized world, societies continuously wrestle to retain their identities while mutually influencing each other and learning lessons from each other. Lesson-drawing is, therefore, inevitable. As Rose (1991:10) puts it: 'one cannot borrow blindly or condemn blindly, for the success of a program is affected by the specifics of context as well as generic attributes. The critical analytic question is: Under what circumstances and to what extent would a program now in effect elsewhere also work here?'

Ideational change, therefore, is a given if societies interact among themselves. Even critical disability scholars mentioned above, agree that transnational coalitions have scored significant successes in global campaigns on disability matters, and in mobilizing disabled people and their allies to put pressure for systemic changes. Carefully thought-out transnational efforts, except for the current Western-centric tendencies in these efforts, are important for ideational reforms and enhancement of disability knowledge in local contexts. Ideational breakthroughs are important for policy change (Campbell, 2004; Trebilcock, 2014). Ideas, therefore, are a crucial factor in transnational disability policy diffusion. Societies' beliefs about world order play a key role in the shaping of their attitudes toward policy changes. As such, policy change proposals, particularly at the stage of agenda setting and policy formulation, must, if they are to gain popular acceptance, be tied to ideational foundations (Trebilcock, 2014). Logically therefore, transnational disability policy entrepreneurs need to identify the most strategic policy agents in each society who would wield the greatest discursive influence in the process of interest, identity, and preference transformation. Contrary to existing Western-centric models of disability policy engagement, acknowledging the need for ideational and policy change is not a sufficient step towards envisioned change. The identification of strategic local partners, particularly when proposed

change is exogenous, is even more crucial. It is local bricoleurs, or civic agents, who construct strategic cognitive frames and communications to alter local beliefs, norms, and rules and translate them so that they appeal to individual and societal notions of appropriateness and identity. The lack of this nuanced approach in the transnationalization of disability knowledge and policy is a major cause of agitation among critical disability scholars. The following section details this process.

Bricolage, translation, and disability policy transfer

To conceptualize an alternative disability policy diffusion approach that goes beyond the neoliberal political institution approach, I propose bridging the following theoretical concepts: Parsons' (2007) ideational explanations for political behavior, and Campbell's (2004) bricolage and translation. In his analysis of how various ideas can shape institutional change, Campbell (2004) discusses translation and bricolage, two mechanisms according to which different ideas are combined and reframed in particular institutional contexts. On one hand, Campbell argues that when new ideas are introduced in a new cultural and institutional context through diffusion processes, these ideas are typically translated into local practice in varying degrees. From this perspective, translation is about adapting foreign ideas to a particular normative or institutional setting so that they can blend in (Clarke et al., 2015). Bricolage, on the other hand, is about combining different pre-existing ideas and institutional components to create something new. In other words, bricolage relates to the capacity of actors to create something new out of the ideational and institutional legacies that already exist in their environment (Carstensen, 2011).

The need for bricolage and translation in disability policy diffusion in SSA is implacable to replace neoliberal impositions. Empirically, because of its unique historical, cultural, economic, religious, and political experiences that collectively shape the disability experience in a unique way, the SSA social context does not render itself adequately amenable to the Western-centric legislative approach without addressing preliminary contextual factors. As already illustrated, existing approaches concentrating on legislative procedures and targeting political institutions for envisioned transformation, have proved to be futile and even offensive, demanding alternative methodologies. Theoretically, social norms, understood as informal institutions, cannot change overnight through prescription of legislation. Unfortunately, as Grech (2011: 93) argues, the global South, and in this case SSA, has since colonial times been 'construed as a blank slate, waiting for outside intervention'. As illustrated in the child marriage example above, social norms constitute identities and meanings that cannot be shifted or changed through legislation alone. As Scott (2005) argues, cultural cognition is an essential component of institutional design and meaning.

To begin to make disability policy pathways that crack deep into SSA societies' sociological,

cultural, historical, and philosophical foundations, translation and bricolaging of ideas offer a more viable and tenacious promise as a mechanism for cultural and ideological change and transformation. This change, through bricolage and translation, operates not through political institutions, but primarily through civic bricoleurs at the societal level. While political institutions are often pliable to political and economic manipulation by the politically and economically powerful wielding political authority, they are sociologically ill-positioned to drive such bottom-up ideational innovation. In SSA, political institution occupants, often perceived as elitist and 'vote mongers' who disappear after elections and reappear in the next electoral cycle, are ineffective in engendering changes in norms related to cultural and religious identities. In their place, I propose civic educators as bricoleurs: traditional leaders, religious leaders, teachers, issue-based advocates, journalists and other social entrepreneurs. It is among communities, families, and sociological groups and associations that disability frames are constituted and sustained. Civic educators, particularly in the SSA context, are strategically positioned to reinforce or alter social beliefs, challenge epistemological positions, and to help re-align norms and values. For example, transnational and domestic organizations that work to reverse trends of child marriage and domestic violence against women in many SSA countries, have realized, after decades of working through Western-centric legislative avenues with little success, that working through community players such as community chiefs and heads of religious organizations incorporating endogenous norms, values, and ideas, is more impactful.

This proposed model underscores the centrality of strategic choice of civic bricoleurs. In countries like Malawi, Zambia, Botswana and Ghana, traditional ethnic leaders and religious leaders wield significant ideational sway over communities, and their teachings are 'reverently' adhered to. They are better placed, socially, to facilitate disability ideational bricolage and translation than political institutions. It is important, therefore, that transnational disability policy actors understand these geo-socio-political dynamics, and invest their resources where they would have most impact.

A potential entry point for championing disability epistemic and policy influence in SSA societies is an appeal to the pre-existing communitarian sense of solidarity, family care, and social cohesion. Grech (2011) acknowledges the importance of family ties in offering solidarity and support to disabled people in the global South. In their research on social policy, Pruce and Hickey (2007) found that solidarity principles built on the strong tradition of family and social care and support for members at the local level, were the main support for Zambia's welfare system. Communal solidarity, which is a strong characteristic of many SSA societies, is a profound opportunity for disability social policy development in SSA societies. With the advent of HIV/AIDS in the 1990s, for example, SSA communities, among the worst affected globally, appealed to communitarian values, adopting home-based care for those with HIV/AIDS rather than institutionalized hospices. Today, global organizations combating HIV/AIDS such as the United States' President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

and the United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS have acknowledged the profundity of home-based care as a niche not just for care, but also for combating social stigma and discriminatory practices preventing individuals from voluntarily seeking HIV testing and treatment. Most HIV/AIDS programs now place home-based care at the core, and policy organizations and activists attribute much of the success in reducing the pandemic through increased education about risky behavior, reduced stigma, and improved care, to the home-based care structure. Therefore, family and communal solidarity could be an important conceptual location for championing ideational enhancement or reform, fighting disability stigma, and implementing successful disability programs.

Conclusion

The study of disability, as we have seen in this article, is dominated by a Western-centric epistemic and ontological bias. This article attempts to shift the focus of both the theoretical and policy discourse on disability away from explanations based on Western-centric institutional structure towards how social ideas, beliefs, cultural-cognitive factors, and historical legacies shape the experience of disability in SSA, and how this determines a unique theoretical and policy terrain. This article underscores one fundamental argument with multiple theoretical and policy lessons. The core argument is that, the Western-centric approach to disability policy transfer, undergirded by its rationalistic individual rights and the assumption that if monetary and legal/political institutional commitment were guaranteed, then problems faced by disabled people would cease across societies, is problematic. This approach, grounded in positivist thinking, assumes that reality is 'empirically objective and value-free, and that laws or generalizations exist independently of social and historical context' (Fischer, 2003:118). Overlooked in this approach, is the recognition that historical contexts, normative dispositions, and cultural-cognitive factors frame and carry knowledge and, therefore, shape the experiences of societies, including those of disabled people.

By replacing the positivist Western-centric linear institutional engagement model with a constructivist approach, this article argues, therefore, that the universalization of Western-centric disability norms and policies is grounded in the distorting neo-colonial influences of epistemological, ontological and political power and ideological forces. There are two important implications from this argument: one for policy scholarship; and the other for transnational policy practitioners. First, beyond the much-celebrated political institution engagement approach, disability policy scholars have an important and urgent task to reconceptualize and ground transnational disability policy diffusion. This article has shown that theory and policy are inextricably embedded in a web of social meanings produced and reproduced through cultural practices and social discourse. Evidently, the political institution engagement model's reach in diverse cultural-cognitive, historical, and normative contexts is limited. Policy scholars, therefore, have the duty to build disability policy diffusion theories

that sufficiently project policy context heterogeneities to enable policy entrepreneurs to responsively frame policies.

For transnational actors, it is important to recognize that historical, cultural-cognitive, and social-political heterogeneities, demand uniqueness of policy frames and designs that evoke contextually congruent normative and cultural responsiveness. Basic to disability policy making in ideationally diverse circumstances must be the understanding of the entrenched discursive values and of shared social meanings. This recognition requires that transnational policy actors transcend linear institution engagement models of policy design, with their empiricist emphasis, and begin to stress interpretative inquiry which requires transnational actors to comprehend the logic of situational contexts that defines and shapes social experience and their understanding of disability policy problems.

Finally, as I acknowledged at the start of this article, disability remains a very complex phenomenon, primarily because it is a concrete lived experience and not merely an academic subject. Policy makers and scholars need to approach this policy terrain cautiously to avoid the pitfalls of homogenization of experiences and ideationally offensive and ineffective policy prescriptions. Therefore, innovative as this approach might be, its precepts must be modestly applied. Future research should subject this explanatory framework to empirical testing. Further research should also examine differences in the progression of disability policy design and implementation among various SSA countries, ascertaining sets of key players and their respective influence both in policy advancements and sociological ideational reforms at the local level.

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