

De-colonizing Disability Theory I – Crippling Development
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Surviving Violent Structures of Singular Identities

New laws and regulations in the countries of Eastern Europe following their accession to European Union in 2004, 2007 and 2013 have contributed to more formal rights among persons with disabilities, but kept the singular – medicalised and pathologised – identity intact. One of the most dominant results of the accession to the EU is the discourse of “mainstreaming work” of the disabled, which however has not prevented individual persons to be forced into short-term welfare jobs or into placement in sheltered workplaces without a work contract. People with disabilities are excluded from ordinary life by their disability label and their “re-inclusion” is possible only through welfare provisions and mostly through quasi-employment and occupational activities.

The discourse of the right to work of persons with disabilities overlooks many other forms of injustice and social suffering, disabled people experience either at home or within institutions. Gender violence remains silenced and invisible. Individual care work without public welfare support and the institutional segregation of persons with disabilities prevail and create interpersonal violence. East European social policies which made the structural violence possible, remains un-discussed. There has been little shift in societal beliefs about the ‘normal’ and the ‘abnormal’ in the region. The continuous production of othering is covered by the discourse of “being different”. Violence is not recognised as a process and structure, but is individualised as being part of “pathology” caused by the disability itself. In such context an alliance between disability and feminist studies can strengthen the historical understanding of injustice among gender as well as among the able-bodied and the disabled. But not only disability studies, also feminist studies remain marginalised among the social sciences in Eastern Europe. A source of power for both, the disability and feminist studies, within the societal matrix of power-knowledge, derives from their inevitable alliance with the disability and feminist activists.