

# Criptic Identities

## Historicizing the Identity Formation of Persons with Disabilities Across the Globe

*Leiden University, Institute for History, 21 – 22 March 2019*

### Call for Abstracts

In recent years, 'identity politics' has evolved as a controversial, but also prolific concept within political, academic and activist debates. A growing body of literature sheds light on different assumptions about identity as a concept that is as much related to expressions of individuality and subjectivity as it is to specific social groups, typically described as outsiders on the margins of society and the political mainstream. Various groups like women, ethnic minorities, queer or elderly have strategically used identity as a tool for creating a common culture and gaining agency to bring about social change (Bernstein 2005). Against current discussions – are identity politics still valuable, and if not, what could be the way forward for political organizing as well as more personal processes of emancipation – this workshop wants to delve into disability as an identity.

Historically, disability politics have included both the professional and institutional negotiation of individuals as socially 'deviant' and 'unfit', as well as organized collective action from within communities of persons with disabilities themselves. How did these differing identities of disability come about? And of equal importance, in which ways did disability *not* become an identity? What kinds of identity formation processes can we detect in different societal contexts as well as cultural settings, and do these follow comparable or diverging trajectories?

As Julie Livingston (2006) has pointed out: « As disability history and disability studies increasingly open up to non-Western histories, opportunities arise not only for gaining new empirical knowledge but also for rethinking the very categories that underlie the socially constructed models [of disability] on which so much analysis rests. Botswana is different from the United States or France. Yet these countries' histories are entangled in one another in complex ways that we have yet to even begin to unpack.»

This begs the question of how to take into account specific local contexts, transnational entanglements and exchanges, as well as intersectionality with other 'identities' like gender, class, ethnicity or age? What have historical examples beyond the dominance of Anglo-Saxon narratives to offer to the thriving field of disability studies? With this workshop, we hope that new, evidence-based studies on the identities of disability and 'the disabled person' from various places around the globe will not only shed light on historical conceptualizations, but may provide new reflections and insights on how we as scholars conceptualize disability today, and in which ways these two might be related.

### **Confirmed speakers**

- **Anahi Guedes de Mello** / *Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil*
- **Elena R. Iarskaia-Smirnova** / *Higher School of Economics, Moscow*
- **Pieter Verstraete** / *KU Leuven, Belgium*

We welcome original proposals that analyse the history of disability perceptions, expressions and identity formation processes within, beyond and across nation states and different cultural settings. The workshop is not confined in focus to any region, but encourages studies on areas that remain underrepresented in disability history, in particular Eastern Europe and the Global South.

A publication is envisaged on the basis of a selection of the papers presented during the workshop. However, the willingness to contribute to the publication is not a precondition for participation.

### **Possible topics might include, but are not limited to:**

- collective identities of disability, e.g. in the form of social movements, organizations, protests, communities and religious institutions
- cultural constructions and productions of disability, by persons with disabilities themselves and about persons with disabilities
- knowledge production, by persons with disabilities themselves, by government experts, academics or medical professionals
- disability in colonial and postcolonial settings, the Cold War, international development, neoliberalism and globalization
- disability in the context of health and rehabilitation, education, livelihoods, indigeneity

## Submission guidelines

Applications are invited from historians and scholars from related fields working on the nexus of disability and identity at any stage of their careers and with diverse geographical backgrounds. We aim at providing an informal setting in which selected participants will present their research (up to 20 minutes) and engage in an open exchange of ideas and perspectives. If you wish to participate in the workshop, please send an **abstract of about 350 words and a short CV** no later than **1 November 2018** to the following email address: [rethinkingdisability@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:rethinkingdisability@hum.leidenuniv.nl). Questions to the organizers can be sent using the same address. Notification of acceptance will be given by the end of November 2018.

## Other practicalities

The conference will take place at Leiden University, in close vicinity to Amsterdam Airport (Schiphol). Catering will be offered to all selected participants at no cost, but participants will be expected to cover their own travel and accommodation expenses. **If you have any specific (accessibility) requirements, please let us know** and we will do our best to accommodate such requests. A small number of **bursaries** might be available on a competitive basis, an opportunity particularly intended for junior scholars and those without research funds from their own institutions. Please indicate when submitting your abstract if you would like to be considered for subsidy.

## Organization

The workshop is initiated and hosted by the research team of the ERC project '[Rethinking Disability: the Global Impact of the International Year of Disabled Persons \(1981\) in Historical Perspective](#)', based in the Institute for History at Leiden University.



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**RETHINKING DISABILITY**  
The Global Impact of the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981) in Historical Perspective