Introduction

Thinking about Disability, Rethinking Difference

In October 1898, Tilly Aston, a young blind woman from colonial Australia, wrote to the press in some distress. Whilst the blind had 'many difficulties to contend with', she wrote, the 'most serious' was 'a lack of proper understanding of their powers, knowledge, and abilities in general'. 'Some people had very queer ideas about the blind', she continued, and 'classed them as idiots'.[1] Such a statement, whilst embedding in it the use of intellectual disability as the foil through which to reclaim differently disabled populations, nonetheless attempted to assert the perspectives of disabled people into the public sphere and challenge derogatory attitudes towards disabled people that were widely held.

Tilly Aston was born in Carisbrook, Victoria, in 1873. Her father, a shoemaker, died in October 1881 and her mother, left to support the family, began to accept money as a midwife. Born with impaired vision, Aston lost her sight completely before the age of seven. She was taught Braille by Thomas James, an itinerant missionary who had lost both eyes and an arm in a mining accident, and had since dedicated his life to seeking out other blind people and teaching them to read. At the age of nine, Aston was enrolled at the Victorian Asylum and School for the Blind, opened in 1866. She became the first blind girl to complete her senior school certificate and the first blind Australian to go to university. Unfortunately, however, Aston was unable to complete her degree. The lack of Braille books was a major obstacle, and Aston became ill with the stress of studying. In 1894 and 1895, Aston co-founded the Association of Braille Writers (later the Victorian Braille Library) and the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, respectively. These were key organisations in the history of the Australian blind community, organising the transcription of books into Braille and campaigning politically for the rights of blind people. Aston went on to become an accomplished author, writing poems, articles, short stories and longer fictional works, as well as becoming head of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, a position

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[1] 'Education and Employment of the Blind', *The Prahran Telegraph*, 15 October 1898, p. 2.

she got despite hostility to her as a blind teacher (it was felt a sighted person would be better suited to the role). One of Australia's foremost Esperanto speakers, she was a firm advocate of the language, which she found useful when communicating with blind people across Europe. She was also a friend and correspondent of Helen Keller, the famous deaf-blind American. She published *Memoirs of Tilly Aston* in 1946 before dying the following year.[2]

Throughout her life, Aston challenged derogatory attitudes towards blindness that were common in colonial Australia and the wider British Empire. She encountered such attitudes personally and was able to critique and parody them. In her memoir, she describes travelling home from school for vacation by train as a child with other girls from the Institution, when an elderly fellow passenger noticed that she and her companions were blind. 'Some blind children! Dear, dear!' the woman is said to have exclaimed. 'Oh, Ned, they are blind! Poor dears! How terrible! They would be better in their graves!' The girls started laughing. They were still more amused when the lady went on to ask them firstly whether they could 'feed and dress' themselves, and then whether they were 'deaf and dumb as well'![3] Through the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, Aston campaigned, amongst other things, for the right of (white) blind Australians to vote and for the removal of bonds liable to be paid by blind people travelling between the various Australian colonies.

Whilst acutely aware of the discrimination disabled people faced, Aston also articulated racialised ideologies from her position of whiteness. In a poem written later in life, she describes 'Black Wanda', an indigenous child who came to her school (otherwise a white institution). Drawing on contemporary ideas and also those associated with the 'noble savage', Aston wrote that Wanda had been 'torn from his tribal woodland glades' where he had 'chase[d] the wind', by a 'luckless fall' that had 'quenched the lamps of sight'. Blinded, Wanda 'came to live with us / where sightless children learn', but the boy yearned for 'his native bush'. Unlike the white children, he struggled to learn how to read: 'His slender hands were guided oft / along the dotted lines / but never did the meaning break / From Braille's embossed signs'. Eventually the boy died 'of a broken heart'.[4] In a note next to this poem in her memoir, Aston claimed this was typical of blind Aboriginal people: 'Many years later, the manager at

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[2] Most of the story of Aston's life can be found in *Memoirs of Tilly Aston: Australia's Blind Poet, Author and Philanthropist* (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1946). Another useful summary of her life and achievements can be found in O. S. Green, 'Tilly Aston', http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/aston-matilda-ann-5078.

[3] Aston, *Memoirs*, p. 33. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

the Lake Tyers aborigines station told me that he had never known a black to live very long after becoming blind, and Sir Baldwin Spencer said the same of the Central Australian tribes. Like our poor Wanda they always died of a broken heart.'[5] Aston also produced missionary literature for blind children in China through *The Book of Opals*, a missionary magazine published in connection with the Mission to the Blind in Heathen and Bible Lands. This confirmed rather than challenged imperial hierarchies. She envisaged her publication as 'a gift from Australia to the blind of other lands', and the magazines featured hymns, an Old Testament Story, and a 'heart-to-heart' talk on 'some theme that [Aston] hoped would stir the spiritual aspirations of the sightless recipients'.[6] This writing spoke both to the sense of community that allowed Aston to connect imaginatively with blind people across the world and the imperial assumptions that structured such relationships.

Through Aston's life we can observe some of the intersections of disability, race and empire with which *Colonising Disability* is concerned. She encountered and challenged attitudes towards blind people prevalent at the time, explored in Chapter 1, including those that linked blindness with helplessness. She attended one of the institutions that, as I discuss in Chapter 2, sprang up as part of expanding provision throughout the nineteenth century with the idea of educating and 'civilising' disabled people. She forged relationships because of her disability, writing often of the 'blind world' in much the same manner as the deaf colonists in Chapter 5 wrote of a 'deaf world'. She campaigned against the immigration restrictions on disabled people that I analyse in Chapter 6. She remained unmarried, partly because of the way in which she perceived herself as a blind woman, reflecting the discomfort felt towards disabled people and sexuality that I examine in a different way in Chapter 7. Through her life and writings we can start to think about the agency of disabled people, as well as how they were represented by non-disabled people. Needless to say, Aston was only one of tens of thousands (if not more) of disabled people living in Britain and its colonies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Writing in 2001, the historian of American deafness Douglas Baynton argued that 'Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write'.[7] Since then disability has been increasingly explored in a range of national and temporal contexts. The American case remains the most developed, but there

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[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[7] Douglas C. Baynton, 'Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History', in Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 52.

has also been work on other global locations such as in the Ottoman Empire, Continental Europe and Britain, including nineteenth-century Scotland by Iain Hutchison; eighteenth-century England by David Turner and in relation to British coal mining by David Turner and Daniel Blackie.[8] However, as yet, the history of disability has been little incorporated into the history of the British Empire.[9] This is despite the fact that critical colonial history has concerned itself deeply with examining the construction of other embodied conditions such as race and gender, as well as interrogating issues of identity more generally both overseas and 'at home' in the imperial metropole.[10] It is also despite the relatively well-populated fields of the medical historiography of the

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[8] For disability history in the United States, see Longmore and Umansky, *The New Disability History*. For the Ottoman Empire, see Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For Continental Europe see, for example, Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability*, trans. W. Sayers (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1999). In the British Isles, see Iain Hutchison, *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007); David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg, eds, *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity* (London: Routledge, 2006); David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012); David M. Turner and Daniel Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution, Physical Impairment and British Coal-Mining, 1780–1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018). For studies of the pre-modern era, see Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[9] Important exceptions are Aparna Nair, '"They Shall See His Face": Blindness in British India 1850–1950', *Medical History*, vol. 61, no. 2 (April 2017), pp. 181 – 199; and Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy's work, *Between Fitness and Death: Disability and Slavery in the Caribbean* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2020) which was forthcoming at the time of writing so is not grappled with in as much detail as it would have been otherwise.

[10] Critical colonial history, perhaps more commonly known as the 'New Imperial History', emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s and continues to be an influential area of historical research in the history of the British Empire. Scholars such as Antoinette Burton, Catherine Hall and Kathleen Wilson were prompted by their engagement with feminism and with the postcolonial critiques of Fanon, Said and Spivak (amongst others) to ask 'new' questions of empire, questions about identity, power and representation, which had previously been marginalised from the imperial history canon. Such work has been diverse, but themes emerging from it that particularly relate to my work have been the exploration of gender and race identity, the conceptualisation of metropole and colony as a single analytical field, the insistence on the impact of the empire 'at home' as well as overseas and the elucidation of fluid and relational constructions of difference. See, for example, Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire, a Reader: Colonisers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003) and Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

British Empire, examining acute sickness, and the significant (though less developed) field exploring mental health and empire.[11] Although some studies have come close to analysing disability and empire, such as Felicity Nussbaum's work on 'defect' in the eighteenth century, this has tended to come from literary rather than historical perspectives. This absence is deeply problematic for historians of empire. Firstly, this marginalises the lives of vast number of disabled people who lived in Britain and its colonies. Secondly, this absence warps discussions of other embodied ways of being such as race and gender, something I return to later in this introduction. Thirdly, as scholars of disability have argued, disability is highly formative of the experience of all bodies and our imagination of

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[11] For work on sickness and empire see: Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2002); David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Rod Edmond, *Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Hardiman, *Missionaries and their Medicine: A Christian Modernity for Tribal India* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Mark Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India, 1600–1850* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Alison Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). For work on mental health and empire see: Debjani Das, *Houses of Madness: Insanity and Asylums of Bengal in Nineteenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015); Catharine Coleborne, *Insanity, Identity and Empire: Immigrants and Institutional Confinement in Australia and New Zealand, 1873–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Richard Keller, 'Madness and Colonization: Psychiatry in the British and French Empires, 1800–1962', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 35, no. 2 (Winter 2001, pp. 295–326.; Harriet Jane Deacon, 'Madness, Race and Moral Treatment: Robben Island Lunatic Asylum, Cape Colony, 1846–1890', *History of Psychiatry*, vol. 7 (1996), pp. 287–297; Sally Swartz, 'Colonising the Insane: Causes of Insanity in the Cape, 1891–1920', *History of Human Sciences*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1995), pp. 39–57; Jonathan Sadowsky, *Imperial Bedlam: Institutions of Madness in Colonial Southwest Nigeria* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1999); Matthew Heaton, *Black Skin, White Coats: Nigerian Psychiatrists, Decolonization, and the Globalization of Psychiatry* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2013); Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughan, eds, *Psychiatry and Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Leonard Smith, *Insanity, Race and Colonialism: Managing Mental Disorder in the Post-Emancipation British Caribbean, 1838–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); James Mills, *Madness, Cannabis, and Colonialism: The 'Native Only' Lunatic Asylums of British India, 1857–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Waltraud Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: The European Insane in British India, 1800–1858* (London: Routledge, 1991); Jack McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry and the 'African Mind'* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); Catharine Coleborne, *Madness in the Family: Insanity and Institutions in the Australasian Colonial World, 1860–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Stephen Garton, *Medicine and Madness: A Social History of Insanity in New South Wales, 1880–1940* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1988) and Erik Linstrum, *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

what the human body *is* (and its limits/fragilities) and *does*.[12] Disability helped to define what was considered to constitute normality and examining disability helps to destabilise otherwise invisible categories such as normality, able-bodiedness and whiteness which have been ideologically powerful. This book argues that looking at disability both in terms of disabled populations and as a category of analysis not only works to fill a gap in the historiography of the British Empire, but also changes the very way in which we approach questions fundamental to critical colonial history, which has aimed at interrogating the constructions of power, difference and identity, issues that I argue here cannot be understood fully without also analysing the construction and experience of disability.

I am not the first to point out that postcolonial studies, which has been very influential upon critical colonial history, has tended to be 'non-disabled' in focus. Clare Barker and Stuart Murray and Shaun Grech and Karen Soldatic (amongst others) have examined this absence from literary and sociological perspectives, respectively.[13] But historically grounded critical colonial scholarship has been slow to take up the challenge of interrogating disability as an experience or an analytical category. An argument has further been made of critical race studies (along with gender studies and queer studies) that, worse than neglecting the issue of disability, this work has contributed to its reification as a marker of corporal deviance. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, for example, argue that not only have other areas flourished where disability studies has faltered, but that

> race, feminist and queer studies have all participated to one degree or another in a philosophical lineage that seeks to distance those social categories from more 'real' biological incapacities … Thus in order to counteract charges of deviance historically assigned to blackness, femininity, or homosexuality, these political

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[12] Whilst there is a limited, if growing historiography of disability, there is a more developed field in literary studies. Examples that I have found particularly influential are: Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Literature and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004). In the field of critical colonial history Felicity Nussbaum's work is of particular importance: Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[13] Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, 'Disabling Postcolonialism: Global Disability Cultures and Democratic Criticism', *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2010); Shaun Grech and Karen Soldatic, 'Disability and Colonialism: (Dis)encounters and Anxious Intersectionalities', *Social Identities*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2016). Also see further articles in these special issue journals.

> discourses have tended to reify disability as 'true' insufficiency, thereby extricating their own populations from equations of inferiority.[14]

There is little reason why this critique could not also be extended to historians. In *Colonising Disability*, I aim to tackle such problems by focusing on the making of disability in Britain and its empire, whilst also exploring some of the intersections between race, gender and disability.

At the same time as critical colonial history has been slow to examine questions of disability, disability studies, perhaps particularly disability history, has avoided addressing questions of race, ethnicity and empire. The 'whiteness' of disability studies has come to be seen as an urgent problem within the discipline. As cultural theorist Jasbir Puar puts it, 'the epistemic whiteness of the field is no dirty secret' but something that has been pointed out for some years, not least by Christopher Bell in his ironic suggestion that the discipline should be renamed 'White Disability Studies'.[15] Framed with a strong Euro-American bias, part of the project of disability studies has been reclaiming and celebrating bodily diversity and the disabled body as a rupture to what disability theorist Robert McRuer has termed 'compulsory able-bodiedness'.[16] As Puar argues, this celebratory model is somewhat harder to maintain in the face of the fact that 'most of the world's disability happens through colonial violence, developmentalism, war, occupation and the disparity of resources'.[17] Yet, despite pronouncements as to the whiteness of disability studies dating back to the 1990s, little work has been forthcoming in correcting this. The nature of the problem is threefold. First, 'white' disability studies is unrepresentative of the experience of disabled people of colour, many of whom have, in Anya Werner's words, faced a 'double whammy' of exclusion due to their status as a minority within an already marginalised group.[18] Second, failing to examine questions of race means disability

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[14] Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 17.

[15] Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Lennard J. Davis, 'Foreword', in Christopher M. Bell, ed., *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), p. viii. Other places where this is pointed out include: Shaun Grech, 'Decolonising Eurocentric Disability Studies: Why Colonialism Matters in the Disability and Global South Debate', *Social Identities*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2016).

[16] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), pp. 2–3.

[17] Paur, *The Right to Maim*, p. xix.

[18] Anja Werner, '"Double Whammy?!" Historical Glimpses of Black Deaf Americans' in special issue: 'Dis-eased: Critical Approaches to Disability and Illness in American Studies', *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2017).

studies has often failed to address adequately the intersections between race and disability conceptually. Third, it is a matter of context. The evolution of attitudes to race, gender, class and disability did not occur in a vacuum but did so, in the examples I explore in this book, in conversation with the growing power of the British Empire. As I seek to demonstrate, colonial ties meant that British models of building an asylum for disabled people developed in the white dominions, though of course these were also shaped by the local situations. Colonial patterns of missionary activity meant that particular work towards blind Indian children developed in the late nineteenth century. And the interplay between empire and development of racial ideology led to the development of eugenics, with its profound implications for disabled people. *Colonising Disability* aims to take on some of these issues, first by acknowledging the imperial status of Britain, where this study is grounded, and second, by analysing the relationship between disability and whiteness, reading whiteness as a racial construct that is too often invisible in, if central to, existing scholarship on disability. As discussed earlier, there are historiographical, empirical and theoretical, imperatives to do this work.

Some Definitions: 'Disability', 'Disablism' and 'Ableism'

Disability is not a 'thing' but a process. As literary critic and disability theorist Lennard Davis puts it,

> Disability is not a minor issue that relates to a relatively small number of unfortunate people; it is part of a historically constructed discourse, an ideology of thinking about the body under certain historical circumstances. Disability is not an object – a woman with a cane – but a social process that intimately involves everyone who has a body and lives in the world of the senses.[19]

Despite common misconceptions, disability and non-disability are not self-evident physical dichotomies. Human bodies have a wide array of physical variations and potential attributes, lacking only some is considered 'disabling'. Disability operates on a continuum. The idea that there is a line demarcating a disabled from a non-disabled population is illusionary, as both are social constructions.

Since the 1970s, disability activists and academics, particularly those based in Britain, have used the 'social model' of disability to flag the way in which society disables individuals with certain impairments.[20] It is not,

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[19] Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 2.

[20] See, for example, Michael Oliver, *The New Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990).

say, paralysis that prevents the wheelchair user from entering the building, but the lack of a ramp. It is not deafness that prevents sign-language users from communicating with many hearing peers, but the latter's unfamiliarity with sign language. The social model of disability stands in opposition to the so-called 'medical model' of disability, which sees the impairment as the source of difficulties – for example, a person is disabled by their deafness, blindness and so forth. There have been a number of important critiques of this social model of disability including its arguably insufficient engagement with what might be termed the 'realities of impairment', including pain, and its failure to acknowledge and engage with questions of race, gender and othering.[21] Others have also suggested that, in much the same way that the relationship between 'sex' and 'gender' has been made more complex by the repositioning of the former as well as the latter as a social construct, so too the difference between 'impairment' (or the biological 'reality' of disability) and (the social construction of) 'disability' is less obvious than first appears.[22] Nonetheless, the social model offers an analysis of power, structure and relationality. In North America, the development of disability studies has taken a slightly different approach, partly because it has been driven by developments in literary theory and other humanities disciplines, rather than, as in the United Kingdom, sociology and education.[23] Here, the focus has been on taking disability as the starting point from which to understand how processes of inequality, discrimination, identity and community and so forth work.[24] Cultural trajectories in particular have been important in demonstrating how those labelled disabled have vested in them contradictory feelings of fear, charity, pity, disgust, anger and resentment. Scholars of disability such as Margrit Shildrick have argued that this is because the disabled body is 'uncanny' (both like and unlike) and a site onto which to project narratives of loss and infantile dependency.[25] Whilst *Colonising Disability* is certainly inspired by my engagement with the social model of disability, I am also influenced by those taking a 'cultural' approach because the cultural model of disability is better able to unpack and, crucially, historicise the phenomenon of

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[21] Dan Goodley, *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 8.

[22] See, for example, Susan Wendell quoted in Snyder and Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability*, p. 7. See also Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[23] Goodley, *Dis/ability Studies*, pp. 11–14.

[24] See, for example, Snyder and Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability*; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* and Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*.

[25] See, for example, Margrit Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

disability.[26] As such, much of my analysis engages with trying to unravel the discursive construction of disability as well as with trying to get at the lived experience of those who have been labelled 'disabled'.

Because disability is socially and culturally constructed, different forms of embodiment have been understood as 'disabled' in different periods. In the nineteenth century, the meaning of disability was changing rapidly in Western European thought. The increased confidence of doctors to identify and cure various conditions led to the medicalisation of certain impairments, such as deafness.[27] The period saw a growing association between disabled people and charity, not least following the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, when disabled people were objectified as members of the 'deserving poor'. In this period, disabled people were also institutionalised more systematically and the dichotomous opposition I referred to earlier was increasingly drawn between disabled/non-disabled bodies. Those with physical impairments were no longer imagined on a continuum of the infinitely flawed human body, but, instead, as Sarah Chinn puts it, as 'constitutionally different'.[28] I argue that it is unsurprising that this shift or 'hardening' of attitudes towards disability occurred alongside changes in attitudes towards race and gender, because disability is an intersectional identity.

There are many types of impairments understood as 'disability' and these can be broken down in different ways. The scholar of disability Judy Rohrer, for example, discusses differences between 'physical' and 'intellectual' disability, and the need to discuss factors such as 'impact', 'onset', 'perceptibility', 'variability' and 'prevalence'.[29] In an already limited historiographical field, historians and literary critics have responded in different ways to the challenge of taking up such an enormous and amorphous category as 'disability'. Many have focused on a single impairment, such as blindness or deafness.[30] Some historians of disability have

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[26] My thanks to Dan Goodley for helping me to clarify this point.

[27] Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Health, Medicine and Society in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), p. 115.

[28] Sarah E. Chinn, 'Gender, Sex, and Disability, from Helen Keller to Tiny Tim', *Radical History Review*, vol. 6, no. 94 (2006), p. 242.

[29] Judy Rohrer, 2005, p. 41 quoted in Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses of Disability*, p. 3.

[30] For blindness see: Moshe Barasch, *Blindness: The History of Mental Image in Western Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2001). For deafness see Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Silent Poetry: Deafness, Sign and Visual Cultures in Modern France* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1995); Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Jennifer Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013) and R. A. R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh: Nineteenth-Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

concentrated on either physical or intellectual impairment.[31] Such a divide would be difficult to maintain in the nineteenth century where there was considerable fluidity between what we might describe as physical disability and intellectual, emotional and mental disability. Concerns about 'feeble-mindedness', for example, which most obviously correlate to what we would describe as 'learning disability' or 'intellectual disability', also evoked fears about physical 'degeneration'.[32] Deafness, to take another example, which today we would think of as a sensory disability was similarly linked with ideas of 'idiocy'. In response, whilst the book focuses most strongly on deafness and blindness as archetypal impairments key to the construction of disability, I range across both physical (blindness, deafness, deformity and, to a lesser extent, mobility difficulties) and intellectual impairments (learning difficulty or intellectual disability). The relationship between physical and mental disability in this period is a fascinating subject in its own right that, whilst too big a topic to explore in this volume, requires further attention. In brief, the relationship between body and mind was an intimate one in nineteenth-century thought, with mental distress often taking physical manifestations (such as fatigue or faintness) and physical disabilities taking a mental toll. In particular, learning disability was slippery ground. Intellectual impairment was often read on the body (even to the extent that skulls of those labelled 'idiotic' were placed alongside those of supposed racial 'others' and sometimes animals). At the same time, the minds of those considered to have bodily difference were often seen as compromised (for example, deaf people and those with epilepsy were commonly seen as having a learning disability). However, whilst it is impossible, for these reasons, to draw an accurate line between physical, intellectual and mental disability in the period, I tend to avoid issues of mental distress and acute sickness in my writing. Whilst I intend to do further work outside this volume on these phenomena, they have proved too large to place in the current book and, as already mentioned, the historiography on both mental health and acute illness has been more extensive than the virtually

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[31] For physical impairment see Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages* and Turner and Stagg, *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity*. For intellectual impairment see Mark Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility: Medicine, Society and the Fabrication of the Feeble Mind in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) and David Wright, *Downs: The History of a Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[32] There are some differences between the United States and the United Kingdom in regards to the terminology around these phenomena. In the United Kingdom the terms 'learning disability' and 'learning difficulty', often used interchangeably, include what is referred to in the United States as 'cognitive disability', such as Down's syndrome, as well as conditions such as dyslexia and ADHD.

non-existent historiography on disability and empire, rendering its inclusion in this study less imperative.[33] Interestingly, this historiography has not framed mental health difficulties as 'disability'.

We must exercise similar caution when applying the term 'disability' outside its modern West European and North American context. There is the temptation to do as nineteenth-century observers did and to assume that to be blind is a universal condition (in much the same way as they assumed 'motherhood', for example, to be a universal experience). Whilst non-physical disabilities, such as learning disability and mental illness, are perhaps more obviously culturally defined, physical impairment too can incur radically different experiences and responses. As the anthropologist Julie Livingston has discussed in her study of twentieth-century Botswana, indigenous definitions, interpretations and responses to disability differ markedly from those imposed by Western observers (blindness as 'usual'/'to be expected', for example).[34] Throughout this book, I use the terminology of 'disability' in the Western sense, and do not engage with indigenous constructions of disability in any sustained way. Although this lack is an urgent historical need, as I discuss further in the text, the remit of this study is to unpick the formation of the category of disability in colonial thought, using colonialism as the common thread.

Another two terms used are 'disablism' and 'ableism'. As disability theorist Dan Goodley explains, whilst 'disablism' may be defined as the discrimination of people understood to be 'disabled', ableism refers to the wider system of which such discriminatory practices are a part.[35] These are processes which privilege a normative way of being; cherish particular forms of personhood and psychological health; assert the 'naturalness' of a non-disabled status; promote an idealisation of 'able-bodiedness'; and indicate institutional bias towards autonomous and independent bodies, a systematic endorsement benefitting all people marked as non-disabled. Ultimately, ableist agendas tend to privilege the young, male and white body. Ableist lines of inclusion and exclusion, made concrete through institutions, legislation and other forms of praxis, not only had life-changing consequences for the people involved, but also attempted to construct a particular kind of nation, state or colony, intolerant of difference of all kinds. As I shall argue in this book, the ideological tenets of the British Empire relied on an ableist ideology, where practices of disablism abounded.

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[33] See footnote 11, aforementioned.

[34] Julie Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). See also Helen Meekosha, 'Decolonising Disability: Thinking and Acting Globally', *Disability & Society*, vol. 26, no. 6 (2011).

[35] Goodley, *Dis/ability Studies*.

Why Historians of Empire Need to Look at Disability: An Argument and an Agenda

As I have already suggested, in this book I argue that the current neglect of disability by critical colonial historians is deeply problematic. There are four reasons why I believe this to be so.

First, and most simply, the numbers of disabled people in the nineteenth-century British Empire were vast – these populations have hidden histories that should not be ignored. Calculating the exact numbers of disabled people either in Britain or in the British Empire is difficult. A major source of information is the census (in which disability was recorded from 1851) but the impairments that were recorded varied with each successive census and census officials reported numerous difficulties in the accuracy of their figures, predominately underreporting due to the stigma attached to impairment (Table I.1). Nevertheless, they suggest that we are considering large populations.

Taking the figures from England and Wales, we can see that the number of deaf people rises from around 10,000 to around 40,000 in the period covered by this book. In the same period those categorised as blind rise from c. 18,000 to 26,000. The numbers in the categories varyingly labelled as 'imbecile', 'idiot', 'lunatic', 'insane' and 'feeble-minded' are the largest categories, rising to nearly 162,000 by 1911. The total number of 'infirm' people by 1911 is around 230,000, though of course this does not include the many people that contemporaries considered to fall into this category – not least those considered 'crippled' through what we might describe as 'mobility difficulties' or those otherwise maimed through illness or accident.

Table I.1 *Disabled populations recorded in the census, 1851–1911*

Date of census	'Deaf' and 'deaf and dumb'	'Blind'	'imbecile', 'idiot', 'lunatic', 'insane', 'feebleminded'	Total numbers of people recorded as 'impaired'
1851	10,314	18,306	Not recorded	28,620
1861	12,236	19,352	Not recorded	31,588
1871	11,518	21,590	69,019	102,127
1881	13,295	22,832	84,503	120,630
1891	29,280	23,467	97,383	150,130
1901	33,753	25,317	132,654	191,724
1911	41,771	26,336	161,993	230,100

Table I.2 *Disabled populations in India, 1881 census*[1]

Insane	Blind	Deaf-mutes	Leprosy sufferers	Total number of peoples recorded as 'impaired'
81,104	526,459	197,215	42,518	847,296

[1] *Report on the Census of British India, taken on 17 February 1881* (London, 1883), p. 255.

(For England and Wales only; all figures from Census Reports 1851–1911, '*A Vision of Britain Through Time*'[36])

Where data exists from overseas, the numbers are staggeringly high, as demonstrated from this snapshot of the 1881 India census (Table I.2).

Despite needing to take all these figures with a large pinch of salt, we can conclude that there were sizable numbers of disabled people living in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain and its empire. A comparison with the twenty-first century is impossible due to the shifting definitions in the cultural construction of disability. However, it may be noted that in the period covered by this book, illnesses such as measles, scarlet fever and meningitis that caused blindness and deafness were common; industrial and agricultural accidents were frequent; and assistive technology such as glasses and hearing aids were rudimentary and prohibitively expensive, meaning that impairments that today would be 'correctable' were profoundly disabling in effect.

Some of these disabled people went on to have colonial lives entangled with imperial concerns. Partially deaf Francis Baring (1740–1810), for example, earned huge amounts of money from the transatlantic slave trade and for some years directed the East India Company as it sought to exploit the Indian subcontinent. Francis Humberston Mackenzie (1754–1815) was also deaf and was involved in slavery, as well as being Governor of Barbados from 1800 to 1806. Josiah Wedgewood (1730–1795), the humanitarian and anti-slavery campaigner, might be described as disabled: smallpox had left him with very compromised sight and a permanently disabled right knee – his leg later had to be amputated. He also had an intellectually disabled daughter. Edward Rushton (1756–1814) became blind when working on a slave ship before his conversion to abolitionism.

My second argument is that these populations did not simply exist unnoticed, but were a source of anxiety and preoccupation, not least

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[36] 'A Vision of Britain through Time: Physical and Mental Infirmity, 1851–1911', census reports, www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/.

because the 'imperial race' was actively constructed as 'non-disabled'. The East India Company, for example, and successor administrations of civil servants in India were anxious to ship so-called 'lunatics' back to the metropole.[37] Disabled people overseas were felt to threaten the image of the strong, masculine coloniser.

Disability was publicly articulated as a matter of concern to the British nation. In her study on deafness in Victorian Britain, Jennifer Esmail argues that towards the end of the nineteenth century there was a shift in attitudes towards deafness: it stopped being a 'private issue', an individual misfortune, and became a 'public threat'.[38] I argue that this change happened more broadly than attitudes towards disability alone. From sensory impairment to stature to intellect, from the end of the nineteenth century, disability became relevant not only to the lives of the disabled, and those who cared for them, but to everyone. When Lord Rosebury declared that 'There is no use having an Empire without an Imperial race', or the journalist Arnold White protested that 'The Empire will not be maintained by a nation of out-patients', it was clear that disability was not only a national but an imperial concern.[39] As I explore in Chapter 7, one of the issues around which these anxieties started to coalesce was that of learning disability. And as discussed in Chapter 1, the association of the 'Imperial race' with 'non-disabled' was reinforced by images of disabled people overseas. Imperial travellers, for example, commented on the sheer numbers of disabled people encountered abroad and used images of disabled people to characterise spaces of colonial otherness.

My third argument is that disability was a language through which other forms of difference were articulated in colonial discourse. In making this argument, I am influenced by the work of the aforementioned Douglas Baynton, who argues in the case of American history that 'Disability has functioned historically to justify inequality for disabled people themselves, but it has also done so for women and minority groups. That is, not only has it been considered justifiable to treat disabled people unequally, but the *concept* of disability has been used to justify discrimination against other groups by attributing disability to them.'[40] Citing the three great citizenship debates of American history – women's suffrage, civil rights and immigration – Baynton argues that impairments ascribed to women, people of colour and migrants were used to justify their exclusion from the citizenship model forged around the adult white

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[37] Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj*.

[38] Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness*, p. 141.

[39] Lord Rosebery at Liverpool quoted in George F. Shee, 'The Deterioration in the National Physique', *The Nineteenth Century and after*, vol. 53 (January–June 1903), p. 797; Arnold White, *Efficiency and Empire* (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 47.

[40] Baynton, 'Disability and the Justification of Inequality', p. 33.

male American subject. From traits of 'irrationality', 'physical weakness' and 'excessive emotionality' read onto nineteenth-century women, to those of 'feeble-mindedness', 'mental illness' and 'blindness' read onto people of colour and prospective immigrants, Baynton argues that these tropes 'are in essence physical, emotional and intellectual disabilities, though rarely discussed or examined as such'.[41] Further, Baynton argues, not only was disability used to deny citizenship to these groups, but rigorously used in debates *for* their inclusion – that is, by denying that such groups had the disabilities ascribed to them, and 'therefore were not proper subjects for discrimination'.[42] These tendencies to ascribe the characteristics of disability to non-disabled populations in order to evoke their otherness can be seen well beyond the North American examples that Baynton explores, including in the making of difference in the British Empire. Tropes of disability can be seen in a variety of debates, from claims that enslaved Africans felt less pain than Europeans and were unsuited to other forms of work or lifestyle, to claims that Aboriginal Australians were weak and doomed to extinction.

To take just one example, disability and impairment appear frequently throughout the infamous Scottish 'racial scientist' Robert Knox's *Races of Man* (1850) as he set out to determine the 'physical structure' and 'mental qualities' of human 'races'.[43] Human variation, in Knox's view, could be fully appreciated by an analysis of instances of people who 'cannot extend their arms or limbs to the full degree', some that 'have no arms but merely hands: others, no legs merely feet', and who 'the back is perfectly straight instead of being arched and curved'.[44] In his attempts to understand human inheritance, Knox writes of 'anomalous structures' such as 'webbed fingers and toes', 'the deformity called hare-lip', 'blue disease' (a heart malformation), 'arms or limbs . . . wanting at birth' and people 'with forms evidently not natural to the well-formed, finely-proportioned, fully developed person'.[45] In the Americas, he claimed, it was discovered that 'man was there, no doubt, but he was not identical with any other race; in his bodily and mental qualities he differed widely from all others'.[46] The 'American copper-coloured race' and the 'Caribs' are described as having 'a flat or depressed forehead' that 'in some cases . . . so as to amount to a positive deformity', whilst 'Esquimaux' are described as having a 'peculiarity about the eye amounting, in some instances, to deformity'.[47] Some of this is evidence of the language of 'inferiority' that permeates Knox's writing. 'I feel disposed to think that

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[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34. [42] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[43] Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), p. 166.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 32. [45] *Ibid.*, p. 119. [46] *Ibid.*, p. 116. [47] *Ibid.*, pp. 170–171, 184.

there must be a physical and, consequently, a psychological inferiority in the dark races generally', Knox wrote.[48] 'As regards mere physical strength, the dark races are generally much inferior to the Saxon and Celt' and 'in size of brain they seem also considerably inferior'.[49] Towards the conclusion, Knox's statement that 'variety is deformity' shows a slippage in his thinking between 'race' and 'disability' more broadly.[50]

Disability also operated as a language through which to express 'racial' or 'cultural' difference metaphorically. For example, throughout the nineteenth century the idea that Africa in particular and Asia and tropical Australasia to some degree were 'sick' continents was a powerful and enduring one. Missionaries, amongst other colonial commentators, wrote of those 'Hindoos' and 'Muslims' as 'heathens', 'deaf to the Word', 'blind to the light' and 'too lame to walk alone'.[51]

Fourthly, disability intersects with other categories such as race, gender and class which we have come to consider essential in understanding power dynamics in the British Empire. The interrelationship of disability with other discourses of difference is now reasonably well established in disability studies. Thus, when Lennard Davis talks about disability as the 'missing term in the race, class, gender triad', he points out that it cannot simply be 'added in' to the mixing pot: 'it is already there in complex and invisible ways'. As he explains, 'there is no race, class or gender without hierarchical and operative theories of what is normal and what is abnormal'.[52] If these identities are truly intersectional, then leaving disability out warps our understandings of other categories of difference. As feminist disability scholars such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson have established, gender was an important framework through which disability was filtered; disability is perceived to trouble the performance of independence, beauty, sexuality and reproduction.[53] At the same time, disability has been used to construct gender difference from Aristotle's understanding of women as 'deformed men' to the oft-repeated assertions of women's physical, emotional and intellectual inferiority. As Felicity Nussbaum argues of the eighteenth century, the differences of race, 'anomaly' and gender were intricately enmeshed.[54] This can also be seen well into the early twentieth century. Although less work has been

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 151. [49] *Ibid.* [50] *Ibid.*, p. 298.

[51] Esme Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference: Negotiating Otherness in the British Empire, 1840–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 80–81.

[52] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, pp. 1, 162.

[53] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'Feminist Disability Studies', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2005), pp. 1557–1587.

[54] Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human*.

done on the relationship between disability and race, as I have demonstrated elsewhere and as I argue here, the construction of race and disability in nineteenth-century colonial thought were not simply analogous processes, but connected.[55]

Interestingly, in British colonial discourse we can see the identification of disabled people as both a cultural group (a 'social problem') and a biological category (an 'inferior race'), markers that held colonial resonances. In terms of cultural difference, we can note the ready identification of disabled others with irreligion.[56] The religious otherness of disabled people sought out by philanthropists was inflected by the rise of missionary work overseas, which identified 'heathens' as objects to be pitied and converted as part of a 'civilising' project. As Nicholas Mirzoeff notes, Thomas Gallaudet, a leading American deaf educator, wrote, for example, 'I only crave a cup of consolation, for the Deaf and Dumb, from the same fountain at which the Hindoo, the African and Savage, is beginning to draw the waters of eternal life'.[57]Discourses of 'civilisation', 'progress' and the replacement of a native vernacular with English language, widely discussed in the context of overseas empires, also played out at home in regards to deaf education.

The codification of 'biological' difference garnered evidence drawn from types of bodies defined by 'race', 'disability' and the intersections perceived enjoining them. The bodies of those most famously associated with 'racial otherness' (Sara Bartman, the 'Hottentot Venus', for example) were defined both through ethnicity and ideas about medical or physiological 'deformity'. Those puzzling over what they termed 'Mongolianism' struggled with whether Down's syndrome was 'racial'; following the fame of Eng and Chang Bunker, conjoined twins were labelled 'Siamese'; and Victorian freak shows exhibited both non-disabled indigenous people from empire and disabled British people. Eugenicists latched onto both race and disability as signs of 'degeneracy', often reading 'racial' degeneration as physically disabling. Because ideas about race and disability were, in the nineteenth century, mutually

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[55] I have made this argument in Esme Cleall, 'Orientalising Deafness: Disability and Race in Imperial Britain', *Social Identities*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring 2015), pp. 22–36. Important exceptions do exist. See, for example, Bell, *Blackness and Disability*.

[56] Esme Cleall, 'Deaf to the Word: Deafness, Gender and Protestantism in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland', *Gender and History*, vol. 25, no. 3 (November 2013), pp. 590–603.

[57] Thomas Gallaudet, *A Sermon on the Duty and Advantages of Affording Instruction to the Deaf and Dumb* (Isaac Hill, 1824), p. 8 quoted in Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'Framed: The Deaf in the Harem', in Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, eds, *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 55.

informing, the 'colonising' treatment of disabled people and the colonisation of ethnic 'others' of empire intersected.

All this, it must be pointed out, does not mean that I will argue that race and disability were 'the same thing'. They were palpably different ways of being with different histories, different modes of construction and different embodied states. As Mark Sherry pointed out back in 2007, to conflate race and disability, which is often done metaphorically (with non-disabled people of colour described as 'crippled' by colonisation and white non-disabled people described as occupying the position of 'the negro' in Leonard Kriegel's famous words, to emphasise their difference), is deeply problematic and potentially offensive to both (sometimes overlapping) populations.[58] Further, the experience of being a white disabled person and a non-disabled person of colour (to take just one example) are fundamentally different and to say they are the same would not only be confusing but to diminish the specificities of experience unique to each population. What I am arguing instead is that the making of these categories, like the making of race and gender, are related constructions that feed off each other discursively and that they are related categories of difference.

Scope: Structure, Place and Time

Although a comprehensive and systematic account of disability or institutions for disabled people across the British Empire is much needed, such a task is a huge undertaking and is an agenda for the future which, just as has been done with gender and empire, will need many people's work and time to develop as a field in its own right. This book is not such a work in itself, but an argument that such an agenda is necessary and some hints at the kinds of directions future work might take.

Chapter 1, 'Disability and Otherness in the British Empire', sets up the discursive framework used throughout the book, exploring the discourses used to construct disability as a category of difference in the nineteenth-century British Empire. I trace the way in which a constellation of figures – the 'cripple', the 'blind' man or woman, the 'deaf-mute', and the 'idiot' – came to be seen as a class of people distinct from the remainder of the population (who, being unmarked, came to occupy the position of 'normal') and argue that these groups formed the basis of the category that we today

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[58] Mark Sherry, '(Post)colonising Disability', *Wagadu*, vol. 4 (Summer 2007), p. 12. For further discussion of colonialism being used as a metaphor see Grech, 'Decolonising Eurocentric Disability Studies'; Leonard Kriegel, 'Uncle Tom and Tiny Tim: Some Reflections on the Cripple as Negro', *The American Scholar*, vol. 38, no. 3 (Summer 1969), p. 412.

classify as ‘disabled’. I argue that ideas about ‘race’ and imperial otherness helped to forge these categories and were, in turn, inflected by them. One of the ways in which disabled people were othered was through the construction of them as people to be pitied and, whilst making this point in Chapter 1, I pick up on its implications in Chapter 2, ‘Saving the Other at Home and Overseas’. From evocations of deaf children ignorant of Christ, to ‘crippled’ men unable to work, to feeble-minded women lax in their morals and prolific in their reproduction, disabled people were seen to need help from the non-disabled. In this second chapter, I trace the institutions established to ‘save’ disabled people, particularly schools, and chart the role of charities, private enterprise and the state in providing for people with different educational needs. Like the first chapter, ‘Saving the Other’ takes a trans-colonial approach, drawing on examples from across the empire. Whilst pity was perhaps the strongest element of the othering of disabled people, this operated alongside and in conjunction with further discourses of otherness. Chapter 3, ‘Exhibiting Bodily Anomaly’, explores one such alternative discourse, that of ‘freakery’, particularly powerful in the construction of people with visible deformities, but, as I shall argue, a discourse that went beyond the freak show into deaf and blind institutions. Through tracing the lives of disabled performers, many of whom were also people of colour, I look at the interplay of the difference of race and the difference of identity in designating certain people as ‘freakish’. Whilst, as I shall explore, the freak show responded to disabled people in a very different way to the institutions examined in Chapter 2, together these categories came to form a group that we might today discuss as a disabled population.

The next two chapters focus on deafness, which, I argue, was a particularly contested impairment crucial to the formation of the category of disability. Two chapters focused almost exclusively on deafness is intended to allow greater scrutiny of this impairment and the distinctive place it occupied in nineteenth-century thought. Chapter 4, ‘Signs of Humanity’, examines how disability in general, and those impairments that implicated the ability to produce verbal language in particular, contributed to an important nineteenth-century debate about what constituted ‘mankind’, that is, humanity. From Aristotle onwards, Western thought emphasised the importance of language (meaning speech) as a key marker of humanity. As the relationship between humans and animals was reconstituted over the nineteenth century, not least in the wake of Darwinian ideas, people without language, especially deaf people, became an important test case in defining the limits of civilised humanity. This, I argue, manifested in a major debate about sign language, which came increasingly to be seen as a ‘backward’ form of communication and associated with racial others. Chapter 5, ‘A Deaf Imaginary’, balances Chapter 4 by looking at the deaf community in its own terms and how it (often indirectly) responded to these claims of otherness. Taking as a starting point the strong identity held by the deaf communities in contemporary Western societies, I look back to the nineteenth-century origins of these communities, and the way in which deaf people themselves constituted 'the Deaf' as a social and political group.

Chapter 6, 'Immigration', is the most trans-colonial of the chapters. As scholars of empire will be aware, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw both huge waves of intercontinental migration and legislation to control it. Historians have explored the racial dimensions of these legislative practices whereby some migrants were considered less desirable than others. This chapter argues that disability too was an important lens through which potential migrants were viewed and that much of the legislation and discourse around immigration was ableist. Disabled people, as well as those deemed unhealthy, were considered to be a public charge and were systematically weeded out through literacy tests and medical inspections. If these conclusions seem obvious, then it is perhaps telling of the way in which ableist discourses are still formative today.

Chapter 7, 'The Health of the Nation', returns to the imperial metropole to examine anxieties around disability at the turn of the century. I argue that, through the rise of fears around degeneration and eugenicistic discourses, there was a new level of attention on the disabled body and of this body as racialised and other. Many of these concerns coalesced around questions of 'feeble-mindedness' – a focus for this chapter – as its embodiment in men, and perhaps particularly in women, represented fears about the future of the imperial race.

This study started out, and remains at heart, a study of disability in nineteenth-century Britain and its empire. It has a wide geographical scope, with some chapters (Chapters 1, 2 and 6 in particular) covering developments in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and India. Inspired by work arguing that metropole and colony were mutually constituted and ought to be explored in the same analytic field, however, a fair amount of the study focuses on metropolitan Britain and the construction there of disabled internal others (particularly Chapter 7). To complicate things further, the kinds of connections that I have explored leak over colonial boundaries. Christian missions to the blind were as likely to operate in China as India; disabled travellers to 'exotic lands' travelled beyond as well as within British territories; and those advocating specialist education for the deaf and blind shared and debated techniques with those in Continental Europe and the United States. In particular, the United States has proved a 'problem' in a neat geographical framing. Whilst obviously outside the British Empire at this time, it is impossible to remove America from discussions of disability in all but the most artificial way. Debates about deaf and blind education went backwards and forwards across the Atlantic; the same freak shows toured Britain, the United States and Continental Europe, and the Victorian discourse of sentimentality that surrounded the construction of the disabled figure occurred in literature in both the United States and in Britain. As Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds put it in *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 'the idea of the "white man's country" crossed and collapsed the imperial/republican divide, drawing on the discursive resources of both traditions [that] enshrine the dichotomy of white and not-white', and there is something to be gained from looking at the 'British and American racial regimes in the same analytic frame'.[59] With this in mind I have retained a discussion of the United States case where relevant, particularly in Chapter 3, where disabled people cast as 'freaks' performed on both sides of the Atlantic, and in Chapter 5, where ideas about a Deaf American State were widely discussed in Britain.

The time frame opens loosely around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the first institutions for the deaf and the blind opening in the final decades of the eighteenth century and the emergence of new charitable discourses around disability emerging in the early nineteenth century. The book stops short of the First World War, which, in creating large numbers of disabled veterans, has been argued to change how disability was framed in the twentieth century.[60]

As with all books, there are significant omissions. The most important line of enquiry that *Colonising Disability* does not extend to is a systematic engagement with indigenous and black attitudes towards and experiences of disability in the diverse areas of the British Empire (though the experiences of some people of colour are sporadically present, including in the discussion of enslaved people in Chapter 1, institutionalised people in Chapter 2 and individuals on the freak show circuit in Chapter 3). Whilst the work of Christopher Bell and Nirmala Erevelles offers a starting point to explore blackness and disability theoretically, and Shaun Grech and Karen Soldatic have explored disability and the Global South sociologically, there is little which explores this historically, beyond Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy's forthcoming work on slavery and disability in the Caribbean or Julie Livingston's historical-anthropological examination of disability in twentieth-century

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[59] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 8–9.

[60] Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

Botswana.[61] There is no doubt that studies to illuminate these experiences and attitudes are urgently needed but, to a large extent, this analysis is beyond the scope of this study.

There are several reasons why indigenous and black attitudes towards and experiences of disability do not feature more prominently in this volume. Practically speaking, there are few sources that relate the experiences of disabled people of colour in the British Empire or indigenous or black attitudes towards them (particularly in English, to which I am limited), at least before the twentieth century. Secondly, it would be impossible to do justice to the diversity of these views and experiences in a single book. Disability was a socially and culturally constructed expression of impairment, so what it meant to be disabled differed widely across the many cultures that existed in imperial spaces, and were only unified through colonial discourse. Thirdly, whilst there is certainly a good ideological imperative to explore systematically indigenous disabled people that I do not pursue here, there are also important ideological imperatives to interrogate colonial discourse that represented disabled people and people of colour in very specific ways and it is this colonial discourse on disability that is the subject of *Colonising Disability*. It was colonial discourse that bound Canadian First Nations People, indigenous Tswana and Indian Muslims (to take just three examples) together in the British imagination as 'natives', and I explore this in part in Chapter 1, where I note the widely held belief in nineteenth-century Britain that all 'uncivilised peoples' (a contemporary framing) treated disabled people worse than the British did. At the same time, as I explore in Chapter 2, other racial and colonial discourses dictated that some colonised people were treated very differently to others and consequently institutions for disabled people were set up in the white dominions, but not (aside from some efforts in India) in colonial dependencies. Further, discourses about race, about both blackness and whiteness, shaped the way in which (white) disabled people were seen in nineteenth-century Britain, such as those who were deaf or who had learning disabilities, as I explore in Chapters 4 and 7, respectively.

This book seeks to start the work of putting disability into its imperial context by acknowledging that Britain's position at the centre of a global

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[61] Bell, *Blackness and Disability*; Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Grech and Soldatic, 'Disability and Colonialism'; Hunt-Kennedy, *Between Fitness and Death*; Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana*.

empire helped shape the attitudes towards disability that were developing in the metropole as well as in the colonies; to introduce the concept and experience of disability to historians and scholars of the British Empire; and to start thinking about the connections between disability and those axes of difference more familiar to critical colonial historians such as race, class and gender.