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European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults 9 (2018) 2, S. 179-192



Empfohlene Zitierung/ Suggested Citation:

Schreiber-Barsch, Silke: Who counts? Disruptions to adult education's idyll and its topography of lifelong learning: Interlinking Rancière's political philosophy with adult education - In: *European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 9 (2018) 2, S. 179-192 - URN:

urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-161420

<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-161420>

in Kooperation mit / in cooperation with:



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Who counts? Disruptions to adult education's idyll and its topography of lifelong learning: Interlinking Rancière's political philosophy with adult education

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Abstract

The question: 'who counts?' is raised in this paper at modern democratic society's fabric, and, more specifically, at the arena of adult education and its counting procedure regarding its clientele, bringing the issue of dis/ability to the fore. For, thus, interlinking citizenship, adult education, and dis/ability, the paper explores the work on disagreement and dissensus by the French political philosopher Jacques Rancière as a theoretical framework. References to qualitative empirical research, elaborating on citoyen sans-papiers (= people without legal papers) in France and on planning and managing activities towards inclusive learning settings by adult education practitioners in Germany, serve to illuminate the theoretical underpinnings' strengths and limitations. It shall lead not only to a fruitful encounter between interdisciplinary theoretical approaches, but also to push the claim that deliberation and civic learning ultimately depends on expressing voice and being listened to, not least by adult education academia, profession and practitioners.

Keywords: citizenship; civic learning; disability; Rancière; spatiality

Introduction

The question: 'who counts?' is raised in this paper in a twofold way. It is directed towards modern democratic society's fabric (democratic society's way of counting its political subjects), and, more specifically, towards the arena of adult education and its counting procedure regarding its clientele, which will be exemplified by the issue of dis/ability. Pointing to dis/ability in the debate on citizenship and adult education brings to the fore



not only a highly contested, but also a usually neglected field of experiencing citizenship and lifelong learning. As Kabeer (2005) aptly remarks, whereas the ‘idea of citizenship is nearly universal today, what it means and how it is experienced are not’ (ibid., p. 1). The paper seeks to explore in what way the work on *disagreement* and *dissensus* by the French political philosopher Jacques Rancière (1999; 2010) might serve as a seminal theoretical framework in order to elicit ambivalences of the issue under scrutiny as well as interdisciplinary encounters for further discussion. For this, findings of qualitative empirical research will be presented, elaborating on *citoyen sans-papiers* (= people without legal papers) in France (Ludwig, 2008) and on planning and managing activities towards inclusive learning settings by adult education practitioners in Germany (Schreiber-Barsch & Fawcett, 2017). Both examples are seen to highlight the potentiality of the public sphere in providing political arenas for learning, performing and communicating processes of political subjectification¹ (see also e.g. Amin, 2015).

Conceptual framework

The paper’s point of departure is the topic of citizenship, which is rooted in a wide range of disciplines and theoretical strands. Taking up an approach in political science helps to extract pivotal components. Isin and Nyers (2014) have introduced a rather skeleton definition of citizenship, meaning: ‘an *‘institution’ mediating rights between the subjects of politics and the polity to which these subjects belong*’ (ibid., 1; emphasis in original). By ‘institution’, Isin and Nyers refer to ‘processes through which something is enacted, created, and rendered relatively durable and stable but still contestable, surprising, and inventive’ (ibid., p. 1). This emphasises an understanding of democracy and (civic) learning as being always on the move, in a state of negotiation rather than representing a fixed, to-be-reached end product. The notion ‘polity’ overcomes nation-centred ideas of polities, which is connected to avoiding the terminology of ‘citizen’ but preferring that of ‘subjects of politics’ or ‘political subjects’ (of whom not all might have been granted the status of a citizen) as ‘the agents of the mediation in hand’ (ibid.). Such a subject-oriented approach, moreover, opens up membership terms to also ‘official and non-official forms, legal and extra-legal belongings’ (ibid.), which, finally, points to citizenship as consisting of individual relationships with a polity as well as ‘collective mediations’ (ibid.).

Linking this understanding to the question of learning and education, and following Dower (2008) and Biesta and Lawy (2006, p. 72), a dialectic between status and process (*being / becoming*) emerges and an imperative for negotiating (as an individual task, yet inevitably mutual relation). Firstly, the argument seems essential that *being* a political subject is a status a priori given (due to being a member of humankind and owner of human rights), meaning, it does not depend on being rewarded only a posteriori through educational endeavours targeted at eventually becoming a political subject some day. Secondly, what indeed remains in *becoming* are the responsibilities and endeavours of each subject, of adult education’s profession and practitioners in fostering the awareness of this membership, the capability of claiming its existence and of enacting its potentialities, rights and duties. Waghid (2014) rightly concludes that such a ‘democratic education in becoming’ is one, which is not being ‘tamed’ by education’s personnel through a priori declaring predetermined outcomes (ibid., p. 22). On the contrary, outcomes of learning are to be considered as ‘momentary learning experiences’ (ibid., p. 23)—keeping their unpredictable nature, their inconclusiveness and highly subject-related significance. Thirdly, this supports relying on a concept of citizenship broadened from status to practice (Biesta & Lawy, 2006) and experience. Considering civic

learning of adults as an inherent part of this, and, furthermore, asking for adult education's role and objectives within this, it helps to take into account Biesta's (2014) differentiation in civic learning as a *socialisation conception* and a *subjectification conception* (ibid., p. 6). It tackles a generic question throughout adult education's history. Should learning be directed primarily towards ensuring the political subject's adaption (and, thus, *socialisation*) to the existing societal order? Or, should it also explicitly enable awareness of membership terms, critical reflection, unpredictable outcomes and, potentially, disruptions to society's and adult education's idyll (the idyllic state of a consensus) by questioning, in the wake of *subjectification*, the dominant order? Whereas both dimensions should not be read as a dichotomy, but rather as two poles in relation to each other, pursuing the idea of *in becoming* emphasises civic learning in the subjectification mode: being *non-linear* (no linear movement from not being a citizen to being a citizen), *recursive* (learning is always fed back into action) and *cumulative* (learning as a successive layering of experiences) (Biesta, 2014, p. 7; emphasis in original).

The reference to *disruptions* leads to a vital line of argument in this paper. Disruptions are more than just discomfort or contestation—they cut right to the core of the negotiating struggle of who counts as society's part as well as adult education's part. The paper understands disruptions as outcomes in the sense of 'momentary learning experiences' (Waghid, 2014), which embody a tenacious kind of disagreement in the context of a particular societal order and which are enacted by political subjects (individuals or collectivities), manifesting processes of political subjectification in the wake of the 'ongoing experiment of democracy' (Biesta, 2014, p. 6). Thus, disruptions are neither abnormal nor per se negative, but are testimony for individual and / or collective mediations in and towards a polity, to which political subjects articulate their belonging (be that in official / non-official, legal / extra-legal forms). This is important, because discussing: *who counts?* is only reasonable *in relation to something*—to that something that decides the terms of counting. Through this lens, the notion of *the political* as the momentum of a disruptive insurgence seems to better reflect the question under debate (Swyngedouw, 2014), whereas the policy science-based notion *politics*, used e.g. by Isin and Nyers (2014), primarily focuses on the administrative architecture of polities. In the sphere of the political, disruptions always put at stake a quest for transformation, as a rather unexpected, subtle experience and spin-off, or also as the main objective, one has strived for and of substantial quality. Thus, in and by civic learning 'people's *issues* become transformed', but also, and even more important, 'the democratic experiment also transforms *people*' (Biesta, 2014, p. 7; emphasis in original).

In this sense, disruptions can be of essential pedagogical value. Supporting Reichenbach's (2000) arguments, such manifestations of disagreement 'enable us to be convinced of the seriousness of, and to be impressed by, the opinions of others with whom we disagree' (ibid., p. 805f; author's translation). Thus, 'the prerequisite for mutual respect need not necessarily be found in what one shares, but also in difference' (ibid.; author's translation). Summing up, the role of adult education's endeavours might not be seen in reaching and retaining consensus (idyll), but on the contrary, in fostering adults' capability of collaboratively engaging by respectfully disagreeing (Pastuhov & Rusk, 2018).

Turning now to Rancière's theoretical framework, allows further exploration of the nuances of the topic under scrutiny.

Rancière and disagreement: The miscount

The French political philosopher Jacques Rancière has considerably enriched the academic discourse with an exhaustive range of works; this paper focuses on *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1999), originally published in 1995 (*La Mésentente: Politique et Philosophie*). The analytical benefit of Rancière's work for the topic of citizenship has indeed been discussed, for example through the lens of human geography (see e.g. Davidson & Iveson, 2014; Desforges, Jones & Woods, 2005; Purcell, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2014) or that of political science (see e.g. Feola, 2014; Schaap, 2011). Yet, the reference to Rancière's work in (adult) education academia and research still remains at the periphery (with some exceptions such as e.g. Simons & Masschelein, 2010; Bastrup-Birk & Wildemeersch, 2013; Biesta, 2014; Rieger-Ladich, 2016). Taking up Rancière's approach to theorise democracy demands, and this explains its usefulness here, abandoning the habitual paths of a deliberative understanding upon which democracy is defined as idyllic state of a consensus on the legitimacy of the dominant societal order and its way of counting its parts (Rancière 1999, p. 95).

Theoretical point of departure: The miscount

Following Rancière, a regime of power in a deliberative democracy is called *police* (or: *policing*) and consists of 'an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise' (ibid., p. 29). This is a regime of *consensus*. It agrees on 'the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organisation of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimising this distribution' (ibid., p. 28). In and through this order, every part of society is assigned to 'his' or 'her' specific place; hence, there exists no beyond, no outside of this order. Yet, according to place, voice is given and heard (*discourse*)—or rejected (*noise*). In negating or not recognising that there exists, due to the given status of being unseen and unheard, a 'part of those who have no part' (*la part des sans-part*), the 'initial scandal' (ibid., p. 27) and the radical wrong in process and outcome of counting society's parts is established: the miscount as foundation of disagreement. In short, consensus reduces politics to a police order, it 'is the 'end of politics'' (Rancière, 2010, p. 42). (Considering the remark in section 1.1: Originally, Rancière speaks of *la politique*, which is then translated with *politics*; however, *la politique* corresponds to the understanding of *the political*. For clarity's sake regarding the quotes, the paper will employ the English translation *politics*.)

On the contrary, Rancière suggests understanding democracy as an on-going process of political subjectification, beginning at and through the momentum of disagreement: This is when the *sans-part* in the police order disrupts this very order—rejecting their positioning as a non-citizen, lesser citizen (Kabeer, 2005) or dis-citizen and, by this, re-affirming their status as political subjects. In later works, Rancière employs the term *dissensus* instead of *disagreement*, understanding disagreement rather as the method whereas dissensus expresses a more fundamental rupture. According to him, a 'dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions or values; it is a division inserted in 'common sense': a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we see something as given'; it is, 'the putting of two worlds in one and the same world' (Rancière, 2010, p. 69). Therefore, he states, '*The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one*' (ibid., p. 37; emphasis in original). Such a rupture is driven by a political subject, enacting and manifesting a dissensus in the sense of dis-identifying

with the police order, and, thus, becoming ‘the operator of a particular dispositive of subjectivation and litigation through which politics comes into existence’ (ibid., p. 39). Thus, politics never constitute in an abstract beyond. The parties involved ‘do not exist prior to the declaration of wrong’ (ibid., p. 39):

...nothing is political in itself merely because power relationships are at work in it. For a thing to be political, it must give rise to a meeting of police logic and egalitarian logic that is never set up in advance (Rancière, 1999, p. 32).

Rancière is clear about the objective of such processes of subjectification: not a (better) inclusion in the current regimes of power, but a revision of the regime itself by those who were previously not granted the right to be seen and heard. Revising or re-counting the order constitutes politics, it ‘is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse what was once only heard as noise’ (ibid., p. 30). Two aspects seem to be important here in understanding the Rancièrian approach: Firstly, politics are not limited to pure versions and exceptional moments of a dissensus; politics might show also ‘in a lot of ‘confused’ matters and conflicts’ (Rancière, 2011, p. 5); and in disruptions, as the paper would argue. Secondly, a revised order might indeed represent a more complementary order—yet, again installing a police order, being a, as Purcell (2014) remarks, ‘best-we-can political community marked by frequent disruptions and a conflictual being-together (ibid., p. 172). In brief: The miscount cannot be ultimately settled; it is rather about ‘the instituting of a dispute over the distribution’ (Rancière, 2010, p. 37).

Furthermore, and vital for section 3 of this paper, Rancière does not narrow down modes of subjectification to linguistic utterances; it is not a pure speech situation. Even though he does not refer to spatial theories, he acknowledges space in its material and symbolic dimension (Rancière, 2011, p. 6). Manifesting a dissensus always comprises a territorial dimension, a re-negotiating of the bodily topography of the political subjects. Therefore, Rancière defines politics as modes of subjectification, meaning ‘the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience’ (Rancière, 1999, p. 35).

Identifying oneself as *discourse* and no longer *noise* in society, is, finally, based on Rancière’s idea of *equality*. The given logic of distribution is challenged in the name of equality; the assertion of equality is grounded in, and exercised through, the re-counting process of identifying oneself as part of the societal order and no longer *sans-part* (as *putting two worlds in one*; see above). In this sense, equality is the starting point, not the ultimate goal. Anyone is equal with anyone else, and this due to the fact of being human (like *being* a political subject; see section 1.1), it is the ‘equality of speaking beings’ (Rancière, 1999, p. 33). This, again, underlines that no one is seen beyond society’s order and would then want to be included in it through *becoming* a political subject some day. In a nutshell: the *sans-part* are not voice-less, they are unheard. Modes of subjectification, thus, provoke the assertion of one’s equality by an act of equality of speech ‘in which the supposed incapable or perhaps less capable ... exercise their voice’ (Waghid 2014, p. 33); thereby, the very structure of democracy is constituted (Davis, 2010, p. 81). Political subjectification, then, reconfigures a field of experience by the assertion of equality:

It decomposes and recomposes the relationships between the ways of *doing*, of *being*, and of *saying* that define the perceptible organization of the community, the relationships between the places where one does one thing and those where one does something else, the capacities associated with this particular *doing* and those required for another. (Rancière, 1999, p. 40; emphasis in original)

Process of political subjectification: Re-affirming equality

Before elaborating on disruptions in adult education's idyll, a more nuanced look needs to be taken to Rancière's understanding of the process of subjectification. It is seen to include three main features: (a) argumentative demonstration, (b) theatrical dramatisation and (c) heterologic dis-identification (Rancière, 1999, pp. 84-90). The thorough analysis of Rancière's work by Davis (2010) seems rewarding for this, and so is pointing to empirically based reflections on these features by means of Ludwig's (2008) empirical study.

In her work, Ludwig discusses the topic of *citoyen sans-papiers* (= people without legal papers) in France as illegalised migrants and, yet, political agents, and this inter alia by referring to some parts of Rancière's work on disagreement (who, himself, expressed ambivalence at the end of the 1990s whether *sans-papiers* are an adequate example or not; La Découverte, 2009). The example of the *sans-papiers* explains why the introductory definition of citizenship by Isin and Nyers (2014) is useful through broadening, not only the figure of political subjects beyond the restricted fabric of a citizen, but also including official and non-official forms, legal and extra-legal belongings in the idea of articulating relationships with a polity. The findings of Ludwig allow visualising Rancière's approach to the process of subjectification and his idea of equality: By 'acting *as if* they have the rights that they lack, the *sans papiers* actualize their political equality' (Schaap, 2011, p. 39; emphasis in original).

In her qualitative research, Ludwig used methods of participatory observation in five Parisian collectivities of *sans-papiers* (in a period between 2005 and 2006) and implemented problem-focused interviews with eight *sans-papiers*. Being declared as illegal or clandestine immigrants (*étrangers en situation irrégulière*) and, thus, as illegal bodily subjects of about 200,000-400,000 persons on the French nation state territory, the complex and often contradictory state-citizen-architecture becomes vivid in the collective body of the *sans-papiers*. Legally defined as being outside of the nation state, yet, a legal grey area is exercised in the practices of everyday life, such as for example granting access to precarious employment, tacitly allowing their children to attend schools or having installed a semi-legal system of medical care (*Aide Médicale d'Etat* (AME) (see e.g. gisti, 2013). Accordingly, their bodily presence on the nation's territory is sort of acknowledged, for their vital needs are taken care of. Yet, in the official nation state narrative, they remain assigned to the place of the *sans-part*. Interestingly, especially since the mid-1990s, the *sans-papiers* have managed to join in 'collective mediations' (Isin & Nyers, 2014, p. 1) and have succeeded in enforcing waves of regularisation. In provoking strikes, the *sans-papiers* dis-identified with their given (hidden) place in the police order and became literally visible in the public sphere through disrupting workflows, giving voice to protest and unmasking their identity despite the risk of arrests. This rupture achieved a punctual re-counting of the order through acknowledging citizenship rights (regularisation) for a considerable number of *sans-papiers*—however, only for those involved in strikes and usually only for members of one of the *sans-papiers* collectivities. Thus, the police order had not been thoroughly re-revised. More precisely, regularisation renders *again invisible* the former *sans-part* as they are immersed in the

regular citizen's body. Nevertheless, the broadening of the legal grey area manifests subtle transformation through political subjectification (see section 1.1; 2.1) and this is why a closer look at the empirical findings allows a comprehension of the Rancièrian approach.

(a) With the aspect of argumentative demonstration, Rancière introduces his understanding of a reasonable character of a revolt (Davis, 2010, p. 84). His main point is that declarations of equality, manifested for example in charters or nation state constitutions, represent a powerful resource in processes of subjectification—but only if they are used for logically verifying the constitution's premises, not as a normative expression of society's aspirations. Referring to France's Charter of 1830, declaring 'all the French are equal before the law', Rancière illustrates its usefulness with regard to the strike of Parisian tailors in 1833. He argues that either the regulations of the police order need to be revised (and, by this, the reason for the inequality) in order to fulfil the premise of the Charter—or the premise itself would need to be revised to 'all the French are unequal before the law'. Interestingly, exactly this rationale is used by one of the *sans-papiers* interviewed by Ludwig (2008, p. 87). With regard to his/her relationship to the French republic's constitution and its omnipresent guiding principles (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*) in the public sphere and buildings, the interviewee explains that not the constitution itself, but its non-equal application constitutes the problem:

Wait, there are articles in the constitution that are not adhered to, you know. Like that one, that we are all human beings, but that is not the case that you experience. We, the *sans-papiers*, we are not treated as human beings. They need to be applied. If they are not applied, they need to be struck off. That's all. We are all human beings, if not, we are all animals. (Ludwig, 2008 p. 87; translation by the author²)

This illustrates the two facets of the constitution. On the one hand, it manifests an existing inequality in the sense of a miscount of its addressees; on the other hand, it offers a reasonable argument for a revolt and for political subjectification.

(b) The second aspect is called theatrical (or spectacular) dramatisation (see Davis, 2010, p. 134). Rancière argues that with regard to the often severe level of discrimination within the police order, the *sans-part* might need to make use of a theatrical dramatisation or, sometimes, violence, in order to support and render visible their arguments of disidentification with their assigned places in the public sphere. This is based on the 'initial scandal' of the police order to negate or not recognise that the part of the *sans-parts* exists. Thus, the non-recognition continues to be exercised, even in spite of visible sights of disidentification. In consequence, a theatrical dramatisation might prove to be necessary in order to break the concealment and manifest political agency as enacting equality in counting society's parts.

Ludwig's findings demonstrate the significance of this feature. The strikes and demonstrations in the public sphere render visible the counting of the *sans-papiers* as-if-citizens (Ludwig, 2008, p. 94). Furthermore, it shows that the realisation of the bodily occupation of public territory is to be seen as a learning experience and outcome. Such learning derives from the knowledge and proficiency of how to organise the disidentification process most effectively towards the objective of regularisation. To produce a spectacle is labelled as a 'learning process' (*un apprentissage*) (ibid., p. 92) by an interviewee. It involves, for example, the professional handling of media issues (which ones and how to address them), avoiding the summer period as a time of a general vacuum in the public perception or to consciously decide on the most spectacular public places to be bodily occupied (ibid., p. 94-95). This apparently illustrates also an intergenerational transformation, because in preceding generations, it was said that 'one is not allowed to make too much noise, ask for too much, not allowed to demonstrate' (Ludwig, 2008, p.

92; translation by the author³). Marin (2006) quotes a *sans-papiers* who participated in the first spectacular demonstration in 1996 when 300 *sans-papiers* occupied the church of Saint-Bernard in Paris and who sums it up: ‘...as long as one does not disrupt, one does not exist’ (ibid., p. 126; translation by the author⁴; quoted from Ludwig, 2008, p. 94).

Finally, (c), Rancière highlights the feature of a heterologic dis-identification. Davis explains that this refers to acknowledging otherness as a fundamental principle of separating identities, and, at the same time, as a connecting element in social struggles of collective mediations. Even though one might identify with the issues and the processes of political subjectification of *sans-parts*, one is not necessarily one of them, like supporters of victims of political persecution. Rancière refers to the revolt of Algerians in Paris in October 1961; or, a recent example, the *Je suis Charlie* – movement in answer to the 7 January 2015 shooting at the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*. In consequence, one always remains in a status of being in-between identities (Davis, 2010, p. 136). This status does not disperse if one is indeed part of the *sans-part*. Because, and this is crucial, political subjectification might also (most probably) mean the process of rejecting or transforming the identity assigned to oneself by the police order. Thus, Rancière puts forward the idea that political subjectification can imply a partial transformation of given identities by the police order or also the enforcement of (provisional) new identities as an outcome of their rejection (see Davis, 2010, p. 137-141).

Again, Ludwig’s findings illustrate this idea of a heterologic dis-identification. One of the interviewees (like the *sans-papiers* movement as such) explicitly links to the given identity as descendants of French colonial history in Africa—but the label as *illegal*, as *non-entitled* due to this territorial descent is reversed, it is de-connected from the police order identity: ‘There are no debts. Let’s do a historical calculation: in history, one needs to calculate, increase slavery, colonisation, globalisation and also the liberation of France. Let’s do the bill: Who owes whom?’ (Ludwig, 2008, p. 91; translation by the author⁵). Furthermore, Ludwig shows that whereas the *sans-papiers* have, in a sense, agreed on using the stigmatising label, the process of political subjectification constitutes repeating this label, but with a different meaning, a self-authorized content (ibid., p. 93). These processes will be now further elaborated with regard to disruptions in adult education’s idyll of dis/ability.

Disruptions in adult education’s idyll: Shifting the focus to dis/ability

Following Rancière, processes of subjectification reconfigure a certain ‘field of experience’ (Rancière, 1999, p. 40) (see section 2.1). Such a field of experience is not a quasi-natural entity; it is what Feola (2014) calls a ‘police economy of mattering’ (ibid., p. 508), distributing voice / speech and noise. Therefore, enacting dissensus by ‘a meeting of police logic and egalitarian logic’ (Rancière, 1999, p. 32) cannot be considered as an ‘unmediated encounter between two subjects, but is rather negotiated through forms of social meaning that amplify the speech of some, and diminish the weight of others’ (Feola, 2014, p. 506). As such a ‘field of experience’ (Rancière, 1999), the paper will take into account the arena of adult education in its relation to the issue of dis/ability.

By adult education, the paper points to the system-part of lifelong learning, meaning the (still mostly nation-state-related) systematic provision of more or less organised learning activities for adults (in the sense of beyond schooling). This could be activities of formal or also non-formal learning, and, of course, the wider context of informal

learning. However, it is not the learning processes as such which are of interest here, but their systematic provision as installing a ‘field of experience’ (Rancière, 1999). This allows insight, not only into adult education’s order and its counting procedures (who counts as a client of adult education?), but also in processes of subjectification by the ‘agents of the mediation in hand’ (Isin & Nyers, 2014, p. 1). Through this, the paper shall also emphasise that space matters in claiming a (re)count of society’s and adult education’s parts: with regard where territorially the claim is expressed, but also to which territories access is claimed for.

Field of experience: Adult education and dis/ability

Modern society’s consensus on the order of the *sayable, visible, thinkable* and *possible* (see section 2.1; also Simons & Masschelein, 2010, p. 513) with regard to dis/ability has turned into a contested terrain, strikingly described by Linton (1998) at the end of the 1990s:

We have been hidden—whether in the institutions that have confined us, the attics and basements that sheltered our family's shame, the ‘special’ schools and classrooms designed to solve the problems we are thought to represent, or riding in segregated transportation, those ‘invalid’ coaches, that shuttle disabled people from one of these venues to another. The public has gotten so used to these screens that as we are now emerging, upping the ante on the demands for a truly inclusive society, we disrupt the social order. We further confound expectations when we have the temerity to emerge as forthright and resourceful people, nothing like the self-loathing, docile, bitter, or insentient fictional versions of ourselves the public is more used to. (Linton, 1998, p. 3)

The paper defines dis/ability not as an ontological category; on the contrary, dis/ability can be congenital, acquired (by accident, disease, age etc.) or also socially constructed, which reminds us of the wide range of possible impairments or difficulties (physical, intellectual, mental and so on). Thus, understandings of dis/ability need to be contextualised in terms of the *interrelatedness* of being in whatever sense impaired, as well as living in disabling societal conditions (Rocco & Delgado, 2011). The paper pursues a cultural model of dis/ability, proposed by the Critical Disability Studies. It argues for a multi-factorial account of dis/ability, emphasising the intersectional linkages between biological, social, cultural *and* psychological aspects, attitudes and norms and explicitly pays attention to power structures (see e.g. Bösl, Klein & Waldschmidt, 2010; Campbell, 2009; Riddell & Watson, 2014; Rocco & Delgado, 2011; Shakespeare, 2013; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006). In this paper, the notation *dis/ability* shall take into account the ‘able/not-able divide’ (Campbell, 2009), referring to the fundamental axe of reproducing inequality. Within this, a particular focus will be set on *adults with learning difficulties*, a notation proposed by *People First* (a self-advocacy group of people with so-called intellectual difficulties).

Regarding the systematic provision of lifelong learning opportunities, Germany is one of those countries with a traditionally highly segregated education system (Poore, 2009; Richardson & Powell, 2011). Segregation is defined along the mentioned ‘able/not-able divide’ (Campbell, 2009), being one of many categories that probably (re)produce social inequality highly in access to lifelong learning (such as gender, ethnic origin, age, or the like). That means, for centuries, segregation between the abled and the non-abled has been based on a deficit-oriented categorisation of learners into ‘normal’ and ‘special’ learning institutions. Historically, not even the status of a *prospective* clientele, seen both

as capable of and vitally, in need of, learning, had been granted to adults with impairments, and, in particular, with learning difficulties (see e.g. Bösl et al., 2010).

This emphasises that discussing adult education through the lens of dis/ability is never a purely pedagogical quest—but also a political quest, as the question of: *who counts as adult education's client?* cuts right to the core of democratic societies (see in more detail: Schreiber-Barsch, 2017; 2018). This is why Rancière's approach is beneficial, precisely because it strongly reminds us of recognising equality as a starting point, and, disruptive insurgences of political subjects as an enactment of embodied and lived experiences of citizenship in relation to a particular field of experience. For disability in its traditional understanding, labelled as a 'diminished state of being human' (Campbell, 2009, p. 5), rejects the idea of *being* a political subject as a status a priori given, due to equality being withheld in navigating through the system of lifelong learning beyond or transverse to a prior 'distribution of places and roles' (Rancière, 1999, p. 28). It means, as Waghid (2014) concludes, that 'those for whom the education is meant might not experience justice in the form of not knowing in advance that which they can aspire to become' (ibid., p. 44). This is reflected in the on-going status quo that, in Germany, learning opportunities for adults with impairments or learning difficulties continue to be provided almost exclusively in sheltered workshops or in care institutions without any primary adult education mandate—hence, not in public places such as public adult education centres (Heimlich & Behr, 2009; Lindmeier, 2003). It manifests a 'regime of dis-citizenship' (Devlin & Pothier, 2006), empirically confirmed by the fact of the very low participation rate of adults with impairments and in particular learning difficulties in learning opportunities meant for the abled (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2014; Koscheck, Weiland & Ditschek, 2013).

The ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (in Germany in 2009) has established, on the macro-level of the polity, a substantial claim for change. In Germany (as elsewhere), the government's commitment to ensuring 'an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning' (United Nations, 2006, art. 24) is called upon to finally fully ensure the existing Right to Education (United Nations, 1948, art. 26). Approaching this through a Rancièrian lens, one might suggest that it could provoke political subjectification in the sense of an *argumentative demonstration*, thus, using the constitutional agenda for legitimising the assertion of equality (see section 2.2). Like one of the *sans-papiers*, who stated 'We are all human beings, if not, we are all animals' (Ludwig, 2008, p. 87), or Rancière's example of France's Charter of 1830, one could also derive in the present context the claim *We are all abled learners in becoming, if not, we are all non-abled learners*. Besides, a current topic serves as an example of *heterologic dis-identification*, which also shows the need of *theatrical dramatisation* in order to be heard. In Germany's social welfare system, around 7.5 million people are labelled 'seriously disabled', according to differing levels of disability (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2014); they are officially registered as holder of a so-called *seriously disabled person's pass*. In autumn 2017, a 14-year-old girl, living close to Hamburg in the Northern part of Germany, was irritated by the fact of being labelled, due to Trisomy 21, as an insofar 'seriously disabled person'. She wrote an article in *easy language* in a journal of a self-advocacy group (KIDS, 2017), explaining that she had produced a new plastic cover for her *seriously disabled person's pass*—concealing this label by a new label: calling it a *seriously alright pass*. This provoked regional and supra-regional attention in the public media and, in the following, it activated other holders of *seriously disabled person's passes* to apply at public authorities a new pass with that label. Half a year later, and after having initially rejected this claim by arguing with technical impracticalities, public authorities in four federal states (Hamburg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Lower Saxony, Berlin)

now officially issue this cover concealing the regular pass—stating that these persons are seriously disabled, but, first of all: seriously alright.

Reconfiguring the topography of lifelong learning?

The example given highlights, as remarked upon in the introduction, the potential of the public sphere to provide political arenas for learning, performing and communicating processes of political subjectification—and thus, for disruptions of the dominant order. Following Rancière and also Biesta (2014) and Davidson and Iveson (2014), public places or the public sphere as such are not per se political. They *become* political by manifestations of a dissensus and a reconfiguration of the field of experience in the sense that ‘words are being separated from the things that they define, ... a body is withdrawn from the place it was assigned to, the language and capacities that were ‘proper’ to it’ (Simons & Masschelein, 2010, p. 513). Accordingly, Biesta argues, what ‘makes a place public ... is precisely the extent to which it makes the transformation of private wants into collective needs possible’ (ibid.); it is about ‘re-qualifying these spaces’ from a tamed domestic quality in a political one as part of the territorial locus of the community (Rancière, 2010, p. 38). This turning point between the private and the political is a crucial, yet rather vague, unpredictable momentum. Davidson and Iveson (2014) pose this question with regard to the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi as the initial spark for the Tunisian uprising in 2010/2011: ‘how was it that a singular and seemingly unformulated act of resistance became something that incited political change?’ (ibid., p. 141).

The paper wants to suggest that a similar situation in-between, a still fuzzy, confused state of conflict (see section 2.1), can be identified in the current topography of adult education and lifelong learning in Germany with regard to dis/ability. Whereas the ratification of the UN Convention indeed seeks to claim an assertion of equality and, thus, a re-count of the initial wrong, the status quo rather seems to pause in a zone of in-between, visibly showing disruptive elements, but only very reluctantly a reconfiguration. This will be illuminated by findings of an explorative research study in the field of inclusive adult education (in detail: Schreiber-Barsch & Fawcett, 2017; data collection and analysis followed Grounded Theory; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The study asked adult education professionals (n=7), using semi-guided expert interviews, about their planning, organising and managing activities concerning how inclusion, in the sense of the UN Convention, is operationalised in their respective institutional learning setting for adults (meaning a place like, for example, a public adult education centre providing organised learning activities). Thus, what renders a learning place an inclusive learning place? For this question, the socio-spatial theory by the German sociologist Martina Löw (2001/2016) provided a seminal analytical framework, defining space as a ‘relational arrangement of social goods and people (living beings) at places’ (Löw, 2016, p. 188). Such an understanding allows insights into the spatial order/ings (or: arrangements) of social space with its interrelatedness of material, personal, social, *and* symbolic dimensions, being embedded in power structures. Moreover, Löw’s distinction between space and place is helpful. Place refers to a concrete territorial locus, whereas on one territorial locus, many social spaces may be (re)produced by human beings. In consequence: space is more than place or territory. This explains Feola’s reference to the characteristic of the Rancièrian police order that it ‘is not simply that some are ‘invisible’ or ‘marginal’ within social space’ (ibid. 2014, p. 507), but rather, ‘they are made so through a framework of meaning’ (ibid.)—a social space (re)produced by human beings.

The findings of the qualitative research study draw attention to the point that in the wake of the UN Convention, however, adult education providers explain and legitimate quite varying models of professional activities under the auspices of planning, organising and managing an inclusive place of learning—differing between traditional segregation, offering a target-group oriented model up to an inclusive model. The segregated model can be identified as reproducing the traditional counting procedure of adult education's parts. For inclusion is realised as a somewhat Potemkin village of the place, positioning learners only on a priori assigned places (such as courses explicitly labelled *for people with disabilities*), which often implies that only rarely do learners with learning difficulties show up at a public learning place. In the target-group oriented model, professionals act on a situational case-by-case decision, which sometimes ends in the territorial outsourcing (and exclusion) of inclusion. For example, an inclusive course offer is integrated in a program booklet of an adult education centre, however, the administrative proceeding (registration, information) and the implementation (place of learning, teaching staff, course material) remains allocated to the place of a disabled care provider. Finally, the inclusive model is, interestingly, grounded in the recognition of the pedagogical value of disagreement (see section 1.1). This means, realising inclusion is described as a 'normal' and daily process of trial and error, of finding also unconventional solutions or at least a compromise (in the sense of a 'best-we-can-inclusion' right now; see section 2.1), and of challenging all parties, learners and issues involved. Irritations are explicitly valued as a fruitful and necessary impulse to encourage professional and organisation learning—and to realise the assertion of equality in the sense that all parties need to contribute and play their part in negotiating lifelong learning.

Conclusion

Summing up, the paper was intended to explore the benefit of the Rancièrian approach to theorise democracy, politics and political subjectifications in the sense of a 'dissensual 'commonsense'(Ranciè, 2011, p. 139), which reminds us to recognise society's and adult education's order as not quasi-natural entities, but being constituted by structures of power and dominance. As Rieger-Ladich (2016, p. 159) points out, we should not only pay attention to the spectacular moments of insurgence, but should also read this as evidence of the societal order's contingency and of its potentialities for alternative ways of the *sayable, visible, thinkable* and *possible*—emphasising again one of (adult) education's pivotal responsibilities and endeavours. The focus on dis/ability shall highlight that the *sans-part* are not voice-less, but they are unheard, ignored or delegitimised, literally incapacitated, as they are spoken for or acted on behalf of, especially in the case of adults with learning difficulties and external decisions on someone's autonomy and maturity. Therefore, a criticism made by Feola (2014) needs to be taken into account when discussing Ranciè's approach. He argues that regardless of all sympathy for Ranciè's emancipatory agency, it remains often forgotten to ask 'how this contestatory activity both inaugurates and requires transformations in the *reception* of democratic noise' (ibid., p. 515; emphasis in original). By this, Feola points to the crucial aspect that also 'hearing' (ibid., p. 515) is part of negotiation and deliberation; he argues that 'such irruptions of equality demand the *cultivation* of receptivity toward de-authorized subjects and the claims they bear', enabling, thus, 'counter-hegemonic practices of listening' (ibid., p. 516; emphasis in original).

This puts the final limelight on adult education's role as a systematic provider of lifelong learning opportunities, being embodied by adult education professionals. The

findings presented of a qualitative study in the field of inclusive adult education refer to a risk brought forward by Davidson and Iveson (2014), called ‘erasure’: No need to use violence, such erasure works very effectively in the police order’s recuperation of control. It is ‘a matter of denying those who (seek) to occupy a given place the ability to act politically’, insofar as their voice is downgraded to ‘noisy rabble’ and ‘who should be ignored because they have nothing to say’ (ibid., p. 149). For this objective, ‘the presence of protesting bodies is acknowledged, welcomed even, as evidence of a functioning police order which does indeed take account of the interests of the whole of society’ (ibid.). This strongly reminds one of the mechanisms used by adult education professionals mentioned above in the context of the target-group oriented model in realising an inclusive place of learning (e.g. territorial outsourcing of inclusion), which again excludes inclusion to the peripheries of lifelong learning and negates the pedagogical value of disagreement. Taking this into account in tackling the question: *who counts?* seriously confirms the need and relevance of ‘counter-hegemonic practices of listening’ (Feola, 2014, p. 516) in adult education practice as well as academia and research.

Notes

¹Sometimes also used in the notation *subjectivisation* or *subjectivation* ; the paper will keep the notation used in Rancière 1999.

²C’est la population française qui a voté la constitution. Mais attend, il y a des articles dans la constitution qui ne sont pas appliqués, tu vois. Comme on est tous des humains, mais c’est pas ce qu’on voit. Nous des Sans-papiers on n’est pas traité comme des humains. Il faut les appliquer, quoi. Si ce n’est pas appliqué il faut les effacer. C’est tout. Nous sommes tous des humains, sinon on est tous des animaux’ (Ludwig, 2008, p. 87).

³ Il faut pas faire trop de bruit, pas trop revendiquer, pas manifester’ (Ludwig, 2008, p. 92).

⁴... tant que vous ne gênez pas, vous n’existez pas’ (Ludwig, 2008, p. 94).

⁵ Il n’a pas de dette. On va faire le calcul historique: dans l’histoire on va calculer, aggraver l’esclavage, la colonisation, la mondialisation et aussi la libération de la France. On va faire calcul : qui doit à qui ?’ (Ludwig, 2008, p. 91).

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