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ON DEMOCRATIC ADULT EDUCATION: NAVIGATING THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN CONSENSUS AND DISSENSUS IN CONTEMPORARY MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

One of the basic presumptions to be found in European policy and research literature on adult education is that it can contribute significantly to the quality of life, well-being, social development, economic competitiveness, active citizenship and empowerment of adults (see, for example, Desjardins and Rubenson 2013; Jarvis and Griffin 2003). The field of adult education is very wide and diverse and includes a variety of topics and contexts (Lattke and Jütte 2014; Veloso and Guimarães 2015). Two of the contexts important for adult education will be addressed in this contribution, namely the community and citizenship.

Communities that are not only co-designed by local authorities, initiatives and citizen movements but also understood as public spaces are one of the most important places for developing solidarity and strengthening civil society, in contrast to the growing individualism of late modern societies. In this sense, adults can (and are willing to) contribute significantly to the development of their communities if public spaces are designed to foster democratic ways of living and learning together (Evans et al. 2016). However, today's communities are not homogeneous places associated with stability, geographical and cultural boundaries. Rather, they are characterised by their diversity, plurality and cultural differences (Lucio-Villegas and Fragoso 2015; Wildemeersch and Kurantowicz 2011). To put it another way, modern societies and communities are either multicultural or are in the process of becoming so. Multiculturalism is understood to be an empirical fact that is related to the migration process and the ethnic heterogeneity within a given territory, and can also be understood as a movement for changing hierarchical relations between majority and minority groups (see, for example, Mikulec 2015). Today's communities, seen as heterogeneous spaces, are therefore multicultural in nature and characterised by difference and plurality, and can be understood as hybrid communities "of those who have nothing in common" as opposed to communities attempting to "(re-)establish strong identification and bonding" (Wildemeersch and Kurantowicz 2011, p. 130).

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Regarding this view on community, citizenship is not understood as a tool for the inclusion and accommodation of citizens, immigrants or refugees into the mainstream values and norms of our societies (Wildemeersch 2014a); Europe's experience of multiculturalism has been characterized by exclusion (Kymlicka 2007) and is best summarised by Žižek (2008): It is about our community; you will love it or otherwise get out of it. This approach to citizenship can be represented by the phrase "citizenship as status" and is associated with the rights and duties that are inherent to membership of a particular community (Wildemeersch and Vandenabeele 2010). In contrast, citizenship in democratic communities means active engagement in collective debates, campaigns and decision-making processes in which democratic practices can be experienced in the context of the public sphere as learning opportunities. In this sense, citizenship is understood as "citizenship as practice" and is associated with active participation in communities (Wildemeersch 2014a; Wildemeersch and Vandenabeele 2010).

Notwithstanding the above, the following research question is posed: What are the possibilities for democratic adult education, i.e. democratic citizenship understood as "citizenship as practice", in contemporary multicultural communities that are characterised by pluralism and difference? In this regard, priority will be given to the political dimension of education and learning and to the concept of democracy, which is inevitably linked to the open space of debate, plurality of opinion, disagreement, struggle and "conflict" because plurality, difference and antagonisms represent the *raison d'être* for democratic practices (Biesta 2014; Koczanowicz 2013). Beginning with Habermas's notion of deliberative democracy and the public sphere, attention will then focus on a critique of his model of democracy, developed by Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière, which demonstrates how Habermas's notion of democracy fails to adequately address the issues relating to power and difference that are crucial in today's multicultural communities. Drawing on Mouffe's and Rancière's notion of "the political" and "politics", the argument put forward in this paper will be that democratic citizenship is perceived to be a democratic practice in which all potentially affected members of a community can actively participate and speak as equal members, while respecting values of solidarity, equality and liberty of all. To conclude, some remarks will be made on adult education and how this relates to democratic citizenship in a multicultural world.

From a consensus-based to an antagonistic dialogical model of deliberative democracy

The work of Jürgen Habermas (1996), who advocates democracy as a space for deliberation, dialogue and the public use of reason for free and equal citizens, represents

a good starting point for a discussion about democracy and public sphere theory. The public sphere is a key concept of democracy that provides a normative basis for rational-critical deliberation and a space for generating public opinion that is aimed at achieving a common understanding or consensus on all important societal issues. Although consensus is rarely reached, as Habermas (1996) himself admits, he is also convinced that it is in principle always possible to achieve this in every act of human communication and that this "is also preserved for communication among strangers" (p. 366). In civil society, the public sphere is where people (members of the political community) discuss matters of mutual concern and learn about the perspectives of others; it is therefore an arena in which a collective will is produced (through publicly exchanged arguments) and political decisions are justified accordingly (see also Fleming 2002; Fraser 2007; Karppinen et al. 2008; Koczanowicz 2013). As Habermas (1996) puts it:

> The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions (p. 360).

Composed of "spontaneously emergent associations, organizations and movements", civil society is also seen as a space where the power of the state and the economy can be reduced, and it "comprises a network of associations that institutionalize problem solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres" (Habermas 1996, p. 367). These associations form a basis for the general public, which comprises citizens "who want to have an influence on institutionalised opinion and will-formation" (p. 367), whereas liberal freedoms of press, radio, and television are intended to preserve "openness for competing opinions and a representative diversity of voices" (Habermas 1996, p. 368). Only an "energetic civil society" (Habermas 1996, p. 369) can protect the communicative structures of the public sphere from its deformations and exercise direct influence on the political system. With regard to Habermas's "two-track" political structure, civil society is located in the informal political sphere, whereas members of the political community take decisions, pass laws and implement policies through institutional arenas in the formal political sphere. The political system therefore functions well if civil society and public opinion influence decision-making institutions policies and laws (Finlayson 2005).

Many adult educators have been involved in identifying spaces where critical learning can take place in civil society in accordance with the "critical" or "radical" traditions of adult education; this is because they regard a civil society that is free from domination by the state or the economy as being a prime location for learning (see Fleming 2002, pp. 2-3) and envisage adult education as an engine of social change that can significantly

contribute to preserving democracy and emancipation by adults learning the principles of democratic reason, active citizenship and communicative action, leading to "counter--hegemonic" practices (see, for example, Brookfield 2010; Fleming and Murphy 2010; Welton 2001). However, critical learning in civil society and "counter-hegemonic" practices can be easily adopted also by the right-wing extremist movements. To become "radicalised" today mainly means to practice Islamist "extremism" and violence: ISIS is also a form of public pedagogy connected with civil society that seeks to educate Muslims who experience oppression about the causes of their suffering and finding the solutions to it (Low 2016). The main question is therefore, how to establish the public sphere as a space for practising democracy and not violent extremism.

Habermas's model of deliberative democracy and the public sphere have also been heavily criticised for reproducing the idea of a rather homogenous (Westphalian) nation-state, simplifying social unity and rational consensus and failing to adequately address pluralism and power (see Fraser 2007; Karppinen et al. 2008). Challenging the Westphalian nation-state framework, Fraser (2007) points out the blind spots in Habermas's public sphere theory. In terms of where the public coincides with a national citizenry and territory, she demonstrates the following:

> The equation of citizenship, nationality and territorial residence is belied by such phenomena as migrations, diasporas, dual and triple citizenship arrangements, indigenous community membership and patterns of multiple residency. Every state now has non-citizens on its territory; most are multicultural and/or multinational; and every nationality is territorially dispersed. Equally confounding, however, is the fact that public spheres today are not coextensive with political membership (p. 16).

As Fraser (2007) argues, today's public spheres are instead post- or trans-national in nature and not tied to national citizenry; they represent a collection of diversified interlocutors that can become fellow members through their "co-imbrication in a common set of structures and/or institutions that affect their lives" (p. 22) and not shared citizenship. Public opinion is legitimate only if all the "potentially affected" members of a community can participate as "peers, regardless of political citizenship" (Fraser 2007, p. 22).

Taking this view as a starting point, Chantal Mouffe (2005) and Jacques Rancière (1999) demonstrate how Habermas's model of deliberative democracy fails to adequately address the issues of power and difference that are vital for democratic multicultural communities. Their critiques will be addressed below: Mouffe's concept of "the political" and Rancière's notion of "disagreement".

Politics and "the political"

There is a distinction between the social and political and between "politics" and "the political". Politics is a set of practices and institutions through which social order is created, based on a consensus among the different actors involved in the decision-making process. The political, however, refers to the antagonistic and conflictual nature of our social and political life – Mouffe (2005) shows that, by negating the political, the consensual form of liberal democracy cannot grasp the pluralistic and conflictual nature of our social world. In contrast to Habermas, she envisages the creation of a "vibrant 'agonistic' public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted" (Mouffe 2005, p. 3). Starting from pluralism, which is understood as the recognition of an ineradicable conflict, and seeing conflicts as a legitimate force in democratic communities, she emphasises that "some kind of common bond must exist between the parties in conflict" (Mouffe 2005, p. 20) in order not to destroy political associations. Antagonisms, in which two sides, "we" and "they", are enemies without any common ground, must transform into a relationship of "agonism", which recognises the legitimacy of their opponents' perspectives. Opponents are understood as "adversaries" – not enemies – and, while in conflict, "they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place" (Mouffe 2005, p. 20). However, the main task of democracy is to change antagonism into agonism because agonisms and differences are integral to democracy. On the one hand, democracy actually requires a "clash of legitimate democratic political positions" (p. 30) but, on the other, it cannot involve unrestricted pluralism. As Mouffe explains:

> The pluralism that I advocate requires discriminating between demands which are to be accepted as part of the agonistic debate and those which are to be excluded. A democratic society cannot treat those who put its basic institutions into question as legitimate adversaries. The agonistic approach does not pretend to encompass all differences […]. But exclusions are envisaged in political and not moral terms (p. 120).

The main point of (agonistic) democracy, which is understood as "conflictual consensus", is therefore to provide a common symbolic space where agonistic debate can take place between adversaries who respect the "ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all" but disagree on their meaning, interpretation and implementation (Mouffe 2005, p. 121). There is no one truth and there is also no special community in possession of it. In an agonistic democracy, we are faced not only with a plurality of truths that are always in conflict, but also with a democratic order that is not set in stone, but can be challenged as a democratic settlement may be also incomplete (see Biesta 2014, pp. 3-4). However, by arguing in favour of limited pluralism in democratic

societies, Mouffe's (2005) position on multiculturalism is also clear: a distinction needs to be made between a set of demands (cultural norms and customs) that should be recognised and granted and those that can lead to the destruction of democratic societies. As she emphasises, democratic societies and communities demand the allegiance of their members to the shared set of ethico-political principles embedded in the constitution or legal framework and cannot allow the "coexistence of conflicting principles of legitimacy in its midst" (p. 122).

Applying Mouffe's notion of agonistic democracy to the field of adult education, we can see that democracy is not primarily characterised as a space of consensus, but as a space for disagreement. Moreover, citizenship in democratic communities means active engagement in collective debates which are characterised by a pluralism of conflict and difference, actions and decision-making process, where democratic practices can be experienced in the context of the public sphere as learning opportunities. Citizenship is not understood as a "status" which corresponds to the rights and duties associated with (rational) community membership, where citizens, refugees or asylum seekers must first adapt to the existing socio-political order in order to participate, and where "strangers" must assimilate and eradicate their differences in order to fit into their communities. On the contrary, it is understood as a democratic "practice" or "experiment" in which all potentially affected members of a community can actively participate, speak and communicate in an open space, in a community that "preserves openness", and where they can experience democratic participation while respecting equality and liberty for all (Biesta 2014; Vandenabeele et al. 2011; Wildemeersch 2014a; Wildemeersch and Vandenabeele 2010). In multicultural communities, we should therefore engage in debates with "strangers", recognise them as equal partners in dialogue even though we cannot understand them and "learn to deal with the strangeness and otherness of our partners in dialogue" (Wildemeersch 2014a, p. 26).

Disagreement: "the police" and politics

In contrast to Habermas's notion of dialogue and deliberative democracy, Rancière (1999) argues that misunderstandings and disagreements are fundamental principles of democracy and democratic societies. In opposition to Habermas's "ideal speech situation", Rancière instead creates a kind of "non-ideal" speech situation. In his view, disagreement is best represented in the following way:

> One of the interlocutors at once understands and does not understand what the other is saying. Disagreement is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it […] (p. x).

Disagreement is a power-based misunderstanding between the poor and rich, who struggle for a more equal distribution, but which "cannot take place at the same table" as there is no place for the poor at the table and their political position is not recognised and accepted (Doerr 2013). It also represents a misunderstanding between workers and the bourgeoisie because the workers' vocation is to work and that of the bourgeoisie is to think. In contrast to seeking a solution by way of rational consensus, Rancière (1999) suggests that a positive understanding of disagreement requires a politics of interruption and "the return of politics" (p. 92). He therefore distinguishes between two systems of logic: "the police" (or social) order, being associated with the organisation of powers and the system for legitimizing and distributing places and roles, that can never be fully equal (although it is all-inclusive as everyone has a particular place and position in it), and "politics", representing the interruption of police order; politics being part of those "who have no part", being able to shift the "body from the place assigned to it" and make "visible what had no business being seen" (Rancière 1999, p. 30). For example, politics was an activity carried out by 19th century workers who, instead of sleeping, spent their nights attempting to enter a world that was not supposed to be theirs: a world of writing, thinking, composing and philosophising. By educating themselves in this way, Rancière (2012) says that the workers were able to free themselves from the "very exercise of everyday work or by winning from nightly rest" the time to think and discuss (p. ix). If the working-class did not want to be excluded from the public sphere, or "included as excluded" (Rancière 1999, p. 119) as was the case with the women, children and slaves in Athens, they needed to find a way to create work, i.e. by making the invisible visible and by taking time to discuss and use the language used by the "other", i.e. the bourgeoisie. In this way they "asserted themselves as inhabitants with full rights of a common world" (Rancière 2012, p. ix) and proved their equality.

Politics therefore occurs when police logic meets with the process of equality and is defined as follows by Rancière (1999, p. 30): "the open set of practices driven by the assumption of equality between any and every speaking being and by the concern to test this equality". Politics conceived in this way has nothing to do with Habermas's notion of democracy or a promised "real" democracy of the future, but it is always already here, embedded in the everyday practice of a unique meeting between equality and inequality. Democracy is "politics' mode of subjectification" (Rancière 1999, p. 99): it represents not only a disruption or interruption of the existing police (social) order with reference to equality for all, but also a reconfiguration of this order, in which new ways of acting and new identities occur (Biesta 2014, p. 5). Subjectification arises when dominated groups invent themselves as political subjects – with a specific identity that

did not exist before – that is equal to the dominant and able to alter power relations through action (Biesta 2010; Doerr 2013).

Applying Rancière's notion of politics and democracy to adult education, we can see that democracy is not linked to any specific social order or way of life, but to the moments in which one may interrupt and reconfigure the existing social order to achieve equality for all. In this sense a plurality of voices must "come into existence". Therefore, civic learning, conceptualised as "political subjectification", is associated with an "experiment" of democracy and understood as a process of transformation. It is through participation in democratic practices that citizenship and democratic agency can be strengthened. In other words, the main challenge faced by civic learning lies in strengthening civic action in the public sphere. Since no special knowledge is required to participate, contribute, join an enterprise, be treated as an equal and question what is taken for granted, everyone can join this experiment of democracy (Biesta 2014; Biesta and Cowell 2016; Wildemeersch 2014b).

Concluding remarks

In light of the recent terrorist attacks and refugee crisis in Europe, Žižek (2015a; 2015b) emphasised that what Europe needs today is a "solidarity of struggles" and not a "dialogue of cultures". In the context of this consensual democratic "dialogue of cultures", he says that refugees are excluded from public debate and the media and do not have a space to speak in the public sphere. Moreover, someone is always speaking on their behalf. To illustrate his point, emphasising the need for "struggle" and referring to a film about Malcolm X, Žižek (2015a) makes the following point:

> After Malcolm X gives a talk at a college, a white student girl approaches him and asks him what she can do to help the black struggle. He answers: 'Nothing'. The point of this answer is not that whites should just do nothing. Instead, they should first accept that black liberation should be the work of the blacks themselves, not something bestowed on them as a gift by the good white liberals. Only on the basis of this acceptance can they do something to help blacks ("Where does the," p. 4).

This is a good example for the arguments put forward in this paper about democratic practices and also opens new perspectives on the roles to be taken by adult educators in a multicultural world characterised by pluralism, difference and many truths, as they (and learners) should connect with what is happening in the public sphere (Veloso and Guimarães 2015).

We began our investigation of the field of adult education by exploring its community and citizenship context. Regarding community, we emphasised that adults can contribute to the development of their communities and that communities designed as

public spaces can strengthen civil society and foster democratic ways of living and learning together. However, today's communities are not homogeneous places, but are instead either multicultural or in the process of becoming so. In line with this understanding of community, also referred to as a "community of those who have nothing in common", we then addressed the question of democratic citizenship. In contrast to understanding citizenship as a "status" which serves not only as a tool for citizens or refugees to include and adopt the mainstream values of western rational communities, but also as a norm (of what it means to be a citizen) that excludes everyone from the community falling to meet this norm, we explored the notion of "citizenship as practice", which is associated with active participation in communities where democratic practices can be experienced as learning opportunities. Here, special attention was devoted to the notion of democracy and democratic practices. First, we explored Habermas's notion of democracy and the public sphere as a space for deliberation, dialogue and the public use of reason by free and equal citizens, and drew attention to Habermas's endeavours in developing the public sphere and civil society as a prime location for learning the principles of democratic reason, active citizenship and communicative action. However, as critics have already noted, Habermas's notion of deliberative democracy is based on the assumptions of a rather homogeneous nation-state, social unity and rational consensus, whereas the social reality is closer to the conflictual situation of diversity and pluralism, and that is why he did not adequately address pluralism and power. In contrast to the "ideal speech situation" and reaching rational consensus in the public sphere, we showed, by appealing to Mouffe's and Rancière's notion of political/politics, that democracy and democratic practices are all about plurality of opinions/truths, disagreements and conflicts. While Mouffe sees democracy as a form of "conflictual consensus" which ensures a symbolic space in which an agonistic debate between all (potential) members of a community can take place, while respecting democratic values of liberty and equality, but disagreeing about their meaning (as democratic order is not a given or set in stone, but can be challenged and changed), Rancière sees democracy not as a specific social order or way of life, but as (democratic) moments which can interrupt and reconfigure the existing social order to create equality of all, meaning the formulation of new ways of acting and new identities.

Therefore, by exploring the community and citizenship context of adult education, by recognising that adults can contribute to democratic methods of learning and living together in their (multicultural) communities, and by identifying the public sphere as a space in which democratic relationships can be established and democratic practices such as learning opportunities experienced, we can make the following concluding remarks about democratic adult education in a multicultural world. Democratic citizenship should be understood as a democratic practice, meaning that all potentially

affected members of one community (citizens, immigrants, refugees, etc.) can actively participate and speak in a community as equals while respecting the values of solidarity, equality and liberty for all. "Others" should be recognised as equal partners in dialogue "across differences" and should be able to speak with their own voice in a public (agonistic) space and in communities that are open in character and enable a plurality of voices to be realised. It is here where their "struggle" for agonistic democracy and social issues of public concern and our learning about their otherness could begin, although democratic methods of acting are not a guaranteed outcome of such endeavours.

Finally, in this context, adult educators should encourage the emergence of public (agonistic) spaces and open communities, combatting the growing colonisation of the public sphere by private and market relationships, in which a plurality of voices can be achieved along with the development of new ideas, perspectives and solutions; not by acting as "enlightened intellectuals" providing the correct answers and solutions to immigrants and citizens as to how they should live together in contemporary democratic multicultural communities. This has been an often prescribed "recipe" for the emancipation of different marginalised or disadvantage groups which is to be found in critical or radical traditions of adult education arising from the thought of Habermas and/or Freire. On the contrary, the following notions should be considered: engaging with different members of a community in an agonistic debate, working with them in real-life community contexts and building on their personal reflections with equality for all taken into account.

Mouffe and Rancière challenge the predominant view of adult education and the role of adult educators in the radical adult education tradition, associated with preserving democracy and emancipatory learning, and "call" adult educators working in non-formal and informal learning community contexts to reconsider adult education's emancipatory presumptions. Namely, according to Rancière, the role of adult educators should be in opening community public spaces and in motivating all community members for acting, as in this way democratic moments can occur and reconfigure the existing (undemocratic) social order. As for Mouffe, the role of adult educators should be in encouraging active participation in communities of all potentially affected community members, because citizenship is associated with democratic practices that can be experienced as learning opportunities. Adult educators should also ensure open public spaces of conversation in which an agonistic debate can take place under the democratic values of liberty and equality for all, as this can lead to democratic transformation of communities and empowerment of its members. If adult educators can contribute to promoting communities that preserve openness, then citizens, immigrants and refugees will be able to participate, speak with their own voice as equals and learn

citizenship practices with the potential of creating new ways of acting, new identities, new knowledge and new ways of living together.

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SUMMARY: In this article the author explores possibilities for democratic adult education understood as "citizenship as practice" in contemporary multicultural communities that are characterised by pluralism and difference. Priority is given to the political dimension of education and learning and to the concept of democracy, which is inevitably linked to the open space of debate, disagreement, struggle and "conflict" because these represent the *raison d'être* for democratic practices. Beginning with Habermas's notion of deliberative democracy and the public sphere, the author demonstrate how this notion of democracy fails to adequately address the issues relating to power and difference that are crucial in today's multicultural communities. By drawing on Mouffe's and Rancière's notion of "the political" and "politics" he rather argues that democratic citizenship is perceived to be a democratic practice in which all potentially affected members of a community can actively participate and speak

as equal members regardless of their (legal) status, and where democratic practices can be experienced as learning opportunities. In the conclusion, conceptualisation of adult education and how it relates to democratic citizenship in the contemporary multicultural world is presented.
KEYWORDS: adult education, citizenship, community, democracy, multiculturalism.

O DEMOKRATYCZNEJ EDUKACJI DOROSŁYCH: KIEROWANIE DIALOGIEM POMIĘDZY KONSENSUSEM A DYSKRYMINACJĄ WE WSPÓŁCZESNYCH SPOŁECZNOŚCIACH WIELOKULTUROWYCH

STRESZCZENIE: W niniejszym artykule autor rozpoznaje możliwości demokratycznej edukacji dorosłych, rozumiejącej „obywatelstwo jako praktykę" we współczesnych społecznościach wielokulturowych, które charakteryzuje pluralizm i różnica. Priorytetem jest polityczny wymiar edukacji, uczenie się oraz koncepcja edukacji. Jest to nierozłącznie związane z otwartą przestrzenią debaty, niezgody i „konfliktu", co stanowi podstawę dla praktyki demokracji. Zaczynając od koncepcji Jürgena Habermasa, dotyczącej deliberatywnej demokracji i strefy publicznej, gdzie już sam autor ukazywał braki tej koncepcji, niewystarczająco odpowiadającej kwestiom związanym z władzą i różnicą, które są tak istotne dla współczesnych społeczności wielokulturowych. Habermas, odnosząc się do koncepcji Chantal Mouffe i Jacques'a Rancière'a na temat „polityczności" i „polityki", argumentuje, że demokratyczne obywatelstwo powinno być postrzegane jako demokratyczna praktyka, w której wszyscy potencjalni członkowie społeczności mogą w niej aktywnie uczestniczyć i mówić jako równi członkowie niezależnie od ich statusu. Wówczas demokratyczna praktyka może być także doświadczana jako możliwość uczenia się. W konkluzji autor przedstawił koncepcję edukacji dorosłych i jej związek z demokratycznym obywatelstwem we współczesnych społecznościach wielokulturowych.
SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: edukacja dorosłych, obywatelstwo, społeczności, demokracja, wielokulturowość.