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Ableism and Racism – Barriers in the Labour Market

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Abstract

Despite the existence of legal instruments designed to protect against discrimination, people with disabilities and with a migrant background nonetheless experience significant barriers in the labour market. As a qualitative study conducted in Hamburg shows, discrimination in the labour market of a Germany embarked on a neoliberal course, rather than working through absolute exclusion, works instead through forms of “limited inclusion”. This paper discusses the extent to which, in this context, ableism and racism act as “bio-political caesuras” (Foucault 2003), although not recognisable as such, since they appear as individualised questions of efficiency, competence, motivation, and the willingness to integrate, and thus become the responsibility of those affected.

Keywords

Ableism, racism, biopolitical caesuras, neoliberal responsibility, Limited inclusion, micro politics, agencement, labour market.

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Introduction

Labour market data for Germany, which at first appear positive by European standards, at second glance turn out to be deceptive, since there are groups of people within society who face significant barriers in accessing the open labour market, or are indeed completely excluded from this market, coming away empty-handed in the present job boom. In particular, these groups include those who as a result of being labelled “disabled” or “chronically ill”, and as people with a so-called migration background and other marks of difference – such as ageism or sexism - suffer multiple discriminations. Although various legal instruments aimed at countering discrimination have indeed been created, such as the General Equal Treatment Act (Ger. abbr. AGG) 2006, the EU directive on Equal Treatment Ethnic Origin (2000), the directive on Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation (2000), as well as the UN Disability Convention, tenacious structures still exist that block the right to inclusion in the open labour market. In an ongoing pilot study in Hamburg, Germany, we seek to analyse barriers to labour market access for people subject to multiple discrimination – both disabled and with a migrant background. In this paper we wish to discuss the initial results of this study as well as examine some resulting theoretical considerations.

Research design

In our investigation of multiple forms of discrimination, we extend the widely applied perspective of intersectionality (hooks 1984; Crenshaw 1989; Hill Collins, Andersen 1992; Klinger 2003; Klinger 2003; Jacob, Köbsell, Wollrad 2010), which seeks to analyse the

superimpositions and interdependencies of different axes of difference. To address the complexity of the phenomenon, it seemed necessary to go beyond approaches that are viewing people affected by discrimination solely as victims and reflections of difference constructions and their resulting exclusions. Instead, it seemed essential to consider the heterogeneity of the connections linking the numerous aspects and actors involved. Thus, it would be possible to examine both the constitutive contexts of entrenched marginalisations, as well as the dynamics of the fluid, contested and changing elements of the constructs of disability and racism - as well as other axes of difference - in the sense of a procedural event. This also means including in the analysis those forms of agency and micropolitical practices of actors that seek to escape the prescribed discrimination and subjectification structures (Pieper et al 2011). This perspective is consistent with the demand of the UN Disability Convention to consider disability, not as a distinguishing mark of a person, and thus in isolation, but rather to grasp people in their respective, situationally different potential, in their interaction with the social environment and entanglement with other categories of difference. Therefore, we use the concept of the assemblage (Fr. *agencement*; Deleuze, Guattari 1987) to examine: the relation linking a heterogeneity of bodies, or human and non-human actors; knowledge production about this; laws and regulations; power constellations; architectural constraints; tools; objects of daily use; situation-specific aids; and movements of desire (Grosz 1994; De Landa 2006; Philips 2006; Puar 2007; Shildrick 2009; Pieper, Panagiotidis, Tsianos 2009; 2011; Pieper, Kuster, Tsianos 2011).¹ Such analytics help avoid

¹ With "agencements" authors such as Deleuze, Guattari (1987); Grosz (1994); DeLanda (2006); and Shildrick (2009) describe a procedural event, processes of "becoming", in which an active bringing about of something new occurs. Agencements are not only characterised by segmenting lines (as here with forms of discrimination), but also by "lines of flight" and incessant movements that, over and over, push forward a process of constant, unfinished reorganisation. Characteristics of "agencements" are, firstly, the heterogeneity of the elements involved, out of whose connections "agencements" are formed. Secondly, it is the movement and the intensity that drive these connections. Here, questions of affect and desire play a role. Desire is not interpreted as a form of lack, but rather as a type of driving force (see Spinoza 1989 *conatus*), aimed at self-preservation (e.g., better living conditions). However, one cannot ascribe to an "agencement" the activity resulting from the personal agency of intentional subjects, as a possible imputed link to the English term "agency" might suggest. Here it is the ability of bodies (i.e. human and non-human entities) to affect and be affected that is to the foreground, and

a descent into structural determinism, or the exaggeration of the personal agency potential of an imagined autonomous and intentional subject. The question is rather how to describe the processuality and the situational dynamics present in the heterogeneity of a relational network linking both a multiplicity of human and non-human bodies, and influencing factors.

Sample

- Twenty narrative interviews (Schütze 1987) conducted with people with migration backgrounds and disability or chronic illness, and thirty guided interviews (Meuser, Nagel 2009) with actors from politics, activism, NGOs, employment agencies, and integration service businesses.
- An interview study with personnel managers of the 250 largest companies in Hamburg.
- Ten ethnographies (Hammersley, Atkinson 1983) with participant observation in different companies, integration firms, and workshops for disabled people.

Data analysis

The data analysis of the sample survey on the hiring practices of companies is based on quantitative statistical criteria. As it is not yet complete, it has not been systematically integrated into the following presentation. We evaluated the intensive semi-structured expert and narrative-biographical interviews in the style of "Grounded Theory" (Strauss, Corbin 1990), using the corresponding encoding techniques. This allowed us to address the peculiarities and specifics of the different social fields and their characteristic practices, structures and dynamics from an assemblage-analytical perspective.

The analysis focuses on attitudinal and environmental access barriers to the labour market, as well as possible forms of discrimination in the workplace. It also seeks to

thus those pre-personal intensities that make connections and describe lines of flight that point beyond existing orders (cf. Shouse 2005; Massumi 2010).

determine the kinds of situational micro-politics that the discriminated bring to bear in their quest for a better life.

Ableism and racism

Since they do not refer to any uniform group, the labels "immigrant" and "disability" ("chronic disease") are problematic and vague terms. In fact, they cover a diverse range of people with very different biographies, skills, potential, educational capital, needs, and residency status; and who have to deal with various types of barriers. What "disability", "chronic disease", and the term "migrant background", as understood in terms of a "continuous embodied experience" (Stephenson, Papadopoulos 2006: 171), actually mean can only be adequately grasped through an analysis of the complex interplay of different factors in day-to-day life. These include very central attitudinal and environmental barriers, i.e. knowledge production about "fit and healthy bodies" or the norms applied, the legal frameworks and regulations as well as the architectural barriers; but they also include the possibilities and potential of people, as well as the support and aids that are available. This complexity requires an approach that takes cognisance of specific processes and contexts.

During our study of the barriers that restrict access to the labour market, it clearly emerged that the attributions "disability" and "migrant background" cannot be regarded as specific characteristics relating to particular individuals. They are actually synonyms for two axes of difference that are reproduced again and again within present-day society: ableism and racism. These two vectors of discrimination act as powerful ushers, performing control functions in terms of school attendance and educational paths; and thus they exert a decisive influence on participation in the labour market, with all the associated long-term biographical consequences.

Ableism

As we understand it, the term ableism refers to the socio-cultural production of a norm and normality that presupposes the efficient (non-disabled) body as the unquestioned natural and privileged state (Campbell 2009 Maskos 2010; Wolbring 2008; Pieper 2011). Ableism manifests itself at the discursive-symbolic level - such as in idealised conceptions of productivity and body image, an ideal that for most people represents at best a short period in their lives. Ableism is also materialised in the institutions of justice, in forms of communication (which are centrally aligned with vision and hearing), and in architectural features, as well as in appliances, tools and objects of everyday use that only specific categories of people find useful and usable. Ultimately, ableism also operates via segregation practices and institutions responsible for assigning to special institutions those who actually or supposedly do not meet performative norms. For many of those labelled "disabled" in present-day Germany, this designation involves a career in segregated institutions - from special kindergartens and special schools to special vocational institutions and jobs in sheltered workshops. This is still the case despite the coming into effect of the UN Disability Convention, with its entitlement to full and equal participation in all spheres of social life. The opportunities for participation in the general labour market, however, are extremely limited for those not deemed to reach the ideal of ableism. For one, the character of the world of work has changed dramatically in the course of the neoliberal transformation of recent years. In the transition to a service economy, there are fewer and fewer long-term, continuous employment opportunities, and more and more "precarious" jobs. Value creation in business is more and more a question of the economic exploitation of a flexible and mobile labour force, where employment is temporary so as to facilitate subsequent lay-off. At the same time, maximum performance of "human resources" has become the primary imperative.

Thus, the integration service consultants we interviewed for our study, and whose task

it is to aid the placement of people with disabilities in the open labour market, report an extraordinarily low willingness of companies to offer permanent employment to people with disabilities. They also testify to the scandalous "dumping" wage levels offered to disabled job-seekers. The group of people diagnosed as "mentally handicapped" have to struggle with such massive employment barriers that it is only by concealing their illness and disability status that they have any chance of employment. This group is seen both as liable to unpredictable fluctuations in performance capacity, and as a factor likely to disrupt economic and efficient work-practices.

As our interviews with personnel managers in Hamburg companies indicate, the terms "disability", "severe disability", and "migrant background" engender, almost reflexively, negative stereotypes. These are almost invariably related to one-dimensional images of "difference", and linked to ideas of inferiority - as the following interview excerpt illustrates:

Personnel manager: "Well, yes, obviously, what makes you hesitate with severely disabled people, why they don't get the job, is clearly the fear that they'll be ill more often, have more downtime and, em, that the people, once they have the job, then you won't be able to let them go any more because they enjoy this extra protection against dismissal. So, if someone isn't performing adequately then you can deal with a normal employee differently than you can with a severely disabled one And for employees with a migration background, well these fears obviously don't apply, em, but I think the concern then is how they'll integrate into the team, and whether they'll be accepted or not."

These one-dimensional images of "severe disability"- as well as the anticipated behavioural uncertainties and negative affective contouring ("this fear") in dealing with persons thus stigmatised - do not simply spring from the personal assessments of the HR managers we surveyed. They rather suggest, due to their relatively monotonous repetition in a number of interviews, that they reflect social power relations that are closely linked to notions of the optimum utility of labour in the respective production regimes. Following Fiona Kumari Campbell (2009), we refer to this power relationship as ableism. With this concept, Fiona Kumari Campbell (2009) describes a network of unanswered, supposedly self-evident,

beliefs, practices and institutions that are deeply and unquestionably embedded in our society; and that presuppose a specific form of the self and of physical standards that is perfect, species-typical, and therefore viewed as "natural" and universally human. The regime of ableism involves a process of establishing and maintaining imaginations of the body in the sense of a normative, obligatory "ableness", a phantasm of "perfect" materiality that is assigned a privileged status. In contrast, the diversity of manifestations of human existence emerges as inferior and inherently negative. Going beyond Kumari Campell, we wish to stress that the regime of ableism cannot be investigated independently of the specific geopolitical context and production regime, and that other axes of difference (racism, sexism, ageism) must also be included in the analysis, including the situational dynamics of all the circumstances and actors involved.

Racism

The forms of unquestioned self-evident hierarchy engendered by ableism exhibit analogies to racist logics, where practices and discourses of "whiteness" (Frankenberg 1997), and belonging to a "German, Western Christian culture" (hence a form of "occidentalism"; Dietze 2010), emerge as an unquestioned and unnamed norm, performing the function of societal ushers. Indeed, both logics of domination, ableism and racism, often exhibit close links and overlaps. Racism often articulates itself through ableism when, for example - as we have observed in our empirical research - the status of an inferior intellectual ability is assigned to racially marked subjects.

Racism can be viewed as a flexible chain of discriminatory practices and knowledge productions that follows ever-changing cycles. Compared to the more monistic structures exhibited by biological racist arguments in the 19th century, we now encounter multiple manifestations and strategies. In our contemporary German immigration society, racism

presents itself as an archipelago of various, overlapping formations, from openly racist violence to different forms of discrimination in everyday life, through to subtle variations of institutionalised racism - as can be seen, for example, in the structures of the immigration laws of the European Union, the rules of European Union's citizenship rights and the German law, the opportunities of accessing the labour market in Germany, or the secular ban on headscarves articulated for example in German court decisions (Tsianos, Pieper 2011: 194 ff). Currently, one can observe forms of racism directed against migrants and their post-migrant descendants. This often involves discourses, policies and practices of state and civil society institutions that produce systematic forms of discrimination without having to exhibit explicitly and intentionally racist reasoning patterns, operating rather with attributions and practices which on the surface appear to be reasonable and value-neutral (Tsianos/Pieper 2011: 195).

Thus, in our interviews with company personnel managers we frequently encounter the "headscarf-wearing woman", and the "Muslim man who refuses to listen to anything his female managers tell him", as signifiers of irreconcilable difference. They become ciphers for the alleged "backwardness" of a supposedly homogeneous "Islamic culture" that, through its refusal to integrate, hinder its own inclusion in the labour market.

Etienne Balibar (1990) has characterised this anti-migrant racism as "neo-racism" or "differentialist racism", which functions via the trope of the incompatibility of cultures. However, we can attest to the formation of a "post-liberal model" of institutional racism that unites two opposing paradigms: "... on the one hand, the nation or political nationalism, based on the notion of an 'essential community' and its unique fate, and, on the other hand, the market, based on competition, which – unlike the nation – does not appear to have either an intimate or an external 'enemy' and thus to exclude no-one, but does however trigger generalised individual selection, which in its lower reaches means social elimination of the

‘incapable’ and ‘useless’” (Balibar 2008: 23).

Problematic of multiple discrimination

Our interviews show that the biopolitical caesuras of ableism often overlap with those racist constructions of citizenship law that decide according to the principles of efficiency and ability about inclusions and exclusions, and in the process generate multiple discrimination - as the example of our interview partner, Jamil, illustrates:

While still a child, Jamil came to Germany as a war refugee and received a disabled pass due to his war related injuries; however - unlike his other family members - he did not receive a secure residence status, but only the status of asylum seeker. He would like to study here and acquire further qualifications. However, despite having lived in Germany for twelve years and completing his elementary and secondary education, as well as training successfully as a retail salesman, he still works in a workshop for the disabled. Jamil is - as our research shows - not an isolated case. Placement in sheltered workshops is often presented as a positive exercise of a right to work, the cumulative negative effects tending to be largely ignored. These include exclusion from the mainstream labour market, the forgoing of advancement and social inclusion opportunities or remuneration adequate to secure a livelihood, and the concomitant risks of economic disadvantage reaching into retirement.

The unlikelihood that this situation can simply be attributed to a lack of ability or motivation on the part of those affected, but that it reflects segregation processes and the “illiberal demarcation policies” (Tsianos/Pieper 2011: 118) of immigration legislation is impressively underscored by Jamil’s situation. In fact he works at an “outsourced workplace”, which means he is employed by the workshop under their terms (for an allowance of less than € 200 per month) and is leased to a company where he holds a full-time job as a clerk, and where his managers are very satisfied with his performance. At the same time he is caught in

a kind of vicious circle: he cannot afford to end his employment relationship with the workshop because his immigration status depends on his being employed. At the same, due to the low income he receives in the workshop, he is unable to earn his livelihood without having to draw supplementary benefits, meaning he cannot attain citizenship. And so he is trapped in his insecure residence status.

Granting of citizenship rights is subject to the precondition of full inclusion in the general labour market and being able to secure one's livelihood. This precondition, due to exclusionary ableist and racist practices of segregation, has manoeuvred Jamil into a paradoxical situation. For one, his insecure residence status acts as an access barrier blocking his path. Secondly, on the open labour market he is met by the prejudice of his being "disabled", and therefore not fully productive; and in addition he faces the generalised assumption of difference due to his "migration background".

Neoliberal biopolitical governmentality – Response-ability

It would certainly be simplistic to identify ableism and racism exclusively as epiphenomena of capitalism; however, as a complex of discourses, power relations and practices, they do forge a close alliance with capitalist market logic, so that one may speak of a symbiotic relationship. Historically, the regime of ableism and racism is closely linked with the genealogy of biopolitics. Michel Foucault (1998; 2003; 2008) describes this as a new register of power that begins to emerge at the beginning of the 17th century on the threshold of modernity - at the transition from the "Ancien Régime" to the modern state and the accompanying rise of nascent capitalism (and colonialism). Foucault describes the genesis of a "power over life" (bios), a political "seizure of power over man as a living being" (Foucault 2003), which he regards as being undoubtedly one of the most important twists in the history of human society (Foucault 1998). This kind of power aims at making productive the life of

the population and of the individual. Biopolitical caesuras along the lines of ableism and racism distinguish between those who are to be "productive" and "may live", and those who are discarded.²

Since then both the expressions of capitalism, i.e. the production and accumulation regimes, as well as the variants of ableism and racism, have become transformed and now delineate new, historically and geopolitically specific contours. Germany has (as indeed have many other states) embarked on a neoliberal path. Under the banner of the neoliberal regime, the dictum of the economy becomes the all-determining rationality, one that simultaneously alters the terrain of social policy, but also the manner in which social groups, social relations, and self-relations are viewed. The "entrepreneurial self" (Bröckling 2007) as a technology of power, i.e. the invocation (Althusser 1977) of the autonomous subject as an entrepreneurial personality who markets and enhances his/her own "human resources" to the optimum, is closely linked to the utilitarian logic of ableism. More and more, issues of social inequality become the responsibility of those affected. These issues have now become risks to be averted by active personal intervention. The problem of unemployment takes on a new guise involving regulatory intervention, continual exhortations to find work, and the obligation to "continually and actively seek work and improve one's skills" (Rose 2000: 92, trans. from original German). The problematisation of unemployment, and ultimately the issue of social inequality, become reformulated in terms of competition between (potential) employees, and articulated as a question of their performance, motivation, and capacity for permanent self-modulation (Pieper 2007: 146). Government now uses a specific subjectivisation mechanism, one that Lealle Ruhl (1999: 97) describes as a strategy of "responsibilisation".

² Although this power is directed towards a "maximisation of life" (Foucault 1998) in "productive" and "production enhancing" fashion, this does not by any means imply the absence of violent measures and procedures. Cynically, these are carried out in the name of life, but under the banner of eugenics and racial discourses (Pieper et al. 2011: 11). "Biopolitical caesuras" along the lines of ableism and racism differentiate between those who "may live", and those who are selected out and - as the excesses of biopolitics during the Nazi regime in Germany illustrate in such an unimaginably awful way - driven to their deaths.

Under the neoliberal government of dis/ability, the solution of exclusion from the labour market (and from many areas of social life) of people classified as "disabled" or "migrant" becomes transformed into an issue of self-technology of those affected. Now the terrain has shifted from a "collective governance of marginalised people" to a new logic of "self-government by marginalised people". While liberalist humanism during the Fordist era in Germany treated "disabled" people as objects of care, the nascent movement of "disabled" people scandalized these practices as disenfranchisement and claimed "autonomy" and "autonomous life". These demands for an autonomous, self-determined life formulated by the disabled peoples' movement have been appropriated and purloined, as it were, by neoliberal politics. Self-determination became re-branded and returned as a new form of attributed individual/personal responsibility for the access to the labour market – of governance through self-guidance.

However, it appears that this form of neoliberal governmentality - as described by Foucault (2008) in his later work and, following him, by numerous authors of Governmentality Studies - is not the only form of governance pursued in the course of neoliberalism: the technology of governance working through the invocation of an "autonomous subject" or an "entrepreneurial self". In fact, our studies show that different technologies and rationalities of government enter into alliances and become superimposed. In the wake of the economic transformation processes, biopolitical caesuras along the lines of ableism and racism have not vanished; instead, they have adapted themselves to the neoliberal structures. Thus, forms of racial discrimination have changed little, be it in everyday life, or in the juridical regulations of the Immigration Act (2005), the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (1993/2011) and the primacy for European citizens on the labour market.

Limited inclusion

In fact, we can point to the regime of ableism as the most powerful present-day biopolitical regime, a regime which is closely related to the current neoliberal or post-Fordist production regime that operates by a total "making productive" (*Produktivmachung*) of the whole sphere of life. However, in our study we have observed that the current biopolitical caesuras, and thus the varieties of ableism and racism, do not simply involve binary boundaries and processes of exclusion of people stigmatised as "handicapped" or through racist attributions. We also observe processes of limited inclusion of those who, under current economic efficiency criteria, are considered "productive enough", "adaptable", and of "optimal utility".

The interviews conducted for our study on access to the "primary labour market" show how these processes of limited inclusion/exclusion function. Segregating practices that emerge early in the biographies of those affected by multiple discrimination emerge here as some of the most crucial actors. Both the institution of the (special) school, which often fails to equip those affected with the appropriate qualifications, and the recommendations of teachers or of Federal Employment Agency staff, exercise a central influence over their future lives. It is often the case that the people affected are not adequately informed of their rights or alternatives, or are denied an effective opportunity to have their say or exercise a right of appeal. Saliah, whose parents are from Morocco, describes how, after leaving a special school for the physically handicapped, she "ended up in a sheltered workshop", as she puts it - even though she really wanted to study for a high-school diploma:

Saliah: "That was because of my teacher, who wanted to put me here (in the sheltered workshops; MP) from the very beginning. So, the employment office said: "No, no, there's nothing else." So I had to go there (...). That's just mean, when you tell them you can read or you can write - right, but you still have to go the workshop."

Our empirical research has shown that many forms of such boundaries exist among those labelled as "disabled", whereby those labelled "market-compatible" and productive

- and thus as (relatively) autonomous - are distinguished from those deemed "not productive" enough, or not competitive on the labour market. Tests - such as those administered by the Federal Employment Agency - are often the instruments used to execute the biopolitical caesuras. This is well illustrated by the interview we conducted with Marisa - who needs a wheelchair, has been working in sheltered workshops for nine years, and is intent on trying to get a job in the primary labour market - not least because she finds the work in the workshop monotonous and not challenging enough, and her income ("What we earn is more or less pocket money. Someone like me gets only 150 Euros a month") is not enough for subsistence. She describes the test process as a sort of one-day degradation ceremony, with lasting biographical consequences:

Then there was a psychologist who discussed this test with me ... I could be working in the open labour market, but /em/ ... I've many, many weaknesses in different areas. My strongest ... where I was actually very good, was in German, in writing. But there's just nothing in the labour market that would really match this."

While it was possible (to work in the primary labour market) it was also a bit difficult, because for me it would actually be better to work in a slightly more protected area." This judgement, reached by an official body, pronounced as "truth" by the test and by the professional authority of the psychologist, develops such a strong potency that Marisa integrates it into her own self-concept: "And that's when I began to think it mightn't be such a bad idea if I stayed in the workshop." However, there is some evidence that what appears at first glance as "conformity" in the face of exclusion should ultimately be interpreted as a "tactic of survival" - the interview partner, by retaining the initiative, renders their situation tolerable and thus avoids falling victim to resignation. Because - refusing to accept the verdict as definitive - she still articulates a forceful abiding desire for a different, more appealing future: "But I still see it like that because it's, well, it's just a workshop, not the end of the world, so you can still work your way up, get promoted and get ahead, so that one day maybe, you can still make it."

Marisa interprets her chances of influencing her future as resting on her own ability to perform, viewing "working hard" and "getting more support" as strategies; thus her self-relation corresponds exactly with the invocations of neoliberal rationality and an ableist normativity. Under neoliberal governmental rationality, the question of exclusion from the "primary" labour market transforms into a question of the self-technologies of those affected: now it becomes their problem, to be solved by their own efforts. "Responsibilisation" is what Lealle Ruhl (1999) terms this subjectivisation mechanism that suggests to those concerned that social inequality is ultimately a matter of individual achievement, motivation and the ability for permanent self-modulation – and thus a problem that can be solved by incessant work on the optimisation of one's own qualifications.

Post-Fordist biographies

Inclusion in the primary labour market, sought by many, is becoming increasingly difficult in an era of neoliberal economics and post-Fordist production conditions creating more and more temporary and precarious work. For one, the willingness of companies to hire people with a severe disability status that enjoys special job protection is dwindling, since this is difficult to reconcile with "hire-and-fire" principles of economic flexibility (Yates, Roulstone 2012). And for those who do manage to get hold of a job in the market for precarious work, it often means manoeuvring themselves from job to job and from project to project. One has to live a "post-Fordist biography": "two years of work, unemployed for a year, two years of work, unemployed for a year", as one of our interview partners expressed it with analytical precision. This also includes repeatedly convincing potential employers - despite all the biopolitical caesuras of ableism and racism in their minds - of their own skills; having to bridge the time between jobs and projects; expending a lot of effort in the acquisition of new projects; always having to adapt flexibly to new work situations; ensuring

that the appropriate technical tools and - if necessary - job assistance is available; and accepting conditions of self-exploitation without being able to develop any alternative long-term biographical projects, and thus having to live with the prospect of an uncertain retirement.

Micropolitics – survival tactics within the biopolitical assemblages of ableism and racism

Under neoliberal governmentality, ableism and racism form what could be termed a total, biopolitical machine. Our interviews illustrate the level of effort needed, in view of these power relations, to carve out a place in society and on the labour market. Some of our interview partners have told us how their own experience of discrimination has prompted them to become activists themselves. Through their involvement in the disability and anti-racist movements, they have found a voice for themselves in the fight for equal rights. They describe a wealth of activities that they have organised at local and national level, using creative actions to highlight their discrimination at the hands of representational politics. In particular, interview partners affected by multiple discrimination describe how, despite not being able to rely on the support network of a political identity-based movement, they nonetheless manage to resist the subject positions of inferiority assigned to them by a society marked by racism and ableism. In the majority of cases what they are left with are various practices of "micro-politics" (Deleuze/Guattari 1987; Guattari 1977). This allows us describe all those singular, everyday acts that are driven by the desire for other, better living conditions, where people who have been denied participation - as Jacques Rancière (1998) describes it - create situations that allow them to improve their situation.

These practices work under the surface, as it were, of existing systems and power relations and are, from the perspective of traditional politics, imperceptible. They contain within themselves moments of transformation of the present that, within the moving

assemblages of relations linking numerous actors and influences as they negotiate and traverse existing conditions and orders, constitute themselves anew.

We wish to demonstrate this by analysing an interview we did with Amir, who came to Germany in his early 20s as a political refugee. As a result of prison terms and torture, he suffered lasting physical and psychological trauma. He is determined to fight for his place in a society marked by racism and ableism. For him, what proved particularly difficult was asserting his rights to support, paid therapy, study, and work. Here, he was confronted with a non-transparent, unresponsive, and hostile bureaucratic machinery; and a legal system that, despite proclaimed equality, still permits discrimination. His story confirms that, in the course of neoliberalism, not everyone is called as an autonomous subject. The biopolitical caesuras of racism and ableism, within the legal system, the administrative system, and in the minds of public authority employees, distinguish between those who are to be included, and those that are deemed non-productive and therefore "redundant", or "objects of care" to be referred to segregating institutions.

Amir describes himself, not as a passive and resigned victim of circumstance, but as someone who has begun a learning process in Germany. This applies to how he relates to his own body, and to the health problems stemming from his injuries and the lasting damage he has suffered. But it also means he has to recast his self-relation, given the ascriptions of racism and ableism which confront him in Germany - his own words: "to learn what I really am". For him, it also means deciphering the grammar of the new state and social system which now confronts him, in order to "understand what German society actually is", "to understand how this system actually works", in order to survive. And he first meets this society that he is trying to decipher mainly in the guise of state representatives - "officials" - together with a system of bureaucratic procedures and legal provisions that continually impose limits and restrictions - for example, when it comes to free choice of residence,

college or workplace - even after he has been granted citizenship. "I was immediately assigned to a category: disabled unemployed migrant" and: "They just stuffed me into a pigeon-hole. And I was right at the bottom". But he tenaciously rejects the inferior subject position he is constantly being assigned. He refuses to be admitted to a residential facility and efforts to send him to a sheltered workshop - despite an A-Level/high-school graduation equivalent qualification from his country of birth. "Yes, you are sick, you mustn't over-strain yourself. The system (the workshop) will allow you to go easy on yourself" is the paternalistic/protective rationalisation that makes of him, more or less, an object of care, and assigns him to the chain of segregating institutions, despite his aspirations for an autonomous life and a normal job.

Amir: "I was in a continuous stalemate. On the one hand, I was free - they told me: 'You are free to choose', but on the other hand, I was always dependent on the state. ... And, I've noticed there (dealing with officials) that particularly during interviews there's an /em/ powerlessness which is always there. On one side the laws that say I am free, that I have a democratic right to demand what is legally my due. And on the other side the ... the matter of discretion, that is, each official can decide about me, what I should do, where I should live, how much money should I get."

In this situation of powerlessness, Amir does not rely on his legal rights, which he sees as offering relatively little hope in his situation. Ultimately, he has no choice but to operate on the level of micro-practices, practices that may retrospectively be interpreted as affective politics. His capacity to affect others, to establish a relationship by telling his story, by "a little phrase" (...) "a smile", evokes a resonance, compassion, and empathy:³

³ In talking about affect and the processes of affecting and being affected, we refer to the works of Spinoza (1989); Deleuze (1988); Brian Massumi (2010). L'affection (Spinoza's affection) is each state considered as an encounter between an affected body and a second, affecting, body. (cf. Massumi 1987: xvi). Affect is an unconscious experience of intensity, a moment of unformed and unstructured potential that drives connections, "agencements/assemblages" (Deleuze/Guattari 1987), where a change in the existing alignments and conditions, a becoming, can emerge.

Amir: "And using these tactics, I also had the feeling, ... that I can bring others into a situation where they can also understand, where they feel sympathy; not pity, but sympathy ... that the others can also start to think a little."

With the help of these affective politics an "agencement" is created as a connection between such heterogeneous elements as bodies, the search for a better life, affects, legal regulations, related narrative, and other factors that cannot be explored here. Ways out or "lines of flight" (Deleuze/Guattari 1992: 19) emerge from this constellation that change Amir's subject position. He rejects the position of care "case" and object of pity by initiating a situation of sympathy, meeting on an equal footing, empathy at the level of shared humanity. We can compare this with Emanuel Levinas' (1969) and Judith Butler's (2005: 157 ff) reflections on self-recognition (and the precariousness of one's own existence) in the face of the person opposite, the other, triggering a recognition of responsibility, a responsibility that carries no paternalistic traits, but respectfully acknowledges the other person.

Using these affective politics, Amir succeeds in creating a common space that fosters a cooperative approach from the various official employees, and later on from potential employers. This "collaboration", as he terms it, encourages these officials to support him and to take decisions lying within their powers of "discretion" in his favour.

This is also the result of his persistent and determined pursuit of his interests. But most of all because he has learned the rules of the game, as it were, trying like a "trickster" (Haraway 1995: 18) to play along, to vary the rules, and to win the game for himself. This happens in different situations in government offices - such as the employment agency, for example - where he balances his feelings and does not allow himself to be affected by aggression and derogatory behaviour from official staff, but instead remains friendly and polite ("If you are aggressive and loud in the offices, they'll use that. And I never was"). At first glance, this could be interpreted as "conformity". But as the examples show, it is more of a tactical effort, a performance of a subaltern position in order to "deterritorialise" it.

Evidence of such balancing acts between quiet, silent acquiescence, the embodiment of the required context-specific standards, and a time-lagged reactive capacity is found in numerous interviews with undocumented immigrants. We can interpret this as an attempted "tactic of disidentification" (Munoz 1999) that offers someone in a precarious position a refuge where they can maintain their capacity to act. It is a politics of minority subjects who secure their subject status within cultural and symbolic orders by merely appearing to be subaltern. Therefore, these practices could be interpreted as a process of empowerment through a confrontation and negotiation of blockages and obstacles in order to create spaces within existing power relations.

For Amir this means that he - after he's come to the conclusion that "understanding this neoliberal system isn't such a bad idea, I've always thought there must be something else" - has landed a "coup" (de Certeau 1988: 91), as it were, by tactically appropriating the neoliberal invocation of the autonomous subject and exploiting it for his own ends. Contrary to the rules and regulations laid down by the authorities, he changed his residence and began a course of study:

Amir: "I was trying to create a situation that is not in the law, which does not fit into the scheme that they (the authorities) want ... and they accepted it but ((smiling)) almost choked on it, so to speak."

These are those moments of productive sociability within the agencements or assemblages of ableism and racism that form aspects of a surplus that, instead of vanishing within pre-existing conditions, goes beyond them, a "deterritorialisation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) of the prescribed order that allows new conditions of existence to emerge, and for Amir, eventually results in a place in the open labour market.

Outlook

The example of Amir and the analytical perspective on micro-politics should not,

however, tempt us to discuss inclusion in the labour market as a question of individual effort and adjustment by those affected by multiple discrimination - in the spirit of neoliberal rationality, as it were. To conceptualize inclusion in terms of an individualized responsibility means depoliticising and neglecting power relations of ableism and racism as well as technologies of neoliberal governmentality in the post-Fordist capitalist regime operating exactly through these interpellations of the autonomous subject as an entrepreneurial self. In advanced neoliberal states like Canada and the United States we can observe what might become the very soon future of the neoliberal regime of ableism and racism in Germany: According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2012), the unemployment rate is currently twice as high for people with disabilities when compared to workers without a disability and the unemployment rates in 2012 for those with a disability were higher among persons racialized as blacks (20.8 percent) and as Hispanics (19.0 percent) than among whites (12.3) percent. In both countries (Canada, United States) people with disabilities are far less likely to be employed and are having a far greater risk to be exposed to poverty than persons with no disability. Neoliberal restructuring of the welfare system with a policy framework based on the notion of self-reliance, individualized responsibility and competition is flanked by the state's removal from providing a social safety net. As a result for example in Canada there is an extremely high percentage of non-employed persons with disability excluded from any benefit living under conditions of poverty (Statistics Canada 2006).

Since Germany has embarked on the neoliberal course we can find similar propensities and German labour market data provide striking evidence of the need for new sustainable and effective labour market and welfare policy instruments – and not only voluntary commitments of politics and business - as well as basic social reorientation processes. Only then will it be possible to achieve respectful recognition of diversity as the norm, and thus guarantee the inclusion of those affected by multiple discrimination. It is important to work on all levels of

society towards cementing new forms of responsible solidarity, in the sense of a shared humanity, both at the level of general awareness and in the practical details.

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