"We are the people who do not count"

Thinking the disruption of the biopolitics of abandonment

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Statement

I hereby state that the thesis contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. This thesis contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

Abstract

Starting from the observation that today the urban emerges as the main site for the production and abandonment of surplus life – a life whose capacities cannot be rendered useful and is therefore not to be fostered – in this thesis I offer a re-politicized reading of abandonment by drawing on my field-research with the largest South African shack-dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo. Grounding this re-politicized reading in the problem of excess freedom that emerges on the horizon of governmental rationality between the political inclusion of the surplus population and their obstructive uselessness, I begin the inquiry by asking how the current order of neoliberal urbanism contains the surplus population when the establishment of the educative trusteeship of development is no longer pertinent.

Focusing on where the neoliberal urban order is contested, I approach practices of abandonment – the splintering of infrastructure and forced relocation – as coinciding with governmental technologies that render the poor unequal as political and/or economic subjects. Locating, to start, the epistemological conditions of abandonment in Michel Foucault's rendering of liberalism as the framework of biopolitics, followed by a discussion of the spatial and juridical technologies of government that materialize the power to disallow life alongside discourses that distance the surplus population from the fostered (bio)political community, the first part of the thesis concentrates on the processes of rendering unequal. Turning, then, to the disruption of this order, I present Abahlali's politics as a three-fold politics of proximity. I argue that in constructing their politics as 1) a space of speaking and listening, 2) a form of knowledge that maintains the shack-dweller as the subject and the knower of politics, and 3) a legal struggle to claim their place in the city, Abahlali disrupts the biopower that lets die.

Based on the resonance of Abahlali's political practice with Jacques Rancière's conception of politics, I offer an account of the disruption of the biopower to let die in terms of the appropriation of excess freedom as the equal capacity of everyone to expose the contingency of the order of rule to which s/he is subjected. Building on the centrality of the shack-dwellers' assertion of equality as thinking and speaking beings, as well as rights-bearing citizens, I juxtapose this account of political subjectification against the notion of everyday resistance as it is deployed in the poststructuralist literature on poor people's politics. Whereas this approach relegates struggles of marginal populations to a sub-political realm where the equality of all, as inscribed in the rights of the political community, do not apply and where, due to their precarious and abject position, the poor cannot aspire to openly challenge their unequal allotment, as the second part of the thesis shows, poor people's politics materializes in the transgression of the spatial and discursive boundaries within which their "everyday" struggles are supposed to remain; the crux of Abahlali's struggle for a place in the city is to say, do and think what surplus people are not supposed to. When, where, and in what terms they find the freedom to do so might give hints for thinking the political subject that challenges biopolitics.

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Introduction

1   The problem

Police shootings in French *banlieues*, poor black people of New Orleans left unsaved in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, hundreds of thousands of Zimbabwean shack-dwellers rendered homeless by their government's months-long shack-demolition campaign, homeless people whose survival mechanisms are legally impeded by regulations of several American metropolises, forced eviction of shantytown and backyard dwellers to peripheral Relocation Camps in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban… A non-exhaustive list of events and processes suggesting that in our present day the urban emerges as the main site for the production and abandonment of surplus life: a life whose capacities cannot be rendered useful and is therefore not to be fostered. In large part, this effect can be traced back to the shifting role of cities under globalized neoliberalism, a transformation that began in the last decades of the twentieth century. In aiming to ground highly mobile global capital, and departing from modernist conceptions of homogeneous spatial development carried out under the auspices of the state, cities are now forced to compete with each other and, in the process of reinventing themselves as competitive entrepreneurial localities, reconfigure urban development. Among the most obvious consequences of such reconfigurations are the increasing fragmentation of urban landscapes into developed and undeveloped areas, and the parallel isolation of their respective populations. While profitable territories are subject to continuous spatial and institutional reconstruction, with their inhabitants encouraged to join increasingly customized infrastructural networks, it is in those areas that do not carry the promise of profit that spaces of abandonment take shape. With basic services rolled back, or never rolled out in these areas, access to urban infrastructure often emerges as a question of life and death.

At the same time, since the optimal flow of economic circulation is now to be secured through its sealing off from potentially obstructive people and places, due to the consequent intensification of spatial demarcation and policing, such access is more and more restricted. Consequently, in ultimately displacing the late-modern ideal of basic protection that states sought to provide to their populations, neoliberal urban development significantly reconfigures patterns of inclusion and exclusion within the (bio-)political order. Arguably then, in materializing the abandonment of large groups of the governed, it represents a major rupture in the rationality of modern political rule that used to tie the legitimacy and strength of a state to efficiently nurturing the life of its people. In the post-colony, where abandoning or nurturing the life of the population had been tied to the objectives of the liberal empire throughout most of modernity, despite political emancipation, neoliberal urban development seems to bring more of the same. Of course, ethe life-fostering rationality of liberalism was linked to a particular construction of the political subject: the political inclusion of individuals as subjects of freedom was essential for the technologies aimed at improving their lives as members of the population. Hence, political inclusion and the regulation of collective well-being were fundamentally intertwined within the framework of liberal rule. Effectively fissuring the population by tying the provision of life-supporting infrastructure to individual capacities to partake in the seamless cycle of production and consumption, neoliberal urban governance signals a disjuncture of this connection. With the tutelage of social governance largely dismantled, the ideal of "governing through freedom" meets its limit figure in the surplus population of the urban poor. The reconfigured rationality of urban development and the spatial assemblage it molds lay bare that the freedom of the surplus population had never matched up with the ideal political subject of liberalism. Yet, considering the present crisis of democratic politics and the extent at which surplus life is currently produced and abandoned, interrogating into the mismatch that exposes the freedom of the superfluous as excess is

imperative. In an attempt to address the concerns that emerge here, the present thesis seeks to respond to the following questions: *How does neoliberal urban governance contain the excess freedom of the life not-to-be improved? How can we conceive of the political subjectivity of the abandoned? And, what are the conceptual consequences of thinking the political subjectification of the surplus people?*

2   Excess freedom and the subject of politics

In his analysis of the relationship between liberalism, development, and surplus life, Mark Duffield (2007, drawing on Cowen and Shenton [1996]), shows that, since its invention in the times of the industrial revolution, the rationale of the "development doctrine" has been to attend to the unintended consequences of liberal economic government, that is, to deal with the surplus population that consecutive cycles of capitalism has routinely thrown off. Through development, in tandem with the paradoxically patronizing liberal concept of the not-yet-autonomous subject (Mehta 1999), the actual redundancy and the potential dangerousness of the unemployed or the colonized – "the underdeveloped" – can be contained. Referring to the problem posed by the abolition of slavery for capitalist imperialism, Duffield argues that development had equally been the liberal answer not only to economically surplus populations, but to the "excess freedom" of emancipated slaves, that is, *politically surplus* lives as well. Here, excess freedom appears from the perspective of abolitionists: "when such an ambivalent freedom had been won, what do you do with such 'free' men and women" (Duffield 2007, 14)? How can the abundance of resources that were rendered accessible with the abolition of slavery be exploited against the will of a people now entitled to govern themselves? As mentioned, the answer was found in development, more specifically, an "educative trusteeship" that was meant to continuously prove that these people are, in fact, not yet ready to govern themselves. Whereas the nineteenth century model of the industrialized

world's tutelage over the "Third World" had become discredited in the latter part of the twentieth, as Cowen and Shenton (1996) show, development is still seen as the ultimate instrument of eliminating poverty by way of rendering the surplus population productive either through the state or through promoting poor communities' self-reliance.

However, in relation to the neoliberal reconfiguration of urban development, several problems emerge. To begin with, the objective of neoliberal urban development is, of course, not poverty reduction. Although, as will be discussed later, dismantling the equalizing ideal of universal infrastructure provision (which characterized both the post-war welfare regimes of the West and the centralized national development programs of post-colonial states in the South) was accompanied by the reformulation of the category of "the poor" on the level of governmental rationality, the correlate techniques of "responsibilization" and empowerment are largely overridden by the processes of economic marginalization and spatial dislocation entailed by neoliberal urbanism. Thus, the practices molding the responsible and self-reliant poor, which critical analysts of contemporary development have invaluably exposed (e.g. the "new global aid regime" in Ilcan and Lacey 2011), are not, I argue, of primary relevance when interrogating the governance of surplus life in the neoliberal city; "the revanchist city" as critical geographers refer to this anti-poor regime (Smith 1996). Consequently, taking into consideration that, for many, neoliberal urban development takes shape in the withdrawal of care, and that the urban government of the poor is thus better interpreted in terms of abandonment, requires we rethink the relationship between (neo)liberalism, development and surplus life.

What happens when the underdeveloped – who are no longer only temporarily unemployed – crowd the metropolis? What is to be done when capitalism produces massive surplus populations within the heart of the developed world, within the very motors of growth? And, what is to be done when the impoverished and oppressed racial majority is

liberated and floods the city? Outnumbering the forces of the mutilated and privatized social, walls are being drawn to shield the privileged from "the class and ethnic warfare" that cities presently give site to (Shapiro 2009a). That is, to secure against the underdeveloped within, municipalities and wealthy property owners increasingly deploy spatial demarcation and violent policing. In turn, parallel to the discursive and legal criminalization of poverty, the educative trusteeship of development that would render safe the surplus population becomes secondary, if not completely unnecessary. But how does the vigilant policing of the global city figure in light of the constant vacillation of liberal political reason between the liberty of the governed subject and "the proper conduct of government" (Hindess 1997, 265)? How does it become possible to police the urban movement and settlement of people who, although deemed useless, are free citizens and therefore as mobile as the rest? In other words, how does neoliberal urban governance contain the politically surplus when the establishment of an educative trusteeship is no longer pertinent?

As I argue in this thesis, beyond the realm of governing through freedom, the surplus people's freedom is suspended by practices that render them unequal as political or economic subjects. While this puts spaces of abandonment in parallel to the colonies ruled through the unfreedom of liberal imperialism (Hindess 2001; Mehta 1999), the fact that these spaces are enframed by a liberal democratic polity suggests that differentiating between subjects ready for the proper practice of freedom and those whose freedom should not be practiced cannot be rationalized in the same manner, that is, through making ontological distinctions between people (Valverde 1996). Thus, especially with the mentioned demise of social tutelage, the delaying effects of the developmental conception of individuals' capacity for freedom are complemented, if not overwritten, by the distancing effects of governing the urban milieu. Much more than physically dislocating the superfluous, in securing the global city as the ideal environment for the smooth circulation of goods and people, that is, by nurturing the space of

the market, neoliberal urban governance at the same time reconfigures the notion of the "public" in ways that effectively remove the poorest from the scope of its referents; with their economic interests deemed unfit for the market, their presence antithetical to the public interest and their dissent unworthy of appearing in public spaces, neoliberal urban governance distances the surplus population from the collective subject of the governed: from the community of equals.

The consequent condition where the urban poor are forced to eke out their survival, often by illegal means and amidst inhuman and detrimental circumstances, might call for conceiving of spaces of abandonment as inhabited by lives stripped of their political existence (Agamben 1998), or, in Hannah Arendt's (1976) terms, their rights to have rights. I suggest, however, that assessed from the points where it is challenged, the power to let die reveals a persistent governmental problematization of excess freedom, of freedom that should not be practiced. In other words, urban struggles direct attention to governmental efforts that aim to reconcile the conflict between the surplus population's economic redundancy and their political capacities as equal citizens. Thus, since they point to practices and discourses which coincide with or, in fact, enable abandonment and which work toward constructing surplus people as incapable political subjects so as to suspend their superfluous freedom, this focus, I argue, potentially allows for a re-politicized reading of abandonment.

In this thesis, I offer a re-politicized reading of abandonment through drawing on my field research with the largest South African shack-dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, whose struggle for a place in the city exposes how questions of equality – as thinking and speaking human beings or as rights-bearing citizens – are indeed at stake in the construction of the urban order that crystallizes the power to disallow the life of the surplus population. Approaching the governmental problem of excess freedom that appears between the political inclusion of the surplus people and their obstructive uselessness from the

perspective of Abahlali's assertions of equality as speaking beings, I will argue, has two interrelated conceptual consequences. In this work, based on the resonance of Abahlali's political practice with Jacques Rancière's writings on the conception of politics, I offer an account of the disruption of the biopower to let die in terms of the appropriation of excess freedom as the equal capacity of everyone to expose the contingency of the order of rule to which s/he is subjected. This account, in turn, suggests not only that technologies of abandonment are reversible, but that their reversal may occur through a process of political subjectification. Thus, on the one hand, urban struggles and, more generally, poor people's politics cannot be thought solely in terms of the mundane and disguised reversal of power practices devised by governmental rationalities, as the "everyday forms of resistance"-literature and governmentality scholars drawing on this literature would suggest. Whereas this approach relegates struggles of marginal populations to a sub-political realm where the equality of all inscribed as the rights of the political community do not apply and where, due to their precarious and abject position, the poor cannot aspire to openly challenge their unequal allotment, as my discussion of Abahlali's mobilization will show, the disruption of the biopolitical order of abandonment occurs precisely through the shack-dwellers' claim that they share the same order of reality where those rights are inscribed, that they are indeed part of the community of equals. On the other hand, the disruptive appropriation of excess freedom through the assertion of political equality in the face of abandonment suggests that the relation between freedom and biopolitical government has to be rethought. If we accept that technologies of molding the (neo)liberal subject of freedom are not deployed in spaces of biopolitical abandonment, then we either have to deny Abahlali's political agency or have to think freedom for political action as not fully captured by biopolitics. Through an interpretation of Abahlali's struggle for a place in the "world class city", this thesis aims towards the latter.

In lieu of the emptied out developmental mandate and complementing an increasingly violent policing, to secure the unobstructed circulation of people and goods, neoliberal governance of the South African city suspends the excess mobility of superfluous people by pushing them into unbearable living conditions or insurmountable distances, or both, in this sequence. It does so in the interplay between a political order that supposedly contains the superfluous as stable voters of the ruling party and entries on waiting lists for "a better life," always yet to come. When the Abahlali (2006, 7) declare: "We know that we are not supposed to be living the way we do", they refute precisely these terms of their suspended inclusion. Demonstrating their identity with "the people" as the referents of the democratic order, they show that their freedom is not at all ambivalent; that their obedience is not unconditioned.

In presenting their resistance against the lethal impact of withdrawing basic infrastructure, such as shack fires ("We are being left to burn because we don't count") or forced evictions to peripheral and isolated relocation camps ("No to eviction to human dumping grounds!"), I will show that the shack-dwellers' mobilization exposes their abandonment as conditional to a set of practices and assumptions that deny them as political subjects. Their struggle against the temporality of development discourse, or the label of "service delivery protests," and the emphasis on the shack-dweller as a thinking and speaking form of existence, suggests that in order to govern the superfluous mobility of superfluous people, that is, to bind their lives to spaces of abandonment, an apparatus of distancing and delaying techniques is put to work: an apparatus that, at the same time, determines what is visible and sayable, and, moreover, what is to be considered political. Accordingly, and in line with what was stated above, I suggest we conceive of demarcation and policing as coexistent with a series of spatiotemporal and discursive techniques that serve not only to contain the excess freedom of the surplus population translated into, among others, free mobility or settlement in the city, but also to secure this order through effacing the traces of its

contingency. To underline: the excess freedom that appears as a problem on the horizon of neoliberal urban governance through the contradiction between the political inclusion of the surplus population and their obstructive uselessness does not produce the political subject. Neither is political subjectification guaranteed by the institution of liberal political rights, nor should the surplus population be understood as the new "proletarian revolutionary subject" (Žižek 2006, 268). It does, however, expose that neoliberalism, like liberalism preceding it, and rationalities of rule in general, has to secure against the contingency of the order that it instates by distancing the *demos* from itself (cf. Hindess 1997, Dean 2007). That is, the people have to be distanced – spatially and discursively – from their capacity to reveal that the order has no grounds. "Depoliticization is the oldest task of politics" (Rancière 2007, 19); or, "The government wants us to think we are useless and nothing so that we won't speak. They want us to feel inferior. So they use the word slum, and eliminate" (Abahlali June 21, 2007). It is precisely in the context of such efforts that a re-politicized reading of abandonment gains significance.

3   Outline of thesis

To outline the stages of such a reading, below I summarize the chapters of the dissertation. With the aim to conceptually ground the account of political subjectification deployed in this thesis, in *Chapter 1* I give an interpretation of (neo)liberal governmentality as a rationality of rule that replicates the ancient dynamics between politics and philosophy and thus the attempt to distance the *demos* from itself. In tracing how this practice of distancing comes to coincide with the abandonment of surplus people, I first give a survey of the notion of surplus life, and then locate the epistemological condition of possibility of abandonment within liberal political reason. Laying out the problem of surplus people's excess freedom as a recurrent problem of political reason, I continue by reviewing the literature on biopolitical

governance and its potential disruption from the perspective of respective conceptualizations of freedom – whether or not the different conceptual approaches can account for the questions derived from the problem of excess freedom. As I then point out, available renderings of the biopolitical subject's freedom do not allow for thinking political subjectification in the face of the current production and abandonment of surplus life, as it is either interpreted as the product and, at the same time, the means of conducting the (neo-)liberal self-governing subject's conduct (as in the governmentality literature), or as effectively non-existent due to the total rule of sovereign power over people reduced to mere biological existence (as in the literature following Giorgio Agamben's approach to biopolitics). Thus moving on to accounts of liberal rule as the government of unfreedom, I turn to an apparent contradiction within liberal political reason; that between its credo of universal equality and the authoritarian practices of rule in which it is routinely implicated beyond the realms governed through freedom. Pushing these accounts somewhat further by emphasizing the significance of the necessity to construct difference in order to govern through unfreedom (Sider 1987), I conclude that the apparent contradiction of liberal political reason manifests the presumption of equality as a condition of domination. Arriving therefore at an understanding of liberal government through unfreedom as contingent upon practices to render the object of rule unequal, I suggest that technologies of abandonment – functional to the neoliberal government of the surplus population through unfreedom – are reversible. In other words, due to the contingency of rule that practices to render the governed unequal serve to mask, we can conceive of power relations that drive the government through unfreedom as reversible in Foucault's (1982) sense, that is, as coexistent with the capacity to act otherwise.

Whereas this conception allows for thinking abandonment without positing the totality of biopower, it does not yet allow for thinking the disruption of the order of abandonment as political. Therefore, via a discussion of their shared roots in Kantian aesthetics, I move from

Foucault's freedom towards Rancière's conception of politics, and argue that it is the assertion of equality that renders the reversal of power relations political: politics occurs when those who reverse the relations of their conduct, and thus disrupt the order that defines what one should think, say and do, claim to be part the community of equals and so expose the order of inequality as unjustified. Consequently, by way of Rancière's dual concept of the police and politics, with the latter being the collective staging of an encounter between the hierarchical order of the police and the basic equality of every speaking being, I return to the notion of excess freedom, now conceptualized as the "improper property" of the people to disrupt any given sensible order. As a brief discussion of Rancière's account of political philosophy demonstrates, philosophical attempts to construct the ideal polity have always centered on containing this excess freedom.

The major change that modernity brought about in this effort was that political philosophy took the shape of social science and thus ultimately equated the people with the calculable sum of its parts, that is, the population. Hence, depoliticization succeeded. Whereas Rancière never excludes the possibility of politics, his account of the current era of postdemocracy suggests that with the traces of the miscount effaced through the all-inclusive count of the sociological parts of the population, the *dissensus* between the logic of hierarchy and that of equality cannot be enacted, in which case, the part that has no part cannot emerge and, consequently, politics is impeded. Nevertheless, posing the tangible segmentation of the neoliberal urban order to what he interprets as the homogeneous visible regime of the postdemocratic consensus (Rancière 1999), I debate whether we can assume a seamless sensible order of the all-inclusive consensual order. As ongoing urban struggles indicate, the global city's distribution of places and livelihoods still coincides with a distribution of political capacities too, and therefore, I suggest to think about this order as the *biopolitics of dispersal* – an order that reconciles the conflict between the surplus population's economic

redundancy and their rights as equal citizens with a set of distancing and delaying techniques so as to separate these people from their inscribed equality.

In aiming to elaborate how the biopolitics of dispersal operates, *Chapter 2* starts by discussing the spatial and economic rationalities that impede poor people's access to the prime realm of urban circulation in the South African context, from the reproduction of apartheid spatial planning through the marginal localization of low-cost housing development to the principles of cost recovery in service-provision and the deployment of the "slum-eradication"-discourse, which constructs the "world-class" city as the "shack-free"-city. Placing these shifts into the context of global trends of urban restructuring that produce the phenomenon of "splintering urbanism" in the Global South as well as the North, thereby configuring an urban topography where less valuable places are left unserved and eventually devolve into spaces of abandonment, I argue that the relationship between those who govern and the governed who inhabit these spaces cannot be fruitfully conceptualized within the framework of the governmentality literature. These spaces reveal strategies of rule that do not translate into productive technologies of shaping the responsible and self-reliant poor; instead, they should be understood as the crystallization of the power to let die, as particular responses to the absolute redundancy of surplus life and thus as signaling a major reversal of the biopolitical rationality that was supposed to secure the legitimacy of rule through nurturing the population. In addition, the lack of the productive technologies of power further suggests the absence of the developmental tutelage: the surplus population in this scheme is not contained through the establishment of the liberal educative trusteeship. How, then, is the excess freedom of the surplus population – an excess freedom that on the perspective of the neoliberal urban rationality appears as the free movement of poor people which, in turn, was one of the major achievements of political liberation – contained in this order?

As I suggest in the second section, if we approach this problematic from the perspective of those who struggle for a place in the city, that is, those whose mobility – the essential asset of the neoliberal imperative of circulation – is deemed detrimental, this spatial order of dispersal is revealed as a segmented order of different spatio-temporalities, which are, in turn, paralleled by different possibilities for public appearance and presumptions about political literacy. In other words, technologies of biopolitical abandonment, which materialize as the withdrawal of care, can be read as an assemblage of distancing and delaying technologies that are in mutual interaction with technologies that render the surplus people unequal as political subjects.

Continuing the analysis of technologies that render redundant parts of the population unequal, *Chapter 3* turns to the juridical practices that parallel the splintered reconfiguration of the global city's topography. Beginning with more general lines of transformation, the first section looks at how the deployment of juridico-legal technologies has changed under neoliberalism as opposed to liberal governmentalities of the previous era. Here, relying on critical geographers' work, I point out that, on the one hand, departing from the naturalist market-conception of liberalism, neoliberal governance is much more active in enhancing the productive capacities of urban areas than the previous governmental paradigm. Resulting in the proliferation of norms and regulations, it relies heavily on legal intervention, so as to nurture the ideal milieu of market circulation. On the other, effectively reinforcing the segmentary spatial order discussed in the preceding chapter, it fosters a disciplinary framework of spatial regulation through prohibiting activities related to homelessness and extreme poverty. Thus, through aiming to eliminate the vision of poverty from the prime areas of the world class city, it works toward the materialization of the homogeneous regime of consensus. This latter aspect is furthered through the depoliticization of the city-space: the so-called bubble laws of American cities, for example, serve to guarantee that people are

protected with a virtual shield of a defined size, within which they are not supposed to be approached or addressed by demonstrators or political activists. In the spirit of the circulatory imperative of neoliberalism, both aspects of this homogenizing process (i.e. the criminalization of poverty and political agitation) are framed in terms of seamless movement of the (proper neoliberal) urban dweller. Together, the juridico-legal means of creating the ideal milieu for the market and the smooth homogeneity of urban spaces thus reinforce the depoliticizing effects of the biopolitical order of dispersal.

Turning to the more specific context of the South African city, the second section sets out to trace how the restriction of free movement re-entered legislation shortly after the fall of apartheid, and what the political conditions were that allowed for this return of the forced mobility of surplus people. Drawing on Michael Neocosmos' (2011) work, I argue that these conditions were defined by the post-apartheid state's apotheosis of transitional justice and its liberal institutions, resulting in the identification of equality with the integration of all racial groups in the liberal multiculturalism of the "rainbow nation", the identification of the political subject with the victim of the apartheid whose wrongs are institutionally reconciled, and the reconfiguration of violence as anti-democratic and apolitical. Furthering the effect of these processes that tie the meaning of the political to the liberal state and depoliticize the economic inequalities that gave the developmental mandate to the first post-apartheid government, on the level of urban government spatial regulation works toward dividing the neoliberal subject of right and the emancipated poor people. The spatial containment of the surplus people's superfluous mobility is thus fortified by gradually removing them from the scope of the collective referent of legal norms – the public – that, in turn, is increasingly tailored to the needs of the market and the neoliberal subject of interest. In the latter part of the section, I illustrate this process through three phenomena: the regulation of street trade,

the eThekwini Municipality's Slums Act, and the depoliticizing deployment of the legal charge of "public violence".

Having thus outlined the biopolitical order of dispersal and the ways it aims to contain the excess freedom of superfluous people, in *Part II* I turn to presenting an account of how this order is disrupted. As this account is based primarily on my field research with Abahlali baseMjondolo, *Chapter 4* starts with an introduction to the history and the structure of the movement. Starting with the discussion of their political subjectification from the vantage point of their first, spontaneous, protest, I focus on the subjectifying role of feeling betrayed. Whereas the shack-dwellers' mobilization dates back to learning that the local municipality breached its promise to give a piece of land to the community of the Kennedy Road settlement for housing development, through the experiences of the following days (including the municipality's rejection of communicating with the shack-dwellers' and the arrest of protestors), their feeling of betrayal in this particular case was soon re-articulated and thus generalized as the experience of politicians' contempt for the life of those who live in shantytowns. Analyzing the statements of this early period, I show how the emancipatory process here consists in the shack-dwellers' recognizing themselves as equal parties to the promise of the better life – a promise that defined the mandate of the post-apartheid governments. This recognition is articulated as the assertion of equality: equality as speaking and thinking beings, who know that their allotment is not justified and are willing to declare this knowledge to an order that treats them as dumb and invisible. It is on these grounds that they contest presumptions about their political illiteracy and the terms of their inclusion into the post-apartheid political order. Hence their "decelebration" of the official Freedom Day and their "No land, no house, no vote!"-campaign, which are discussed in the second section.

Moving on to an interpretation of Abahlali's "living politics" that targets the distancing and delaying effects of the "world class" city's sensible order, I present the driving

principle of this *politics of proximity*, that is, the imperative to stay discursively, spatially and temporally close to shack-dwellers' experiences and sufferings. Offering an interpretation of the movement's intellectual practice along similar lines, I then discuss how Abahlali counter the hierarchical distribution of supposed intellectual capacities that characterizes the NGO or academic attitude toward shack-dwellers by declaring themselves the professors of their own suffering. Complementing the equation between the object and the subject of knowledge that this declaration entails, so as to keep knowledge production about their lives within their very environment and at the same time eliminate the "distance of explanation" that formal education normally reproduces (Rancière 1991), the movement names the informal settlements as the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. As the last section shows, the same reason drives Abahlali's pedagogical practice that intends to keep a direct and active relation between academic education – to which some of the movement's members gained access – and the ongoing education in the University of Abahlali, in other words, life in the shantytown.

Completing the discussion of Abahlali's politics of proximity in its final aspect, that is, proximity in its literal, physical sense of claiming a place within or close to the city, in *Chapter 5* I explore the movement's legal resistance against the forced mobility of surplus life and the possible role of litigation in emancipatory politics in more general terms. Starting with the latter, in the first section I address the apparent conceptual problem that positing the framework of liberal rights as emancipatory entails for a Foucauldian theoretical perspective, from which rights appear as the products and the instruments of liberal governance and its aim to construct the self-governing subject. Pointing to the unidirectional and often totalizing accounts of governmentality in the second section, and drawing attention to the possibility of alternative readings of Foucault's law as strategically reversible (Golder and Fitzpatrick 2009), I next re-interpret this reversibility through Rancière's notion of literariness, that is, the

sensible materiality and availability of a community's freedom and equality inscribed in rights declarations. This interpretation, which turns on the consideration that the governed can resignify the name of the collective referent of rights, I argue, allows for thinking litigation as the appropriation of excess freedom, without falling back on an essentialist notion of freedom. In aiming to show how this occurs in Abahlali's struggle, in the latter part of the chapter I argue that instead of having merely an abstract quality that is irrelevant on the margins of the realm governed through freedom, legal texts allow the shack-dwellers to assert their equality through proving that they share the sensible order in which those texts are supposed to be valid. Indeed, as it is illustrated by the example of resisting forced evictions through referencing the rights of illegal occupiers, the emancipatory potential of the law – in providing the shack-dwellers with the determination and the courage to stand up against their evictors – emerges exactly where they assume the status of the rights-bearing citizens in the realm where these rights were not supposed to apply.

The sensible availability of equality as inscribed in legal texts, beyond enabling the shack-dwellers to mobilize an "obligation to hear" their declaration that they know they belong to the community whose equality is enshrined in the constitution (Rancière 2007, 86), their litigation against the Slums Act leads, on the one hand, to the shack-dwellers' re-articulation of the wrong that determines their allotment. On the other hand, it disrupts the distribution of spaces deployed by this order not only when the shack-dwellers succeed in preserving their place in the city, but also when they demonstratively "invade" the places of law, as in the case of the Constitutional Court hearing of the Slums Act. Despite the temporary and fragile nature of their legal victories – that Abahlali seem to remain aware of – on these occasions technologies of citizenship are practiced upwards, giving materiality to the surplus people's excess freedom to be otherwise.

4   Methods

Considering the central position of my field research with Abahlali in the present attempt to offer a re-politicized reading of abandonment, a discussion of methods is due here. Whereas ethnography is usually not regarded as a staple in the IR-scholar's toolkit (or of those working within the biopolitics/governmentality literature), in recent decades, partly by way of feminist scholarship within the discipline (see e.g. Cohn 1987, 2006; Enloe 2000, 2001; Moon 1997; Tickner 2006), there has occurred a move towards ethnographic methods; a move that Wanda Vrasti (2008) refers to as the "ethnographic turn" in IR. Thus, drawing also on the methodological strand of political ethnography developing within the overlaps of political science, sociology and anthropology (cf. Auyero 2006; Baiocchi and Connor 2008; Joseph, Mahler and Auyero 2007), it has become more common to study political activism from a close-up perspective, with the aim to understand the meanings and conceptions of politics deployed by actors within both institutionalized and less formal organizations, and so to interpret "the lived experience of the political" (Baiocchi and Connor 2008, 141). As Vrasti (2008, 300) rightly notes, instead of merely diversifying existing methods of data-collection, enriching available styles of presenting research, or "giving voice" to abject groups presumably lacking one, "the radical promise of ethnography" lies in allowing us to think and write politics differently, to move beyond IR's all too frequent discursive practice of policing what politics, democracy or community can be. Whether or not IR's experimentations with ethnography have lived up to this promise, or should even aspire to do so is not of concern here (but cf. Jackson 2008, Rancatore 2010, Vrasti 2008; 2010). Rather, in my own striving towards that promise, by positioning the field research within the formation of this project, below I would like to point to the continuities between the methodological approach in this thesis and the idea of knowledge entailed by Abahlali's intellectual practice on the one hand, and Rancière's (1991) conception of equality as a presupposition on the other.

Among the most important points that need to be addressed here is the relationship of what we would traditionally refer to as the subject and object of research. When I became interested in Abahlali baseMjondolo in the process of planning a project about possible forms of resistance to biopolitics, it was the movement that determined the course of the study based on their own knowledge about social scientific research as well as their experience of presumptions of inequality that are frequently associated with the researcher-research object relationship. In line with the above mentioned idea of the University of Abahlali (see *Chapter 4*), that is, the movement's rendering of the shantytown as a place of knowledge production, so as to maintain the practice of theorizing shack-dwellers' life in proximity to its actual terrain, in a note to potential researchers (and NGOs, activists or churches) linked to the contact form on their website, Abahlali (22 May 2007) outline the conditions they set to those wishing to work with them. Among these is a requirement for researchers to engage directly with the movement with their enquiries and spend time in the shantytown before writing about the movement. Beyond the fact that some members have themselves learned about research methods (cf. Abahlali and Rural Network 2009, 64–65; Lindela Figlan, interview, 30 June 2009), the principle of sharing and discussing research outputs with the movement and the consequent interaction between discourses also suggest the impossibility to draw distinctions between ways of knowing – and this is, I believe, precisely the goal of "living learning".

Abahlali's effort to equalize the "formal" academy and the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo translated into conceptualizing the biopolitics of abandonment and its disruption through Rancière's (1991) adaptation of Joseph Jacotot's egalitarian pedagogy and the presumption of equality upon which it is based (see *Chapter 4*). More specifically, beyond the respect for Abahlali's request to carry out research through engaging in a discussion with them where they live, the decision to approach technologies of abandonment from the

movement's perspective,[1] and thus to interpret practices that disallow life as coexistent with a distribution of visibility, speech and assumptions about intellectual capacities resulted largely from the parallels between an understanding of Abahlali's politics gained throughout the field research and my reading of Rancière's work on the aesthetic character of politics. These parallels were then reinforced not only because the empirical research and the theoretical inquiry proceeded contemporaneously, but also because some Abahlali members were themselves aware of Rancière's work. In turn, the methodological approach that was molded by all these processes and circumstances, and wishes to work against reproducing the "distance of explanation" entails that instead of tracing hidden motives and unconscious acts within the operation and discourse of the movement, the starting assumption for discussing Abahlali's politics is, simply put, that they know what they do, and they do what they say (Rancière 1991; cf. *Introduction to Part II*). Therefore, in line with the move of the collaborative approach in ethnography from "reading over the shoulders of natives" to "reading alongside" the people the ethnographer works with (Lassiter 2005, 3–14), the framework for my research was adapted to Abahlali's interpretation of their spatial and infrastructural marginalization as coinciding with the denial of their equality as thinking, speaking, political beings. Hence, the most important question pursued in the following chapters is not so much whether or not political subjectification occurs in the face of biopolitical abandonment, but what we can learn from the fact that it does.

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[1] While this approach certainly has continuities with Foucault's (2003, 30) call for "an ascending analysis of power", in adopting the presumption of equality as its methodological principle, it goes further than what such an analysis would imply.