9-15-2010

SHACKDWELLER CITIZENSHIP

Margaret Scott
Macalester College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cities

SHACKDWELLER CITIZENSHIP

by Margaret Scott

Image(s) Source: Abahlali baseMjondolo, 2010.

Advocating the Right to the City in Durban, South Africa

Literature on slum and shack settlements focuses mainly on the staggering numbers of shackdwellers, the steadily increasing urban population, and the perils of rapid urbanization yet largely ignores the rights of the poor people housed in these disputed and often highly politicized areas. Even in literature sympathetic to the need for improved conditions, little agency is granted to those who have the greatest stake in how slums are managed, the shackdwellers themselves. This paper looks carefully at shackdwellers' rights, considering the activism of a South African movement, the *Abahlali baseMjondolo*. Details on the Abahlali are revealed through a variety of sources, whether newspaper, magazine or journal articles, book chapters, or court documents. All aspects of the Abahlali movement; origins, structure, and activism, reveal a pragmatic and alternative model for citizenship that differs from the citizenship offered by the South African government. The paper utilizes the political economy of place perspective as a lens to understand how the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement's grassroots advocacy counters the market-oriented development put forth by the government. The Abahlali baseMjondolo's inclusive governance and powerful advocacy for a right to the city offer a compelling model of citizenship in a steadily urbanizing world.

I n t r o d u c t i o n :   D u r b a n ,   S o u t h   A f r i c a

In 2006, the Kwa-Zulu Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-Emergence of Slums Act was introduced to the Provincial legislature as a bill, one that would impact thousands upon thousands of South Africans living in informal conditions and settlements across the province. In October of 2009, nearly three yeas later, the Constitutional Court of South Africa, the country's highest judicial authority, ruled the Act. During this three year period, the Act was highly contested, fiercely opposed by shackdwellers and rigidly supported by many levels of South African government, from local to national. The case was originally brought into question by Abahlali baseMjondolo, an association of 20,000 members living in the varied informal and squatter settlements that surround the city of Durban, on South Africa's eastern coast. The Abahlali movement began in Durban in 2005, originally mobilized in protest to the privatization of land in the Kennedy Road Settlement. Since its founding in 2005, the movement has grown to encompass 30 settlements throughout South Africa, making it the largest social organization in the country since the fall of apartheid government in 1994 (Abahlali baseMjondolo, 2006).

For decades, South Africa has operated under the reproachful yet distant eye of the world's authorities, eager to present a façade of progress while routinely failing to serve the needs of its poorest citizens. The Abahlali movement knows this too well to be true, representing one part of a substantial and slowly growing population of informal settlements throughout the country. It is estimated that South Africa hosts 12 million squatters, typically defined as individuals living without land tenure in informal or self-built structures. While the settlements themselves vary greatly, vulnerability of the inhabitants remains steadfast, whether to structural collapse, drought, or eviction. Regardless of the structures or services available to the residents, the squatter settlements characteristically lack tenure, meaning that inhabitants have no legal right to their land.

Writing in the *New York Times* in 2005, reporter Michael Wines describes that squatters number "…more than one in four South Africans, many living in a level of squalor that would render most observers from the developed world speechless" (Wines 2005). South African authorities often seek to appease these observers from the "developed world." Authorities aim to present the country in the unified and democratic vision that the constitution, finalized in 1996, put forth for a renewed South Africa in the post-apartheid years. While the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa will always represent a momentous achievement and significant political shift, the years since that time allow a critical perspective on the country's progress. This issue proves to be particularly timely given the upcoming World Cup 2010, the international soccer tournament scheduled for four weeks between June and July across South Africa. David Smith, writing for the *Guardian*, notes South Africa's particular "burden" as host:

> But South Africa's heaviest burden may be one of expectation: it is the nation seen by millions of hungry and war weary as the great hope of the continent. The "beloved country" now has the challenge of refashioning the image of not merely itself but the whole of Africa (Smith 2009).

While the 2010 World Cup may begin to reveal the South African government's currently misplaced priorities, it is important to recognize the extent to which the poor of South Africa have remained severely disenfranchised for decades before the coming tournament. In the face of such disenfranchisement, communities of resistance have surfaced, offering hopeful and practical visions of change for South Africa. Abahlali baseMjondolo, the shackdwellers' movement in Durban, represents one powerful voice, advocating for a radically different physical and political infrastructure for all South Africans.

This paper will look closely at the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement (also referred to here as Abahlali) in order to better understand how those with the fewest legal rights have come to actively represent themselves in the face of an often hostile government. The paper will first look to a range of literature, including an overview of the theories of political economy of place and the right to the

Margaret Scott   2

city. The interaction between these two bodies of theory provides a background for the model of "shackdweller citizenship" that the Abahlali movement ultimately presents. Within these theories, I will consider relevant literature surrounding the issue of squatting, inhabitant's rights, and social movements for citizenship as they relate to the conflict over land in Durban. With a background on theory and literature in place, I will then examine the Abahlali movement in greater detail, looking to its origins, unique organizational structure, and recent activism in organizing against the Kwa-Zulu Natal Elimination and Prevention of the Re-Emergence of Slums Act. The "Slums Act" offers an unusual perspective on the political landscape in Durban, a complicated dynamic that extends to South Africa on the whole. The Slums Act allows a more intimate understanding of the obstacles facing the Abahlali movement, an understanding that is helped in large part by theories of political economy of place as well as the right to the city. A closer look at the grassroots activism (and ultimate success) in opposition to the Slums Act offers a valuable and alternative perspective on the political economy of place, demonstrating how the right to the city directly counters many of the assumptions implicit to the political economy of place theory. Though the paper focuses on the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement as a central case study, the project is equal parts theoretical and practical, working first to understand how two compelling theories of urbanism come into conversation and conflict in Durban, South Africa. Secondly, the paper offers a resolution of the theories of political economy of place and the right to the city, arguing that the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement offers a powerful model of "shackdweller citizenship." Throughout all, the paper considers the significance of Abahlali at several levels, whether as a powerfully representative political organization in Durban, a signal of change for South Africa, or as a model for housing and human rights advocacy the world over.

T h e o r y   a n d   L i t e r a t u r e

This paper is rooted in two significant bodies of theory, the political economy of place and the right to the city. As the paper continues, it becomes clear that the right to the city offers a compelling counter to the assumptions of political economy of place. Before beginning a deeper consideration of the literature, however, I must first consider my personal role as a researcher and author. My interest in the Abahlali movement comes from a deep interest in the right to the city itself – in linking intricate and articulate theories of urbanism with movements in reality, with real people reenvisioning real cities in a new and more just vision. The sources and information presented here, though relatively broad in scope, are limited by my lack of experience in South Africa and Durban. Having never visited the country, the research becomes an account of Durban and the deeply rooted land conflict from afar.

Overall, the data utilized here comes from a variety of written sources. Books and journal articles contribute to the background, whether the political economy of place or the broad theoretical background of the right to the city in the literature review. Information on the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement comes from the movement's comprehensive website, varied newspaper articles, and journal articles written by interested academics. The KwaZulu-Natal Slums Act presents itself through the text of the Act itself, newspaper coverage on the trajectory of the Act through the court system, and the Abahlali movement's own charting of the Act, its unconstitutionality, and the progress over time.

Throughout all of these sources, the paper relies heavily on second-hand accounts, whether through activists, academics, or reporters. Marie Huchzermeyer, writing in her book, *Unlawful Occupation*, describes these authors as "responsive academics," individuals attuned to the intricate struggle of the urban poor in Durban (Huchzermeyer 2004, 3). Many of these accounts come from journals, in which a variety of academics work to place the Abahlali political struggle in a broader

Margaret Scott   4

conversation around human rights. The activists and organizers of the Abahlali movement are equally clear in their framing of their political struggle, aiming to present the issue as one that is primarily moral rather than only political. This framework is replicated in the work of the many "responsive academics" that seek to publicize the achievements (and underscore the significance) of the Abahlali movement. Though the movement has advocated for its visibility through political protest, the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement also presents a constant public face through the use of an extensive and frequently updated website. For a movement born out of a shantytown, lacking basic services such as water or electricity, the site is an impressive and extensive undertaking. The site offers background on the movement, the motivations for activism, and offers a constant and conscientious perspective on an improved South Africa for all (Abahlali, 2010).

Though contemporary articles and sites help to understand the Abahlali's current activism, broader theory is nonetheless essential to establishing a framework for the movement's signficance overall. Following are descriptions of the theories that contribute two decidedly different perspectives on cities and their citizens, first the political economy of place followed by the theory of right to the city.

Political Economy of Place

The theory of political economy of place looks closely at cities and the processes that shape a given place over time, making it a simple and practical lens to use when looking at Durban, South Africa. Rather than focus singularly on the concept of "process," political economy of place in turn considers the particularities of place and the role of the individuals and organizations that work to shape the city in their vision. On the whole, this perspective is a useful tool for understanding the political geography of individual places. Three pieces in particular help to frame political economy of place, both in itself as a theory and more so as an important analytical tool for understanding the changing geography of Durban, South Africa. Though the politically economy is best known in a

piece by John Logan and Harvey Molotch (1987), the theory also incorporates the work of two other authors, Kevin Cox (1998) and Alan Pred (1984).

To begin, John Logan and Harvey Molotch (1987) articulate political economy of place, as indicated in the title of their work, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place.* Logan and Molotch present a useful perspective on the economics that are necessarily rooted in a given place. Kevin Cox (1998), in his article, "Spaces of dependence," offers a closer examination of the interplay between scale and local politics. Finally, Allan Pred (1984) addresses structuration theory as a way to understand the relationship between society and place, emphasizing change and fluidity over time.

In *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*, John Logan and Harvey Molotch (1987) explore the interchange between exchange and use value, demonstrating how capital and community-driven interests often come into conflict. In the second chapter, "Places as Commodities," Logan and Molotch interrogate place in the context of the market. The authors assert that place is "indispensable" and "idiosyncratic," emphasizing the significance of "place value," the value that makes place distinct from any other type of commodity (Logan and Molotch 1987, 17). Use value and exchange value, though they are present in places concurrently, are distinct in how they are utilized, whether by people and communities (based on a place's utility) or, in terms of exchange value, how a place is commodified, or valued in market terms. Logan and Molotch's interrogation of the value of place forms the center of their work, as they use these concepts to define the "growth machine." The authors define the growth machine as a coalition of entrepreneurs and associates who "unite behind a doctrine of value-free development – the notion that free markets alone should determine land use" (Logan and Molotch 1987, 32). The motives behind the growth machine are important to recognize, as they help to understand the obstacles facing individuals and interests that fall outside of the machine. The binary evaluation of place through use and exchange value becomes increasingly important when considering growth and

change in Durban and South Africa. Mainly, the political economy of place advances the assumption that exchange value, of utmost importance to the growth machine, will prevail over the interests of use value in shaping the landscape of a place.

Kevin R. Cox (1998), in "Spaces of dependence, spaces of engagement and the politics of scale, or: looking for local politics," engages with political economy of place in order to demonstrate the significance and complexity of local politics. Cox identifies "spaces of dependence" and "spaces of engagement" as a way to emphasize the importance of "the politics of scale." To begin, Cox defines spaces of dependence as localized social relations, emphasizing that spaces of dependence are place-specific (Cox 1998, 2). Spaces of engagement, on the other hand, are a political space, "constructed through networks of association" (Cox 1998, 21). As such, spaces of engagement reflect the fluidity of scale in politics. Cox explains the dynamics of political scale eloquently, cautioning that, "It is tempting to see each form of politics as having its own, territorially-defined arena: local politics and local states, regional politics and regional states, etc" (Cox 1998, 20). Rather, spaces of dependence and engagement demonstrate that political scale is not fixed in the local, but instead connected through "networks of association," linking local organizations to national organizations, local political initiatives to regional disputes, and so on. The politics of scale clearly connects to the many forms of politics surrounding the Slums Act in KwaZulu-Natal, none of which have a fixed or definitive "territorially-defined arena" in spite of their political labels.

Just as political economy helps to highlight the shaping of a place over time, so too does structuration theory, articulated by Allan Pred (1984) in his article, "Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places." Pred focuses his writing on "becoming places," highlighting the ways in which places are produced. For Pred, "produce" is an important verb, as he emphasizes that place is a "human product." He elaborates, explaining that "Place, in other words, always involves an appropriation and transformation of space and nature

that is inseparable from the reproduction of society in time and space" (Pred 1984, 279). Through tying place and society together, Pred similarly articulates the inherent value of place that John Logan and Harvey Molotch's establish in *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place.* Pred articulates the relationship between place and society with a keen eye to the dialectics inherent to the production of place. He explains,

> As nature is transformed into humanly made elements of place and as local space is structured and given new meaning by the ceaseless dialectic between socialization and social reproduction, what can further take place is constrained as well as enabled (Pred 1984, 288).

Pred's explanation of this dialectic represents one aspect of the larger structuration theory, as originally articulated by Anthony Giddens (1984) in *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration.* Giddens emphasizes the role of "knowledgeable agents," individuals whose awareness of societal constraints enables them to change the institutions they inherit from society, again reflecting the dialectic present in structuration theory overall. Lastly, Pred's writing offers a reminder of how theories of place can be utilized in research. He explains,

> The proposed theory of place, after all, is historically contingent. It is not a theory that lends itself to formal testing, but a theory that is meant to inform the questions posed by researchers inquiring into real situations in actual places or regions. (Pred 1984, 282)

The shackdwellers' movement in South Africa represents an example of a "real situation," where the extent of the societal and political constraints that surround (and inspire) their activism and agency, becomes clear.

Overall, the political economy of place offers an intriguing perspective on the city, encouraging a closer examination of the nuances of how a city is grown and reproduced over time. Additionally, these writings serve as an important reminder of the individual actors, highlighted as competing interests in *Urban Fortunes*, that contribute to growth. Such a perspective encourages a critical examination of a city's growth based on the varied capacity of individual agency, rather than the assumption of state or corporate dominance. Each of these writings will present themselves

Margaret Scott 8

again when looking more closely at political economy in a "real situation," in Durban, South Africa. Though political economy offers a practical framework through which to examine the Abahlali movement, it remains greatly limited by the assumption that the growth machine paradigm of growth inevitably wins out against community interests. The theory of the right to the city offers an alternative vision of urban change, one that believes in the powerful agency of individuals and communities, the importance of the use value of land, and the urgent need for an improved, more just city for all inhabitants.

The Right to the City

As the world becomes increasingly urbanized, authors from a broad list of disciplines have come to comment on the future of cities and the people who shape them. Though the Durban, South Africa case study is decidedly contemporary, it is useful to consider the theories of and commentary on urbanism from the past half century, in which the contested spaces of cities have become apparent on a global scale. Karen Tranberg Hansen, author of *Reconsidering Informality* echoes this concept, stating, "…urban space is not so much a product of a regulatory system as it is a dynamic field of interaction for economic, social, cultural, and political processes…" (Tranberg Hansen, 8). Three core concepts reflect this "dynamic" nature – informal urbanism, contested citizenship, and finally, the right to the city. Whether attributed to authors with a global perspective or observers with an eye to contemporary Africa, these multiple perspectives help contribute a necessarily broad background to this paper. As will become clear later on, this breadth is reflected in the Abahali movement itself, as activists and residents see themselves as a dutiful part of a broader struggle for human rights and equality.

Informal Urbanism

As informal settlements and urban populations have consistently grown in the past decades, much protest has arisen over the threats of population growth, increasingly polarized wealth, and the

Margaret Scott 9

present realities of insufficient infrastructure. Much of the discourse surrounding urban growth is decidedly negative, citing the percentages of growth and the illegality of "invasive" informal settlements worldwide. More productive commentary, however, comes from authors with a pragmatic and open perspective on the informal urbanism present in countries across the world. Though many authors have commented on the trend toward urbanism, two particularly helpful authors are Robert Neuwirth (2007) and Mike Davis (2005). Both authors present realistic and progressive perspectives on informal settlements and their significant role in the future of cities worldwide. This progressivism establishes a useful framework for understanding the far-reaching value of an innovative movement such as the Abahlali baseMjondolo.

Robert Neuwirth has written extensively on the topic of slums and squatter settlements across the globe, having lived in several informal settlements himself. Through a blog, "Squattercity," numerous articles, and several books, Neuwirth makes clear his sensitivity to the realities, challenges, and decided hopefulness of shack settlements. Neuwirth emphasizes not only shackdwellers' rights, but also their role in recreating their cities in a decidedly more egalitarian vision. In "Squatters and the Cities of Tomorrow," Neuwirth explains clearly the role of squatter settlements in envisioning the future.

> No developer can build at prices the squatters can afford – that's the very reason they build for themselves. But over time, with a bit of legal protection and the chance to engage in politics, what they will build are the cities of tomorrow (Neuwirth 2005).

This concept of the future is important to consider, as it addresses the deep political philosophy behind squatter settlements. The building of "cities of tomorrow" is not simply an act of shelter but also a significant political act, in which a model of representativeness and accessibility is made possible for all city inhabitants. Squatter settlements envision a city where inhabitants live, work, and thrive in proximity to the places they choose, regardless of their ability to pay. The concept of pricing and affordability is immediately apparent, helping to understand how use and exchange

value, as articulated by Logan and Molotch, continue to be significant concepts in understanding the growth machine, even as it applies to the less conventional image of urban shack settlements. Neuwirth's writing illuminates a progressive view of shackdwellers' rights, acknowledging foremost the need for "legal protection" as well as the right to political engagement. If this paper achieves nothing else, it will demonstrate to the reader how the housing inequalities of cities across the world reveal far more than a lack of housing, instead demonstrating a broad denial of basic human rights to the poorest inhabitants. Without the political acknowledgement and engagement of the inhabitants most in need, housing equality will never be achieved, an integral concept in the discussion of citizenship and the right to the city that continues here.

Mike Davis (2005), in *Planet of Slums*, offers a useful explanation of how the process of suburbanization operated in 20th century South Africa, often to devastating ends. His writing helps to understand how government frequently contributes to unjust urban landscapes.

> Apartheid, of course, took this system to its dystopian extreme. Building on a foundation of colonial racism, postwar South African legislation not only criminalized urban migration, but also provided for the uprooting, with enormous brutality, of historical inner-city communities of color (Davis 2006, 52).

Though this quotation looks in particular at South Africa, Davis' writing in *Planet of Slums* emphasizes a broad perspective on the ubiquity (and continued growth) of slum development across the globe. Davis' writing pays careful attention to the disturbing realities of slum populations worldwide, commenting wryly that "…the one billion city-dwellers who inhabit postmodern slums might well look back with envy at the ruins of the sturdy mud homes of Catal Huyuk in Anatolia, erected at the very dawn of city life nine thousand years ago" (Davis 2006, 19). In spite of his pointed critique, Davis' writing nonetheless offers an informed perspective, sympathetic to the needs and demands of communities denied their right to housing. He explains the processes of over-urbanization: "Driven toward the cities by brutal and irresistible forces, the poor eagerly asserted their "right to the city," even if that meant only a hovel on its periphery" (Davis 2006, 55).

In evoking "the right to the city," Davis emphasizes that the issue is not simply the right to safe or stable housing but rather a deeper issue, in which the poorest inhabitants are denied citizenship in the cities they call home.

Contested Citizenship

Citizenship occupies a clear and critical role in the debate over cities and their inhabitants. As cities grow and change, physical and political boundaries constantly shift with the governing power at the time, constantly changing the concept of a "citizen." A closer consideration of citizenship is an important bridge between the realities of inequality in urban settlements and the struggle for recognition and rights, particularly the demand for the "right to the city." In the example presented by the Abahlali, the movement has consistently put forward a model of representative democracy and citizenship that the government, whether local or municipal, is unable or unwilling to accept. Two authors offer powerful summaries of new and useful paradigms for citizenship that are offered by urban social movements.

James Holston (1999) writes eloquently in his collection *Cities and Citizenship*, helping to tie the perspectives on place and individual agency presented as part of political economy of place to a new understanding of citizenship. In his essay, "Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship," Holston explains how citizenship changes as new identities and practices are introduced into the city. As individuals reproduce structure within their cities in new ways, what he deems "sites of insurgence," the city (and citizenship within that) changes, albeit slowly (Holston 1999, 167). Just as Cox (1998) identifies in his exploration of political scale, Holston links different levels of government as part of the process of defining new areas of citizenship. He writes,

> The lesson of this paradox is that planning needs to engage not only the development of insurgent forms of the social but also the resources of the state to define, and occasionally impose, a more encompassing conception of right than is sometimes possible to find at the local level (Holston 1999, 171 – 2).

Holston's employment of paradox relates to the concept of dialectic addressed earlier in Cox's exploration of structuration theory, as local initiatives (here read as "insurgent forms") are often constrained by "resources." "The lesson of this paradox," in Holstons' words, is a reminder of the importance of scale when evaluating the political process, a lesson to be taken into account when evaluating the legal process in Durban (Holston 1999, 171).

Mark Purcell (2003) offers another useful exploration of citizenship in his article, "Citizenship and the right to the global city." Purcell envisions an active role for all city inhabitants, writing that, "If inhabitants hold a central role in the decisions that produce urban space, property ownership can no longer confer a dominant voice in decisions about what to do with urban land" (Purcell 2003, 578). Purcell's choice of language is central to understanding his meaning. The use of "inhabitants" holds great significance, as it emphasizes that boundaries of citizenship are drawn (or ought to be drawn) on the basis of inhabitance rather than other more politicized interpretations of identity and citizenship. He explains, "…the right to the city is earned by living in the city" (Purcell 2003, 577). Purcell's exploration of citizenship and inhabitance directly connects to the theory of the right to the city; a concept that threads throughout literature on urbanism and urban social movements.

Right to the City

Henri Lefebvre, a French philosopher and sociologist, first popularized the phrase, "the right to the city," in *Le Droit à la ville,* published in 1968. Though the right to the city is manifested in many different ways currently, Lefebvre created a fundamental framework for the theory. Throughout his writing, Henri Lefebvre emphasizes the need for city inhabitants to have the right to participate in, take control of, and change the city as needed. Lefebvre's use of the term "inhabitant," rather than "citizen," brings attention to the limited representativeness of political structures, built as they are into physical space and ownership. The concept of *inhabitance* has become a cornerstone of the right to the city today, a concept already seen in Mark Purcell's

Margaret Scott   13

"Citizenship and the global city" (2003). A discussion paper published by the Habitat International

Coalition contextualizes Lefebvre's "inhabitance" four decades later:

> What is still relevant for today's cities is Lefebvre's belief that the decision-making processes in cities should be reframed so that all urban dwellers have a right to participate in urban politics and to be included in the decisions which shape their environment (Habitat International Coalition, 2005).

This belief in the rights of "all urban dwellers" is similarly echoed in the writings of geographer and

philosopher, David Harvey. Over time, Lefebvre's right to the city has been cited by a wide range of

authors and academics, all of whom have contributed to an evolving application of the theory.

David Harvey has written extensively on the right to the city, even publishing an article of that very

name. "The Right to the City," published in 2008, frames the right in an economic context,

outlining the relationship between urbanization and capitalism in order to emphasize how the rights

to private property have superseded a collective right to the city (Harvey 2008). In spite of the

pervasiveness of economic rather than public interests in city planning, Harvey notes that, "…there

are, however, urban social movements seeking to overcome isolation and reshape the city in a

different image from that put forward by the developers…" (Harvey 2008, 33). Harvey continually

underscores the need for city dwellers to actively participate in the production and restructuring of

their city. For Harvey, change is key: "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to

access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city" (Harvey 2008, 23).

Here, Harvey introduces an urban consciousness, an acknowledgement of the reciprocity between

the city dweller and the city. Just as a detriment to the city harms the city inhabitant, a restructuring

of the city can alleviate disparity and discrimination for all urban dwellers. This reciprocity is a

notion that is thoroughly embraced by the activism of the Abahlali movement, as shackdwellers

work to simultaneously restructure the physical and political structures that have been significant

sites of oppression in their lives.

Andy Merrifield (2002), in his work *Dialectical Urbanism*, echoes this concept of change, acknowledging the significance of a changing city. He writes: "Cities are always in flux – that's what cities are all about, that's what cities do" (Merrifield 2002, 49). With this thought in mind, Merrifield examines the dialectic, as the title suggests, of urbanism and urbanization. Merrifield explains that while urbanism is based in reality, on use values, urbanization is more abstract, based on exchange values (Merrifield 2002, 160). In simpler terms, urbanism can be understood as a day-to-day experience of city life while urbanization is a transformative, indiscernible process, bringing people to cities and creating structures and systems (Merrifield 2002, 9). Merrifield's employment of use and exchange value clearly connects to the political economy of place theory, emphasizing the distinct economic structures that shape city landscapes. Ultimately, Merrifield explains the theoretical purpose of "dialectical urbanism:"

> *Dialectical Urbanism* seeks to promote an urban praxis that is incorporated in flesh and blood, that does bring real people – everyday people – to the fore, who in big and little ways somehow make a difference: they change a world that is changing them (Merrifield 2002, 160).

Again bringing to mind the concept of change, "dialectical urbanism" emphasizes the role of people, rather than private entities, in taking control and "making a difference." Merrifield's concept of change is decidedly two sided, emphasizing the give and take of the relationship between the inhabitant and the city. This emphasis on "everyday people" provides a useful context for the right to the city, as it aims to turn the city's attention from private profit to people's participation. The reciprocity between city and inhabitant is equally visible in David Harvey's, "The Right to the City," as he defines an urban consciousness, asserting that no aspect of the city is fixed or permanent. Merrifield's dialectic achieves a similar end as it distinguishes between urbanization and urbanism, encouraging the city inhabitant to view urbanization as a constantly changing process, constantly in conversation with urbanism. In highlighting the inherent variability of cities, the inhabitant is further encouraged to challenge the injustices and marginalization that too often default from

urbanization. The emphasis on the power of the individual relates well to Pred's (1984) articulation of structuration theory, in which individuals are seen as capable agents of change within the cultural and societal structures they have inherited. It is just this challenge of change that we see at the heart of the right to the city, and in turn, at the heart of the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement, as they work to reverse the political injustices imprinted into the physical landscape.

There is a clear dynamic of "dialectical urbanism," in Merrifield's terms, inherent to Durban, South Africa, in which the prioritization of the exchange value of land, rather than use value, has resulted in the denial of a basic human (and constitutional right), the right to shelter. From the definitions of the right to the city presented here, it is clear that the right re-orients the ways land use should be determined, arguing against the privatization of land that has come to dominate the free market. Political economy of place's articulation of the growth machine outlines the processes of urbanization (and privatization) that have shaped cities across the world, Durban being just one example of many. Government actors, specific legislation, and the general absence of government oversight, have all contributed to complicated and underserviced land uses throughout the informal settlements of Durban. As the members of the Abahlali advocate for their "right to the city" against unjust circumstances, they confront a complex set of actors that have fueled the "growth machine" in Durban and the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Beyond its theoretical existence in a wide range of literature, the right to the city appears, in actuality, in many cities across the world. Though Durban is profiled here, the right to the city is envisioned and demanded in cities as varied as Miami, Sao Paolo, Buenos Aires, Ankara, Phnom Penh, and many, many more (Neuwirth 2007). A powerful example of the right to the city in practice is the Take Back the Land movement, a grassroots organization based out of Miami, Florida. Different though Durban and Miami may be, they are linked by the powerful advocacy of their poorest residents. In Miami, the Take Back the Land movement advocates against rising

foreclosure rates, actively protesting eviction and lobbying for radically changed housing policies. Take Back the Land advocates the right to the city and within that, "the right to return," arguing that families have the right to remain in the neighborhoods they call home, regardless of the legal procedures of foreclosure and eviction (Take Back the Land 2010). Though their movement is decidedly local, Take Back the Land emphasizes their role within a "translocal network" of local movements, interconnected in their grassroots activism and radical vision for broader urban equality. Take Back the Land cites movements in Brazil and South Africa (the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement among them) as sites of inspiration and solidarity, demonstrating the powerfully broad scope of the right to the city as a theory, a movement, and a realized vision for future cities.

As this paper continues to examine the Abahlali baseMjondolo, the conflict between the predominant growth machine, as embodied by the South African government, and the right to the city, as embodied by the Abahlali movement, is clarified, complicated, and ultimately understood as a potential model for a new form of citizenship. The Abahlali movement offers a model for citizenship that is practical in their demands for housing and radical in their demands for a more inclusive city.

Abahlali baseMjondolo

The shackdwellers of Durban have long shouldered the burden of oppression at the hands of the South African government. Though inequality assumes many forms, nowhere is the severity more visible than in the houses – vulnerable to collapse or fire, isolated from public services, subject to eviction – that crowd the landscape immediately surrounding any large city in South Africa. While these conditions surprise people from the outside, Jacob Bryant, writing in the *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, notes the value inherent to such settlements as a home. He observes, "…the settlement is a hopeful place: near to town and to employment, near schools where children can

learn English, and in a middle-class neighborhood where even casual employment out pays anything available in most rural areas" (Bryant 2008, 43). Already, Bryant has identified the use value (here demonstrated as site and convenience) inherent to an informal settlement, in spite of its inadequacies and vulnerabilities. The use value of these settlements is largely ignored by the government, as they instead choose to see them primarily as illegal, underserviced, and in need of eradication rather than improvement (Huchzermeyer 2007). Though the Abahlali movement in Durban has faced certain political backlash from their active defense of their homes and neighborhoods, the greatest irony may be the freedom in the absence of government, a freedom that encourages a powerfully open political climate. Richard Pithouse, an academic and journalist with an attentive eye to the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement, comments on this particular situation.

> It can simultaneously be a site of political and cultural freedom because of its proximity to the city, its popular cosmopolitanism and its autonomy from the State and authoritarian modes of enforcing 'tradition' and also, a site of suffering because the absence of the State means the absence of services (Pithouse 2008, 68).

In the face of such overwhelming absence, the Abahlali movement has actively organized and in doing so, put forward a consistent vision of a more just city for all inhabitants. In order to best understand the Abahlali and its activism, this paper first considers the origins of the movement and the political context in Durban and secondly, the organizing and leadership structure that has made the movement possible and progressively more successful in their struggle for equality. Finally, the paper will consider the Kwa-Zulu Natal Elimination and Prevention of the Re-emergence of Slums Act, in which South Africa's troubled government and the Abahlali's hopeful organizing have come face to face.

Origins

The Abahlali movement began in Durban in 2005, originally mobilized in protest to the privatization of land in the Kennedy Road Settlement, one of over 500 informal settlements throughout the city of Durban (Pithouse 2007). Since beginning in 2005, the movement has grown

to encompass 30 settlements throughout South Africa, making it the largest social organization in

the country since the fall of apartheid government in 1994 (Abahlali baseMjondolo, 2006). The

origins of the movement are important not only for the injustice they explain but also for the tenor

of the struggle they reveal. The origins of the Abahlali movement demonstrate three significant

issues – overt betrayal by the government, continued injustice in the post-apartheid era, and the

struggle for visibility that the Abahlali continues to hold foremost. Through all, the Abahlali

movement purposefully frames the struggle as inherently moral, complicated by politics, governing

structures, and economics.

The Abahlali movement emerged out of a deep disappointment with "broken promises"

from the government. In his article, "Struggle is a School," Richard Pithouse explains the catalyst

for the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement:

> People had consistently been promised over some years that a small piece of land in
> nearby Elf Road would be made available for the development of housing. The promise
> had been repeated as recently as February 6, 2005, in a meeting with city officials and the
> local councilor. The Kennedy Road Development Committee had been participating in
> ongoing discussions about the development of this housing when, without any warning
> or explanation, bulldozers began excavating the land (Pithouse 2005).

In response, community leaders and frustrated community members organized an extensive road

block, bringing together hundreds of residents to protest the privatization of land they had fully

expected to serve as new public housing (Abahlali baseMjondolo, 2006). Such a deliberate betrayal

represents a growing disillusionment with the government from the ground up, a reality that

becomes clearer as distance from apartheid grows. Nigel Gibson, an academic whose work engages

the Abahlali movement with broader social philosophies such as Marxism and the Black

Consciousness Movement, comments on the consistencies and divergences since apartheid,

explaining that, "While the legacies of colonialism are thus apparent in the contemporary situation in

South Africa, what is new in the recent period is the development of shack settlements that have

begun to organize autonomously from the ANC" (Gibson 2008, 703). Although the African

National Congress, South Africa's leading political party has governed through significant country-wide changes for the better, the continually lacking political and physical infrastructure for shackdwellers remains a significant point of contention. Richard Pithouse, when describing the Kennedy Road Development in his article "Struggle is a School," implicates the ANC more overtly, suggesting that the ANC has operated in collusion with an oppressive status quo. He writes, "The people in whose name the power of the ANC was legitimated have been betrayed" (Pithouse 2005). Pithouse again evokes this concept of betrayal, in which the right to housing, a fundamental human and constitutional right, has been entirely denied to shackdwellers throughout the country.

Though the example of the Slums Act presents few instances of violent government oppression, the Abahlali movement has been undeniably persecuted for their political activism since their founding. On their website, the movement outlines the fundamental sources of violence and criminalization by the government, most commonly from conflict with police forces (Abahlali 2010). Conflict with police has lead to beatings, unlawful arrest, and long-term incarceration for numerous of Abahlali members. While the government is largely absent in many formal ways, shackdwellers nonetheless feel deeply vulnerable and threatened by the way the government and the police, meant to protect and serve them, view their poverty and their race as reason to violently criminalize their very existence (Abahlali 2010).

It is significant to note the undeniable role of race in the Abahlali movement's experience and activism. Though the movement does not utilize race as a focal point in their political rhetoric, it is nonetheless a clear point of conflict and a severe inequality that the time since apartheid has done little to lessen. As a researcher working from outside the country and with no experience of South Africa's deep and troubled racial politics, I use this paper to instead focus on the inherently geographic struggles of the Abahlali movement. This paper looks broadly at the political forces at

work in the landscape of Durban, all with the understanding that South African poverty and government oppression is deeply and undeniably racialized.

Confronted with an unaccepting and gravely disappointing political climate, the Abahlali shackdwellers have instead organized a campaign for broader recognition, looking to create visibility for their struggle in spite of the threats from their government. Jacob Bryant, writing in the *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, explains this dynamic of visibility through protest, "For as they march, they are marching for housing, for land, and against forced removals, but they are also marching to be seen – not only to curious tourists photographing them, but to be seen on their own terms" (Bryant 2008, 60). The struggle for visibility makes an important connection between the reality of Abahlali activism and the theories of urbanism and urban social movements explored earlier. In looking beyond the physical injustices surrounding them, the activists of Abahlali demand a deeper right – the right to the city. As articulated in the literature review, the right to the city encompasses a view of citizenship that is radically different than the present reality in most cities, certainly a radical divergence from the political reality in Durban. In demanding a right to the city, the Abahlali movement directly challenges the current structures of growth in Durban, governed by the motives of private interest and exchange value rather than the need for public services.

Organizing and Leadership

The Abahlali movement is marked by its inclusiveness, presenting a model for urban citizenship on a small but compelling scale. Though there are distinct leaders of the movement, the organization overall reflects an ethic of representativeness that is absent in the dominant political structures that claim to represent the settlements across the city. The movement achieves representativeness through a framework of a "politics of the poor" and a relatively open and independent governing system (Pithouse 2008).

Margaret Scott

S'bu Zikode, former President of Abahlali baseMjondolo writes that, "When you lead people you don't tell them what to do. You listen." Zikode's perspective is clear in his writing about Abahlali, arguing for recognition of the validity of the shackdwellers' demands and the value inherent to their grassroots organizing. Throughout all aspects of their organizing, Abahlali aims to represent the poor – to provide an unrivaled political voice for a constituency that the government and public often ignore. He elaborates here in his article, "Sekwanel! Sekwanel! (Enough is Enough!)," "Without unity there is no hope. But unity must be real. It cannot be created from the top. It must be created in the middle of the struggle of the poor" (Zikode 2008, 121). Through framing the issue as economic, the struggle for justice in the shack settlements of Durban connects to a challenge to privatization, a central aspect of the right to the city. Marie Huchzermeyer acknowledges how the government has largely ignored this economic reality:

> Thus, for reasons of discriminatory political representation or exclusion, government intervention has mostly been driven by the perception of informal settlement as either a threat or a convenient labor pool, and not the experience of poor living conditions or a conviction of class-based exploitation (Huchzermeyer 2004, 90).

Richard Pithouse echoes this same idea, writing here in his article, "University of Abahlali baseMjondolo." Pithouse again places blame on the "unwilling" South African authorities and urban elites, all of whom he holds responsible for the economic injustices throughout the country:

> They remain unwilling to confront the fact that the wealth of cities is historically based on the enclosure of rural land and the exploitation of cheap labour and that there is, therefore, a historical debt owed to the people rendered poor by the same economy which has rendered them rich (Pithouse 2007).

An economic narrative becomes clear in both of these descriptions, telling a familiar but disappointing story of government neglect because of private interests, again prioritizing exchange over use value. Throughout his writing on the Abahlali movement, Pithouse pays particular attention to the progressive structure maintained throughout the organization, ultimately explaining his view that, "It was, I think, this highly democratic nature of the organization in Kennedy Road that

Margaret Scott   22

produced its radicalism" (Pithouse 2005). Pithouse explains that political participation comes in many forms, whether through the central committee, an active community of 30 to 40 activists, or the engagement of 200 or more residents with the organizing of large marches or rallies. He also acknowledges the inevitability of residents who choose not to participate, though the philosophy of an open, participatory political system remains in place regardless (Pithouse 2005).

Another reverent supporter and writer on the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement is Raj Patel, author of *The Value of Nothing* (2009). Though Patel's book addresses capitalism and democracy broadly, he profiles the Abahlali movement as part of his chapter entitled "Democracy in the City." His writing on the movement powerfully articulates a fundament of the Abahlali's right to the city – the right to the stay put. Just as the Take Back the Land in Miami advocates the "right to return," the Abahlali movement "…demand[s] to be a part of the city's politics in the same way that they are *already* integral to its society and economy. For poor residents of any city, the first substantive right to the city is the right to stay put" (Patel 2009, 142). Patel goes further in articulating the Abahlali's demonstration of citizenship, writing that, "No matter what your nationality, if you're living in the shacks, you're of the shacks: a truly inclusive idea of citizenship" (Patel 2009, 141). The Abahlali's representativeness clearly marks their embodiment of the right to the city, in representing the demands of all shackdwellers and advocating a shackdweller citizenship from the ground up.

A final aspect of the organization's structure is financial independence, as they accept money primarily for legal assistance. The Abahlali movement feels strongly that its independence must be respected at all costs, choosing to rely on the non-monetary resources of its members and leaders rather than outside sources whenever possible (Abahlali baseMjondolo 2006). As an active organization operating decidedly outside of conventional political structures, this type of independence garners the Abahali a great deal of attention, whether respect from fellow activists or anger from their frustrated opponents, occasionally resulting in conflict with the government. This

Margaret Scott 23

fierce independence appears throughout the movement and represents a fundament of their success, a dynamic that becomes clearer when examining the KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act. Ultimately, the Abahlali's progressive organizational structure or "radicalism," as Pithouse deems it, represents the insurgent citizenship and participation of inhabitants inherent to the theory of the right to the city. When the Abahlali baseMjondolo brought the Slums Act to Constitutional Court, the right to the city was also brought to the national stage, modeling a view of citizenship that holds inhabitants' rights above else. Simple though it seems, this view of rights radically counters the view put forth by the South African government and the international forces that strongly influence South African politics. Throughout all, the Abahlali movement is intentional and certain in the virtue of their activism, often citing the phrase, "Struggle is a school…" (Abahlali 2010) (Pithouse 2005). The simplicity of the statement underlies the power of its meaning, signifying that the struggle for rights is valuable in and of itself and that everyone can learn from the struggle for inhabitants' rights.

The Slums Act

For the Abahlali, whose activism has been historically local, the repeal of the Slums Act represents a victory not only in its repeal but also its national visibility, an invaluable part of the struggle for equality. The Act, though an event well worth considering on its own, is useful also in how it introduces the main actors that have come together to advocate for the shackdwellers' rights or, alternatively, to conspire to keep the status quo of staggering inequality in place in cities across South Africa. In order to best understand the significance of the Slums Act, the paper first considers the origins of the Act, the scale at which the Abahlali movement operated in opposing the Act, and finally the legal constructions that were used to promote a very particular type of acceptable "growth" for South Africa.

Margaret Scott   24

Origins

The Slums Act came about originally as a method to meet the United Nations Millennium

Development Project Goal, set forth in 2000, of steady slum removal (Huchzemeyer 2009). Just as

can be seen in the case of the impending World Cup in 2010, the South African government often

bends to external pressure, whether political, cultural, or economic, and in doing so overlooks the

needs of their most vulnerable citizens.   As such, in 2007, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial

Government took pains to meet then-President Mbeki's standards for "shack-free cities," using slum

removal as one method for achieving this end (Huchzermeyer 2007). Though the Act professed to

be a progressive step towards achieving housing rights for South Africans, the reality was a

threatening prospect for any who had managed to create shelter for themselves, albeit vulnerable or

illegal, in such a hostile economic and political climate. The Act was particualrly significant because

of its designation as "pilot legislation," meaning that slum elimination policy would be utilized across

South Africa in the wake of its original provincial implementation, policy that would impact an

estimated 12 million people (Constitutional Court of South Africa, 2009). Marie Huchzermeyer,

writing here in an article for *Pambazuka News*, comments on the government's disappointing method

for addressing the housing crisis:

> South Africa has still not grasped the concept of a social concept of land…What
> KwaZulu-Natal has also still not learnt from Brazil is that slums, as embarrassing as they
> may be to city managers, must be understood as temporary relief to the housing crisis,
> and that improvements must involve the occupants rather than displace them
> (Huchzermeyer 2007).

Huchzermeyer's assessment is critical, both in style and significance, as it identifies the "social

concept of land," a clear gesture toward the concept of "use value," a central element to

understanding the debates that surround the KwaZulu-Natal Slums Act and the broader conflict

over squatting and increasing privatization in South Africa. Huchzermeyer's critique represents an

alternative and sympathetic appraisal of informal housing, much like those expressed by Robert

Neuwirth (2007) and Mike Davis (2006) in the literature review. Clearly, the South African government has largely assumed a perspective on shack settlements that is oriented around exchange rather than use value, a distinct imprint of the growth machine. In seeing no inherent use value to the shack settlements or "social concept" of the land's value, the government prevents the creation or implementation of policy that offers any significant agency to the individuals who endure the worst of the housing crisis. In this way, the Slums Act of 2006 offers a snapshot of a wider government stance on informal settlements, whether at the provincial or national level. The Act and the legal battle that ensued are indications of deep-seated conflict in South Africa, one that finds free market economics at odds with the fulfillment of the most basic human (and constitutional) rights. In the example presented by the Act, the Abahlali movement offers a counter argument for a right to their city, working against the legal initiative that would have denied their basic right to earn ownership and formal governance over the land they call home.

Scale

The Slums Act rearranges the scale at which urbanization in Durban has typically taken place. In the past decade, government intervention has been intermittent - occasionally repressive toward demonstrations of activism and particularly towards the Abahlali baseMjondolo. At the same time, however, the government is almost entirely absent in any progress towards housing the province's poorest residents. With the proposed Act at the provincial level, the Abahlali movement confronted a level of governance far beyond what they had typically addressed with their activism. In the past, the Abahlali movement protested against local councilors, demanding basic services from the immediate political infrastructure in the city of Durban. Richard Pithouse elaborates on this tendency, "One of the reasons why the local councilors have often been targeted in these protests is because they are supposed to be accountable downwards to their constituents and to speak upward to the state their behalf" (Pithouse, 2007). In the advent of the Act's implementation,

Margaret Scott   26

however, the Abahlali movement organized on a new scale, both in their alliances and in their overall aim. Though the Abahlali movement has been far reaching since its founding, the scope became clearer in protesting the Slums Act, as the movement engaged with members beyond the Durban area, particularly the Rural Network, representing the interests of settlement inhabitants in the many rural communities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (Abahlali 2010). As the scope of their alliances grew, so too did their aims for reform, this time taking the proposed legislation to task for its unconstitutionality in Durban's High Court. When the Act was nonetheless ruled constitutional in Durban's Court, the Abahlali was undeterred, instead pursuing the case to its final destination in South Africa's Constitutional Court.

The multiple levels of scale present in the Slums Act prompts a reminder of the political economy of place perspective. In his article, "Spaces of dependence, spaces of engagement and the politics of scale, or: looking for local politics," Kevin Cox asserts that politics is not fixed, a concept that fits logically with the Abahlali's engagement with multiple layers of government in order to put down the KwaZulu-Natal Slums Act (Cox 1998). Though the Slums Act proposed a great burden to shackdwellers across the country, the opportunity to contest the burdensome legislation earned the movement, often operating locally, a resonant political voice at the national level. In this way, the Abahlali was able to use the decidedly anti-poor legislation as a tool of their own, appealing instead to the country's judicial system to acknowledge the validity of their claims to rights. In Cox's (1998) framework, the Abahlali movement's advocacy at the national scale represented a "space of engagement," actively linking their activism to organizations across South Africa and to the "translocal" movements for the right to the city across the world (Take Back the Land, 2010). In this case, the Abahlali succeeded not only in dismantling unjust legislation but also in representing their organization's progressive, participatory structure and broader vision of citizenship to a national and international audience.

Legal Mechanisms of Growth

In Durban, growth has historically been oriented toward privatization, in that private interests are given precedence over the needs of most underprivileged or underserviced communities. The Abahlali baseMjondolo movement after all, was born out of a deep frustration with privatization in the Kennedy Road Settlement. Because the Abahlali shackdwellers remain without legal rights to their land, they are unable to use private property as a basis for their citizenship or a foundation on which to advocate their rights to the government. In this case, the growth machine is a useful paradigm because it illuminates the position of the government as they confront the political challenges of a large shackdweller population. As articulated earlier by Logan and Molotch, the growth machine represents actors that are motivated by a vision of value-free growth, looking to evict shackdwellers rather than recognize their right to stay put and to gain services and legal recognition in the communities they call home (Logan and Molotch 1987).

In the KwaZulu-Natal Elmination and Prevention of the Reemergence of Slums Act, it is precisely this perspective on land use that presents itself. Rather than concern themselves with the problems of housing, the Province's rightful jurisdiction, the Provincial government inserted itself into the matter of land tenure. In legislating on land tenure, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial government found itself outside the bounds of its constitutional authority (South African Constitution, 1996). Moreover, the Provincial government created legislation that deeply disenfranchised the people it most affected, weakening the few protections on which shackdwellers' tenuous housing rested. Acknowledging this, the Abahlali baseMjondolo organized against the Slums Act with a platform that extended beyond the constitutionality of the Act and instead appealed to the morality of the issue. The Abahlali's moral framework reveals the extent to which the government has failed to deliver services and recognize the basic rights of the neediest citizens. Specifically, the Provincial government misrepresented their legislation, arguing that the ultimate

goal of "shack free cities" justified the means of evicting already vulnerable communities from their land. Through the lens of use and exchange value offered by the political economy of place, this reality becomes clearer and explicitly points to the culpability of South African government, in this case the Provincial government, in perpetuating political structures that deny the social value of land.

Just as the Provincial government used the Slums Act to promote exchange value, choosing only to see the potential value of "shack free cities," the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement used their opposition to the Slums Act as a platform for vocalizing the use value of their neighborhoods, advocating for their "right to stay put." In demanding a political voice and bringing the Slums Act to national and international attention, the Abahlali movement achieved more than its overt goal, the repeal of the Slums Act. Beyond the Act itself, the Abahlali movement asserted the right for shackdwellers to have a political voice, a right that has routinely been denied. Marie Huchzermeyer offers an eloquent summary of the impact of the repealed Act and a thoughtful consideration of its overall significance. She writes,

> Of course shack dwellers' struggles do not end here. Collectively, we need to find ways to ensure that relevant provisions in existing legislation and policy are consistently implemented, especially insofar as they promote upgrading. It is also important to propose policy and legislative changes that don't take us back to an apartheid-era attitude to informal settlers, but take us forward. Some argue that the ruling is insignificant because living conditions remain the same as before. But what is different since the judgment is that the fear of unfair eviction is removed for shack dwellers in the province (Huchzermeyer 2009).

Though the living conditions of the shack settlements remain the same, the political recognition of the movement, however small, cannot be underestimated. As the right to the city implies, a right exists beyond the right to housing, a right to inhabit public space, to have safe and stable housing, and for inhabitants to participate in the governance of their city. As inhabitants, the Abahlali and its members were able to have a legitimate voice in shaping their city and in turn, the political and physical landscapes of settlements across South Africa. Their activism embodies much of the theory this paper has discussed, demonstrating the "knowledgeable agency" of individuals in structuration

theory, as articulated by Pred (1984) and Giddens (1984). In doing so, the Abahlali baseMjondolo put forth a valuable model of citizenship, a "shackdweller citizenship" that gives hope to movements and inhabitants across the world, all struggling to re-envision the oppressive city structures they have inherited (Holston 1999). The Abahlali movement's embodiment of the right to the city is all at once radical, practical, and hopeful.

C o n c l u s i o n :   S h a c k d w e l l e r   C i t i z e n s h i p

This project came about as a way to understand the lived reality of the theory of the right to the city. I looked closely at the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement in Durban in order to understand the nuances and challenges of the theory in practice, and ultimately, to see how this theory might be useful to similar movements for human rights. The Abahlali baseMjondolo movement in South Africa demonstrates how the idealism and radicalism of the right to the city confronts the rigidity and free market pragmatism of the political economy of place theory. In the example presented by the repeal of the Slums Act, the Abahlali movement's right to the city ultimately wins out in a fierce contest against the government's narrow embodiment of the political economy of place. Though the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement's vision of growth is decidedly different than their government, they have nonetheless been successful in advocating their right to the city – a right to stay put in the places they call home. In doing so, the Abhalali movement has organized against an unjust status quo, one that marks the lives of the poorest citizens and the landscapes of cities worldwide. Rather than accept the inevitability of their eviction, as promoted with the misleading rhetoric of "slum elimination," the Abahlali movement powerfully denied the limited view of citizenship put forth by the government's uncritical acceptance of the growth machine. Though slum elimination purports to be a desirable end, the means to achieving "shack free cities" would

greatly threaten the protections and rights of shackdwellers, a reality the Abahlali refused to accept as inevitable.

Though the Abahlali movement represents but one example, their distinct embodiment of the right to the city connects their activism to movements and cities across the globe. The right to the city's open framework makes it a useful rallying cry for movements across countries and continents, uniting the world's poorest residents through belief in their inherent right to shelter, to legal recognition by the government, and to participate in the decisions that govern their lives. Though the poorest citizens experience a diverse range of injustices in different cities across the globe, the point stands that the right to the city inserts an entirely new rhetoric into conversations on urban growth. Rather than emphasize "growth," the right to the city advocates the "right to *return*," as with Miami's foreclosures, or "the right to *stay put*," as with Durban's evictions. No matter the circumstance, the right to the city articulates the right for inhabitants to inhabit – to live safely, to work stably, and participate freely in the governance of their neighborhoods, wherever they may be.

This articulation of inhabitants' rights counters the presumptions of "value-free growth" inherent to the political economy of place theory (Logan and Molotch 1987, 32). Though the theory of the right to the city refutes many of the simplistic assumptions of the political economy of place theory, the exploration of the right to the city theory serves to broaden (rather than deny) the political economy of place theory. Political economy of place is useful in its straightforward articulation of the typical actors invested in shaping a city's growth. The right to the city, here embodied by the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement, stands as a reminder that inhabitants can successfully advocate for the use value of a place. In spite of the seeming inevitability of privatized growth based on exchange value, inhabitants nonetheless have a voice in advocating their own vision for the future. Therefore, while political economy of place serves as a theoretical foundation

Margaret Scott 31

for understanding urban growth, the right to the city serves an equally important role of realizing social justice in the city, enabling "shackdweller citizenship" in Durban.

As this paper focused mainly on activism in Durban, future research of this kind would greatly benefit from a broader scope of movements for land and housing rights. The interconnected scale of the right to the city demonstrates the prevalence of the theory in practice in countless cities. Therefore, further research with a broader perspective and greater attention to detail would only serve to strengthen the argument for more just and inclusive cities, to further challenge the assumptions of political economy of place, and to further elaborate the many different ways the right to the city is put into practice.

In bringing the right to the city the South Africa's national stage, the Abahlali movement articulated a radical view of citizenship to an audience far beyond the country's boundaries. Even a brief consideration of South African politics reveals the heavy involvement of international political structures, clearly evidenced by the World Cup in 2010 or the United Nations development goals that largely inspired the Kwa-Zulu Natal Slums Act in 2006 (Huchzermeyer 2007). Though the Abahlali movement is largely bound to Durban, their activism asserts the right to the city to an expansive audience, voicing opposition not only to the South African government but also the oppressive political and market forces operating on an international scale.

As such, the Abahlali tactfully inserted the right to the city into a broader discourse on the growing polarization of cities, the power of the urban elite, and the all too frequent complicity of the government in the processes of privatization that routinely deny rights to citizens most in need. Movements for the right to the city, whether born out of the shacks of Durban or the foreclosed homes of Miami, are stark reminders of the strength of communities, the alternative visions for the future of our cities, and the models of citizenship that can powerfully translate theoretical and democratic ideals into lived reality.

Margaret Scott   32

R e f e r e n c e s

Abahlali baseMjondolo. A Short History of Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Durban Shack Dwellers'
Movement.
http://www.abahlali.org/node/16

Abahlali baseMjondolo. Memornadum Handed to Senior Superintendent Glen Nayager of the
Syndenham Police Station.
http://www.abahlali.org/node/991

Abahlali baseMjondolo v. Premier of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. 2009. Constitutional Court Judgment.
Constitutional Court of South Africa. Case CCT 12/09 [2009] ZACC 31. October 14.

Abahlali baseMjondolo. 2010. Press Statement: Operation Murambatsvina comes to KZN: The
Notorious Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Bill.
http://www.abahlali.org/node/1629

Abahlali baseMjondolo. "Supporting Abahlali baseMjondolo." http://www.abahlali.org/node/269

Bryant, Jacob. 2008. Towards Delivery and Dignity: Community Struggle from Kennedy Road.
Journal of Asian and African Studies 43: 41 – 61.

Cox, Kevin R. 1998. Spaces of dependence, spaces of engagement and the politics of scale, or:
looking for local politics. *Political Geography* 17: 1 – 23.

Davis, Mike. 2006. *Planet of Slums.* New York: Verso.

Gibson, Nigel C. 2008. Upright and Free: Fanon in South Africa, from Biko to the shackdwellers'
movement (Abahlali baseMjondolo). *Social Identities* 14: 683 – 715.

Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Habitat International Coalition. 2005. UNESCO-UN-HABITAT-ISS. Urban Policies and the Right
to the City. Discussion Paper. Paris.

Harvey, David. 2008. The Right to the City. *New Left Review* 53: 23 – 40.

Holston, James, ed. 1999. *Cities and Citizenship.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Huchzermeyer, Marie. 2009. Ruling in Abahlali case lays solid foundation to build on. *BusinessDay.*
November 4.

Huchzermeyer, Marie. 2007. *Pambazuka News.* "Elimination of the Poor in KwaZulu Natal." July 4.

Huchzermeyer, Marie. 2004. *Unlawful Occupation: Informal Settlements in South Africa and Brazil.*
Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.

Margaret Scott   33

Independent Online. 2009. KZN Slums Act ruled unconstitutional. October 14.

Independent Online. 2009. Landmark judgment in Slum Act case. January 27.

Keller, Bill. 1993. *New York Times.* Squatters Testing Limits as Apartheid Crumbles. November 14.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1996. *Writings on Cities.* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Logan, John R. and Harvey Molotch. 1987. *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Merrifield, Andy. 2002. *Dialectical Urbanism.* New York: Monthly Review Press.

Neuwirth, Robert. 2005. Brainstorm - How shantytowns become real cities. *Fortune International*, October 17.

Neuwirth, Robert. 2007. Squatters and the Cities of Tomorrow. *City* 11: 71-80.

Ngiam, Xin Wei. 2010. Taking Poverty Seriously: What the poor are saying and why it matters. http://www.abahlali.org/node/27

Patel, Raj. 2008. A Short Course in Politics at the University of *Abahlali baseMjondolo. Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43: 95.

Patel, Raj. 2009. *The Value of Nothing: How to Reshape Market Society and Redefine Democracy.* New York: Picador.

Pithouse, Richard. 2008. A Politics of the Poor. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43: 63 – 94.

Pithouse, Richard. 2005. Struggle Is a School: The Rise of a Shack Dwellers' Movement in Durban, South Africa. *Monthly Review* 57.

Pithouse, Richard. 2007. University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. *Voices of Resistance from Occupied London*. Issue 2. http://www.occupiedlondon.org/abahlali/

Pred, Allan. 1984. Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74: 279 – 297.

Purcell, Mark. 2003. Citizenship and the right to the global city: reimagining the capitalist world order. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27: 564-590.

Rabkin, Franny. 2009. Slum law evictions ruled to be unlawful. *Business Day.* October 1.

Smith, David. 2009. World Cup 2010: football brings defining moment for South Africa. *Guardian*. June 13.

South African Constitution. Chapter 2 – Bill of Rights. Section 26: Housing.

http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96cons2.htm#20

Take Back the Land. About the Take Back the Land Movement.
    http://www.takebacktheland.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=servicedetail&serviceid=18

Tranberg Hansen, Karen and Mariken Va, eds. 2004. *Reconsidering Informality: Perspectives from Urban Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Wines, Michael. 2005. Shantytown Dwellers in South Africa Protest Sluggish Pace of Change. *New York Times*. December 25

Zikode, S'bu. 2008. Sekwanel! Sekwanel! (Enough is Enough!) *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43: 119 – 124.

Zikode, S'bu. 2008. The Greatest Threat to the Future Stability in Our Country is the Greatest Strength of the *Abahlali baseMjondolo* Movement (SA) (Shackdwellers). *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43: 113 -117.