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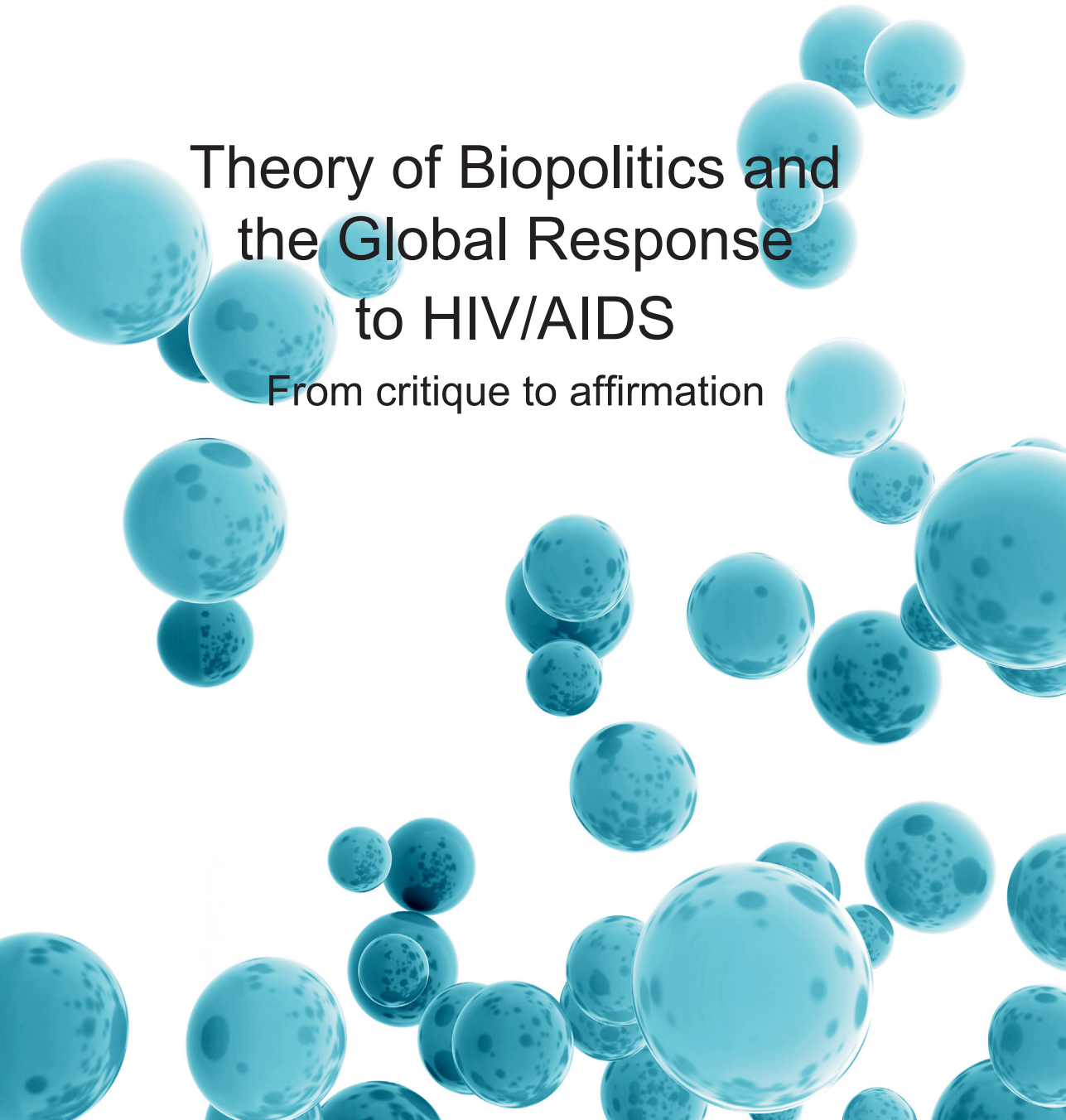
JAAKKO AILIO

# Theory of Biopolitics and the Global Response to HIV/AIDS

## From critique to affirmation



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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

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*To Delfiini and Mesimarja*

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beautiful daughter yet to be named, writing about transforming the world would simply be in vein.

Jaakko Ailio

Helsinki

August 2017

# ABSTRACT

The vast evidence shows that the scale up and liberalization of the global HIV/AIDS relief especially in the past fifteen years has overall improved the life changes of people virtually everywhere. However, as numerous critical studies have simultaneously emphasized, in the globally marginalized locations this overall improvement has been accompanied by cementing already existing hierarchies and the establishment of new inequalities. In these locations the well-intentioned global response to HIV/AIDS has run into an obstacle that has been undefeatable; namely, the body. Due to the fact that people are physiologically and pharmaceutically different, the global response to HIV/AIDS has not been able in reality to affirm the freedom and equality of all globally marginalized sufferers, despite this being the intention. This is not at all surprising from the perspective of the biopolitical theorizing of the past four decades. One of the most established and well-known claims in this interdisciplinary field is that political universalism recedes when life steps to the foreground. When the general aim is to save, improve, secure, modify or foster life, the attention is eventually focused on particular biological differences, regardless of universal ideas that might inspire this governance. And yet, in spite of this resonance that runs between the field of biopolitical thought and the concrete problems of the contemporary global HIV/AIDS governance, extensive and systematic attempts to introduce biopolitical theories into the context of the global HIV/AIDS governance have so far been lacking.

This research responds to this lack. The focus of the study lies in bringing the field of biopolitical thought into an intimate connection with the currently unsolvable political problematics of the contemporary HIV/AIDS governance in order to move beyond a simple critical elaboration of the current situation. After all, in spite of the difficulty of thinking political universalism and the management of our lives together, not all scholars of biopolitics have seen political universalism and the domain of life as absolutely incompatible. On the contrary, recently a number of theorists of biopolitics have brought forward different ideas on how political universalism might still be made operative in relation to the domain of life. In spite of the insightfulness of these ideas, however, these so-called theories of 'affirmative biopolitics' have remained somewhat cryptic and no general consensus have

emerged over how life and politics could be brought together in a way that would make it possible, for instance, to speak about politics of life that also in practice affirms everyone's freedom and equality.

As a result of this ambiguousness, we will not only reflect the current debates within the field of biopolitical theory but also develop and push further the ideas of seminal theorists of biopolitics, such as Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito and Michel Foucault. Empirically this engagement will lead us to analyze the political limits of the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS through literary works that concentrate on the difficult situation of the globally marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers. The literary works we will focus on are Carolyne Adalla's *Confessions of an AIDS Victim*, Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*, Meja Mwangi's *The Last Plague* and Yan Lianke's *Dream of Ding Village*. All these works have been selected on the basis of their resonance to the actual problems of the global governance of HIV/AIDS, and all these works are read by contrasting them to the political limitations of our current perceptions of these problems, along the lines set by a methodological orientation called the 'materialist criticism' of literature, which originates from the work of Elaine Scarry.

Through our empirical analysis we will show how even the most marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers can be seen on the basis of their lives to be actually free and equal in a more extensive sense than on the basis of the liberal public health ethos. In this manner, we will eventually introduce 'affirmative-biopolitical' ideas of freedom and equality into the context of global HIV/AIDS governance. Through these two ideas we will sketch a political relation that consists from the prevalent liberal policies and from the viable possibility of concrete affirmative biopolitics, which on the basis of the affirmation of these ideas of freedom and equality, possesses genuine potential to go beyond the limitations of the current global response to HIV/AIDS. Finally, we will reflect our actual possibilities to transform the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS and elaborate what kind of political acts as such are in this context faithful expressions of affirmative biopolitics.

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Lukuisilla mittareilla tarkasteltuna etenkin viimeisen viidentoista vuoden aikana tapahtunut HIV/AIDS-pandemian hallinnan globaali intensifioituminen ja liberalisoituminen on parantanut tilannetta käytännössä kaikkialla. Kuten lukuisat globaalin hallinnan käytännön vaikutuksia luotaavat kriittiset tutkimukset ovat kuitenkin samaan aikaan osoittaneet, globaalisti marginalisoitujen alueiden kohdalla kehitys on sivutuotteenaan myös pakottanut joitain ihmisiä perusteettomasti huonompaan asemaan kuin toisia. Marginaalisissa konteksteissa puutteellisesta terveydenhuollon infrastruktuurista ja köyhyydestä johtuen ihmisten sattumanvaraiset fysikaaliset erot ovat toistuvasti johtaneet siihen, että HIV/AIDS-pandemian hallinta ei ole käytännössä onnistunut toimimaan täysin omien periaatteidensa mukaisesti kaikkien oikeuksia ja tasavertaisuutta kunnioittaen. Tämä ei ole yllättävää monitieteellisen biopoliittisen teoriaperinteen näkökulmasta. Biopoliittisen teorian yksi keskeisimmistä väitteistä on jo pitkään ollut, että poliittisen universalismin ja väestöjen elämän hallinnoinnin välinen suhde on ristiriitainen. Kun väestöjen elämää pyritään turvaamaan, vaalimaan tai muuttamaan, huomio keskittyy lopulta välttämättömästi partikulaareihin biologisiin ja fysiologisiin eroavaisuuksiin, mikä tekee poliittisesta universaalisuudesta käytännössä merkityksetöntä tai ainoastaan muodollisia.

Edellisistä yhtäläisyyksistä huolimatta HIV/AIDS-pandemian globaalia hallintaa ei ole tähän mennessä laajamittaisesti ja systemaattisesti tarkasteltu biopoliittisen teorian näkökulmasta. Käsillä oleva tutkimukseni pyrkii osaltaan täyttämään tätä aukkoa. Tutkimuksessani HIV/AIDS-pandemian globaalin hallinnan politiikkaa käsitellään käyttämällä hyväksi biopolitiikan teorian piirissä esitettyjä viimeaikaisia avauksia. Lähestymistapa on lähtökohtaisesti lupaava, sillä vaikka täyttä konsensusta ei ole syntynyt ja osittain viimeaikaiset avaukset ovat olleet vaikeaselkoisia, on erityisesti ’affirmatiivisen’ biopolitiikan teorian piirissä jo pystytty esittämään alustavia ideoita, joiden perusteella poliittisen universalismin ja elämän hallinnoinnin välinen ristiriita mahdollisesti voitaisiin ratkaista.

Johtuen edellä mainittujen avausten luonnosmaisuudessa tutkimuksessa ei sovelleta valmista teoriaa HIV/AIDS-pandemian globaalin hallinnan tapaukseen.

Päinvastoin, tutkimuksessa biopolitiikan teoriaa edelleen kehitetään esimerkiksi Giorgio Agambenin, Michel Foucault'n ja Roberto Espositon ajatuksia jalostaen. Teoreettisten kehittelyjen perusteella tutkimuksessa päädytään lopulta empiirisesti tarkastelemaan HIV/AIDS-pandemian globaalin hallinnan politiikkaa kirjallisuuden avulla. Empiirisesti tutkimus hyödyntää neljää teosta, jotka kaikki käsittelevät globaalisti marginalisoitujen ihmisten vaikea tilannetta HIV/AIDS-pandemian yhteydessä. Kyseiset teokset ovat Carolyne Adallan *Confessions of an AIDS Victim*, Jamaica Kincaidin *My Brother*, Meja Mwangin *The Last Plague* ja Yan Lianken *Dream of Ding Village*, joita kaikkia tutkimuksessa luetaan peilaamalla teoksien sisältöä HIV/AIDS-pandemian globaalin hallinnan nykypäivän ongelmiin. Metodologisesti teoksien luentatapa pohjautuu Elaine Scarryn kehittämään kirjallisuuden 'materialistiseen kritiikkiin'.

Empiirisen analyysin perusteella tutkimuksessa esitetään, että jopa globaalisti kaikkein marginalisoiduimmat ihmiset voidaan biopoliittisesta perspektiivistä käsittää vapaimmiksi ja tasavertaisimmiksi kuin liberaalin HIV/AIDS-pandemian hallinnan näkökulmasta katsottuna on mahdollista. Näin tutkimuksessa ei ainoastaan kyseenalaisteta nykymuotoisen HIV/AIDS-pandemian globaalin hallinnan legitimiteettiä, vaan biopoliittisen vapauden ja tasavertaisuuden ideoiden avulla tutkimuksessa myös osoitetaan poliittiset suuntaviivat, joiden perustalta pandemian globaalin hallinnoinnin uudelleenjärjestely on mahdollista. Lopuksi tutkimuksessa pohditaan, mitä kyseisten suuntaviivojen seuraaminen konkreettisesti tarkoittaa.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Inventing the Global Response

According to Allan Brandt, a distinguished historian of medicine, it is still premature to write the history of the HIV/AIDS pandemic as the virus continues to take a heavy toll on such a large number of people. Yet, the progress already made in addressing this pandemic and the changes wrought by HIV in public health policies, clinical medicine, research practices, cultural attitudes and social behaviors have been far-reaching. Brandt writes that most notably the HIV/AIDS pandemic has provided the foundation for revolutionizing the traditional approaches to 'international health', replacing them with an innovative global approaches to disease that we are currently beginning to get accustomed to. Thus, already on a basis of these broad effects on science, medicine, socio-cultural environments, public health and worldwide cooperation, Brandt concludes that, although it is still too early to write the history of this pandemic, eventually when it will be written it will be important to recognize that without this pandemic "there would be no global health movement as we know it today."[1]

The above-quoted short text by Brandt, published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*, is a comment to a review article, co-written by Peter Piot, the former executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). In this article the response to HIV/AIDS is elevated as a paradigmatic model for global health. According to the authors of this article, it is quite remarkable how in just three decades, after the outbreak of opportunistic infections and Kaposi's sarcoma was reported in a small number of homosexual men in California and New York, we have an unprecedented global response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic which incorporates a multisectoral approach that involves

[1] Brandt 2013, 2152.

> public health officials, clinicians, politicians, and leaders in civil society, business and labor, the armed forces, and the law, working in concert and with financial resources in excess of $15 billion per year to reduce the incidence of HIV infection and associated mortality.[2]

What makes this development even more remarkable is that most of it has happened after the dawn of the current millennium, after the fight against HIV/AIDS was included into the now-expired Millennium Development Goals and after the United Nations' General Assembly endorsed a final Declaration of Commitment in June 2001, which emphasized the importance of treating the global HIV/AIDS crisis as a matter of highest priority. It was these maneuvers that made the HIV/AIDS crisis, as Tony Barnett and Alan Whiteside have put it, "the first global epidemic of which we have been commonly conscious."[3]

The dawn of the new millennium was decisive, even though the global attention has since only intensified. For example, in 2006 and 2011 the General Assembly produced two follow-up declarations that continued to underline the importance of the uninterrupted involvement of the whole global community in the matters of HIV/AIDS and the pandemic also got repeatedly mentioned in the recent UN's post-2015 development agenda, titled *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. These declarations and agendas aside, the dawn of the millennium was decisive because shortly after it the growing concern led, first, in the year 2002, to the formation of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, established to finance anti-AIDS activities in developing countries. Then, second, in 2003, President George W. Bush launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which aim was to allocate billions of dollars to the countries hardest hit by AIDS. Regarding both of these organizations, the promise has also been kept. Without downplaying the role of other funding bodies, it is noteworthy that since the establishment of these two organizations the global resources made available in the low- and middle-income countries have more than quadrupled. This has made it possible to scale up HIV prevention and treatment services in these countries, where the most of the world's HIV positive people live, to the level previously unthought-of. Moreover, a number of hugely positive results

[2] Piot & Quinn 2013, 2211.

[3] Barnett & Whiteside 2006, 374.

have followed. For example, since the year 2000, the new infections have declined 35% worldwide and there are now on a global scale approximately 15 times more people receiving the life-saving antiretroviral drug therapy than there were at the beginning of the current millennium.[4]

And yet, even though the dawn of the current millennium was the moment when the global response to HIV/AIDS gathered its current momentum, the beginning of the global response to HIV/AIDS can be better situated in the mid-1980s. The first proper institutional landmark was when the World Health Organization (WHO) founded the Global Program on AIDS (GPA) in 1987 – an organization which led the global response until 1996 when UNAIDS was launched. Under the leadership of the GPA's first Director, a physician and human rights advocate Jonathan Mann, GPA took as its tasks to raise HIV/AIDS awareness, formulate evidence-based policies, provide technical and financial support to its member countries, initiate relevant research, promote participation by a broad range of civil society institutions and champion the rights of those living with HIV. While today similar tasks are backed by a strong global consensus, this was not the case in the mid-1980s. Instead, all the way to the latter half of the 1990s, even the liberal democracies of the West were debating whether their public health responses to HIV/AIDS should favor commonweal over the rights of the infected and at-risk citizens or whether the civil liberties of the infected and high-risk populations should be respected by employing voluntary and consensual tactics. Peter Baldwin has showed how somewhat surprisingly during this first phase of the pandemic the United States and Sweden adopted more restrictive policies than Germany or France, despite the latter two are usually considered to be less laissez-faire and concerned with civil liberties than the former. According to Baldwin, this was due to the fact that the political ideology of these nations always did not correspond with their traditions of dealing with contagious disease, as these traditions typically stemmed from their nineteenth century dealings with earlier epidemics of contagious disease, such as plague, cholera, yellow fewer, smallpox and syphilis. Furthermore, as Baldwin states, these nations were also internally divided during this era to the extent that

> AIDS was sometimes regarded less as a disease in a biological or epidemiological sense than as a social and symbolic phenomenon with medical consequences […].

[4] UNAIDS 2015a.

> In selecting preventive strategies against the epidemic, society was also revealing its core values. Individual rights, liberty, and democracy, on the one hand, or compulsion, exclusion, and force, on the other: thus ran the Manichaean choice offered by many observers.[5]

Today, however, this conflictuality largely lies in the past. Despite the resistance from the part of traditional public health models, the well placed individual advocates of human rights, such as Mann, and the important activist campaigns in different countries, especially the one in the US, gradually succeeded in turning the tide towards the current wide acceptance of the intimate connection between health and the rights of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. In this way, it can be said that the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS actually marks a shift in public health thinking, as for example Jeremy Youde has maintained. According to Youde, in the case of HIV/AIDS, the traditional coercions, compulsions and restrictions have for a first time in the context of a contagious disease given way to an approach that seeks to provide health by primarily advocating individual rights and liberties.[6]

Recently, this exceptional status of HIV/AIDS among other contagious diseases got also underlined by its securitization. Although HIV/AIDS was unprecedentedly singled out as a potential threat even to the international peace and security by the UN's Security Council in the early 2000s, this move did not lead into increased abuses of human rights and civil liberties in the name of security. Contrary to what securitization theory and various historical examples might suggest, the securitization of the HIV/AIDS pandemic only increased the importance placed on human rights by encouraging governments around the world to see the improvement of the health of their HIV positive population as a matter of national security. From the traditionalist perspective, then, the most notable and surprising aspect of the securitization of HIV/AIDS is, as Stefan Elbe has well put it,

> that it does not appear to have culminated in such a draconian response to the AIDS pandemic along the lines of responses that states have historically

[5] Baldwin 2005, 11.

[6] Youde 2010, 89–113.

implemented to other infectious diseases (such as leprosy, cholera, or even SARS more recently).[7]

Elbe rightly elaborates that regarding the securitization of the pandemic the main reason for this continued triumph of the individual rights-based response over the reactionary public health measures is that, instead of being driven by a temporary extension of sovereignty at the expense of civil liberties, the securitization of HIV/AIDS was actually a result of clever strategy used by certain public health officials and activists. In the case of HIV/AIDS, the language of security was all along invoked in connection with human rights. The security arguments about HIV/AIDS were especially framed in a way that sought to demonstrate why the global improvement of the health and welfare is important not simply because of the general well-being of humanity but also because of the self-interest of states. In fact, as there exists very little empirical evidence that really suggests that HIV/AIDS could lead to serious security crisis scenarios, such as state collapse, the securitization of HIV/AIDS has foremost been 'a noble lie', as Elbe has phrased it.[8]

Yet, it would be wrong to say that the contemporary hegemony of the rights-based approach has only been established though clever tactical moves and political activism. This is so, even if the securitization of HIV/AIDS has not been the only 'framing' deployed by the proponents of the liberal approach. Instead, the triumph of the liberal response intertwines with a deployment of many creative framings of HIV/AIDS – such as developmental and humanitarian framings – and clever responses to various counter-framings, as the studies of global health governance have documented.[9] And yet, even more importantly the nature of HIV infection, clinical research and biomedical science have all supported the liberalization of the global response too. First of all, because HIV infection is not self-evidently visible condition and as HIV is primarily transmitted through acts which are considered private, the preventive measures have been from the early on haunted by 'the human factor' which is difficult to control through simple and crude public health measures. After all, it is hard to realize clinical and population-based interventions

[7] Elbe 2009, 15.

[8] Ibid., 27–58.

[9] See e.g. Harman 2010; Rushton 2010; Ingram 2013; McInnes & Lee (eds.) 2015.

or adoption of protective behaviors in relation to people's sexual conduct without sensitizing the response to different individual needs and circumstances.

Furthermore, the invention of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) in the mid-1990s and especially its current conceptualization as not only treatment but also prevention tool has made this individual emphasis even more important. Because it has been now shown that compliance to one's individually tailored therapy does not only turn HIV infection into a chronic condition but it also lowers viral load to the level which dramatically reduces the transmission risk of HIV, it is now for the first time more or less realistically envisioned how HIV/AIDS could be globally eradicated in the relatively short-term future (i.e. by the year 2030 as UNAIDS now maintains). If we are able to remove the political, social, cultural, economic and legislative obstacles that prevent getting people widely enough on pills and successfully carry on their individual therapies, it is believed that we can overcome our outsized dependency on the behavior change approaches which have been widely perceived as only limitedly efficient. As Alain Giami and Christophe Perrey have summarized, it is presumed that with chemoprevention and certain other novel prevention techniques, such as male circumcision, we can sufficiently affect even the lives of those globally marginalized high-risk populations that have thus far proven out to be particularly non-willing or non-able to behaviorally alter their HIV/AIDS-related vulnerability, despite of being identified as 'key populations' by global policies.[10] Illustrating the new-found optimism, the current executive director of UNAIDS, Michel Sidibé, writes in his foreword for the latest UNAIDS strategy:

> Ending the AIDS epidemic will involve progress across the entire spectrum of rights: civil, cultural, economic, political, social, sexual and reproductive. Defending the rights of all people – including children, women, young people, men who have sex with men, people who use drugs, sex workers and clients, transgender people and migrants – is critical to ensuring access to life-saving services. Through the realization of their rights, people being left behind will move ahead, to the very forefront of the journey to end AIDS – informed and empowered, mobilized and engaged.[11]

[10] Giami & Perrey 2012, 356–357.

[11] UNAIDS 2015b, 3.

## 1.2 Persistent Inequalities

In spite that the achievements of the global response to HIV/AIDS for the past one and a half decades are indisputable, there are still certain serious hindrances in the way of eradicating HIV/AIDS. First, according to the recent estimates by UNAIDS, there is at present still around 36.9 million HIV positive people living in the world, out which 17.1 million do not even know that they are carrying the virus, and out of which less than half are currently reached with antiretroviral therapy. In addition, from the humanitarian viewpoint the clock continues to tick fast as the annual number of AIDS-related deaths is still 1.2 million.[12] Secondly, it is not that even the most central actors of the global response necessarily share all the same goals. For instance, PEPFAR is an acknowledged part of the US 'transformational diplomacy' which seeks to advance democratic reforms and basic rights in fragile states in accordance with US foreign policy interests. Although US interests have thus far been largely convergent with the general aim of the global response to save lives, the US evangelical right nevertheless has been able to influence the amount of funds PEPFAR has spent on the promotion of sexual abstinence before marriage and channeled to the HIV/AIDS-related work of faith-based organizations in the countries hardest hit by the pandemic – sometimes even in ways that are at odds with the current liberal-minded public health rationale.[13]

Thirdly, the controversial role of pharmaceutical industry is far from solved once and for all. Even though since the beginning of the present millennium certain patent violation claims made by pharmaceutical companies have been rejected by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and different domestic courts on the basis of the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS crisis, important questions still remain unanswered. These questions especially revolve around the prices of the so-called second and third-line regimens of HAART. At present, it is only the prices of the first-line antiretroviral drugs that have fallen dramatically due to innovative funding arrangements and the above-mentioned legal facilitations of production and purchase of cheaper generic drugs. In this way, although the lowest price of the first-line antiretroviral medicines can now be as little as US$ 100 per person per year[14], the second and third-line drugs, which people need when their first-line or second-

[12] UNAIDS 2015c.

[13] See e.g. Ingram 2007; Cooper 2015.

[14] UNAIDS 2015a.

line regimes fail, continue to be radically more expensive. For example, in a recent article on the cost-effectiveness of newer antiretroviral drugs in the US, the authors estimated that with current market prices the treatment of patients with advanced HIV infection who are treatment experienced requires expenditures in the range of US$ 54,559 to US$ 75,556 per one quality adjusted life year.[15]

And yet, the barriers in front of the global eradication of HIV/AIDS cannot be reduced to the massive scale of the pandemic, the existence of conflicting interests or the logic of profit that often drives the pharmaceutical companies. Although these are real problems and important topics of study – not only in relation to HIV/AIDS but also in relation to the global health governance in general[16] – we actually could be more relieved than is currently possible, if these would be the only obstacles to overcome when tackling the HIV/AIDS pandemic. After all, in spite of their magnitude, the above-listed obstacles can all be overcome in principle through further mobilization of resources and straightforward political negotiation and regulation. These are obstacles which in the end are matters of political will and financial support, even though it is certain that making progress in relation to these issues is not easy. However, in contrast to these obstacles, the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS is also haunted by problems that at present appear to be truly unsolvable. These are problems that have persistently surfaced especially in the critical studies that have been sensitive to the local level consequences of the global HIV/AIDS policies in the marginalized locations of the world. These studies have showed that, although the scale up of the HIVAIDS relief in the past fifteen years has overall improved the life changes of people virtually everywhere, in the marginalized locations these improvements have been frequently accompanied by cementing already existing hierarchies and the establishment of new inequalities.[17]

For instance, in relation to rolling out of HAART into various globally marginalized locations, these studies have frequently shown how the new life changes created have materialized unevenly. As the progress of HIV infection can only be halted with a life-long therapy – during which the individual response to the therapy must be

[15] Bayoumi et al. 2013.

[16] See e.g. Poku et al. (eds.) 2007; Davies 2010; Elbe 2010; Harman 2012; McInnes & Lee 2012; Youde 2012; McInnes et al. 2014; Davies et al. 2015.

[17] See e.g. Biehl 2007; Fassin 2007; Seckinelgin 2008; Nguyen 2010; Seckinelgin 2012; Crane 2013; Decoteau 2013; Anderson 2015.

monitored, the drug-cocktail occasionally altered and the side-effects of the medication treated – certain individuals unavoidably end up needing more counseling, testing, and monitoring than others as people are pharmacologically and physiologically different. Yet, in the marginalized locations every additional need might be decisive. In conditions where proper health infrastructure is lacking, these random bodily differences can make it considerably more difficult for certain individuals to successfully carry on their therapy than it is for others. Then, as we are dealing here with a lethal condition, the saving of lives, improving people's opportunities for good health and realization of their basic human rights is in these contexts frequently accompanied by the paradoxical and irreversible hierarchization of their living environments. Although lives are saved, opportunities for better health created and basic rights realized, certain people seem to be unavoidably and irreversibly left behind in the process.[18]

Furthermore, this is not the case only in relation to rolling out of treatment opportunities among the marginalized but the same paradox also often haunts global prevention efforts which target those who are perceived to be the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. For example, Emma-Louise Anderson discusses in her recent book the gendered dynamics of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Malawi. She writes how the HIV/AIDS-related gendered imbalance in Malawi is a result of multiple sets of different customs, habits and practices in which the lives and identities of Malawian women are deeply embedded. Therefore, Anderson maintains that the protection and empowerment of these women is actually more difficult than it seems on an abstract level. From the perspective of Malawian women, the global efforts to protect and empower them in relation to HIV/AIDS often come with too big a price to be paid in practice as participating in these efforts is commonly premised on leaving behind a range of social goods that are already provided by the different cultural customs, habits and practices. Anderson emphasizes that this neglect of local level complexity undermines the effectiveness of the global response by making it largely irrelevant to the lives of the many Malawian women and sometimes even detrimental as it works to diminish the traditional 'safety nets' which certain women, especially in matrilineal areas of Malawi, are able to deploy for their benefit.[19]

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[18] See especially Biehl 2007; Fassin 2007; Nguyen 2010; Decoteau 2013.

[19] Anderson 2015.

Later on we will return to these inequalities and hierarchies that accompany the global response to HIV/AIDS but now another intertwined paradox deserves our attention. This other paradox has to do with the lack of alternative vision that is prevalent within these studies which have brought forward the problematic local consequences of the global HIV/AIDS policies in the marginalized locations of the world. Although the orientation of these studies has been critical and the authors have often explicitly sought to aid the improvement of life changes of the globally marginalized people beyond the limits of the current global response, these works have been very conventional in their criticism. Often these studies have remained congruent with the liberal-minded public health ethos that is advocated by the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS, even if the authors of these studies have sometimes claimed otherwise. With their focus on human rights, health equity, listening to the voices of the people and supporting their struggles for freedom, these studies have frequently ended up steering our attention to those same issues that are already considered important at the global level. The above-mentioned Anderson's work on HIV/AIDS and gender is a case in point. Despite its apt criticism towards the contemporary response, Anderson eventually concludes her work by emphasizing that on the basis of her research it is clear that the challenge now for the post-2015 agenda is to augment gender social justice by ensuring freedom from gender as structural violence; a task which Anderson thinks we can accomplish through overcoming the entrenched global health agenda that is currently still based on liberal "ideology rather than evidence."[20]

We can rightfully ask, however, if this is not already acknowledged at the global level? Does not even a cursory look at global level documents and declarations tell us that gender, evidence-based policies and respect for freedom and justice are considered important by the entrenched liberal ideology that lies at the core of the contemporary global response? For instance, in the latest UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS from the year 2011 it is stated that all the member states:

> 39. Reaffirm that the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all is an essential element in the global response to the HIV epidemic, including in the areas of prevention, treatment, care and support, recognize that addressing stigma and discrimination against people living with, presumed to be living with or affected by HIV, including their families, is also a

[20] Ibid., 157.

> critical element in combating the global HIV epidemic, and recognize also the need, as appropriate, to strengthen national policies and legislation to address such stigma and discrimination.[21]

Furthermore, in the same declaration it is also maintained that all the member states:

> 60. Commit to ensure that financial resources for prevention are targeted to evidence-based prevention measures that reflect the specific nature of each country's epidemic by focusing on geographic locations, social networks and populations vulnerable to HIV infection, according to the extent to which they account for new infections in each setting, in order to ensure that resources for HIV prevention are spent as cost-effectively as possible and to ensure that particular attention is paid to women and girls, young people, orphans and vulnerable children, migrants and people affected by humanitarian emergencies, prisoners, indigenous people and people with disabilities, depending on local circumstances.[22]

Given that this concern for the different needs and circumstances of vulnerable and marginalized populations has been one of the most central dimensions of the global response since its birth and that the representatives of this rights-based approach have worked hard to establish its current hegemonic position, the accusation of the global response for simply neglecting women's experiences in practice seems harsh. Moreover, even if we were to accept that the above is mostly rhetoric insofar as human rights or fundamental freedoms are not yet something that the globally marginalized women can in their daily life regularly enjoy, the question remains what separates the freedom, justice and gender equality that scholars such as Anderson advocate from the same terms already present in the global level documents and declarations? If the difference solely concerns the level of practical implementation of these ideas, it is hard to see any real difference between Anderson's position and the entrenched liberal ideology she criticizes. For example, already the subtitle of the previous declaration seems to underline this

[21] UNGAPD 2011, 7.

[22] Ibid., 10,

like-minded perception. The full title of the declaration is: 'Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying Our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS'. The criticism here seems to simply concur with what it criticizes.

## 1.3 Politics and Life

The level of political sophistication which we can be found in the above-mentioned critical studies of the global HIV/AIDS governance nevertheless varies. In addition to the works that have simply neglected thinking about the reasons why it is so difficult to pose political alternatives to the current hierarchization of marginalized localities that accompany the global response to HIV/AIDS, there are works which confront this difficultly head-on. Especially Didier Fassin's insightful study of the politics of HIV/AIDS in South Africa is noteworthy here. Although Fassin has not been able either to sketch an alternative project to the ongoing hierarchization of marginalized localities, he has nonetheless been able to identify the theoretical heart of the question. Fassin has maintained that, in spite of the heated polemics and disputes which have surrounded HIV/AIDS in South Africa since the late 1990s, the starkest controversy has never lied between the recognized adversaries. According to Fassin, although the liberal health ideology, championed in South Africa especially by the HIV/AIDS activists and international bodies that have supported them, is far better than, for example, the ban of antiretroviral drugs in public hospitals that was operative under the former President Thabo Mbeki's tenure, the activists and the South African government have not frontally opposed each other. All the time during their struggle, the government and activists have continuously shared the idea that all lives have the same value, even if this idea has many times led these two parties to advocate even radically different practices. Fassin writes how the activists have consistently wanted to save every life possible and the South African government, even during the Mbeki's era, have sought to do this too yet without increasing the general inequality between the country's citizens. In this way, Fassin thinks that there has never been 'a politics of life versus a politics of death' -situation present in the post-apartheid South Africa but actually only a confrontation between two forms of politics of life. Yet, as Fassin immediately continues, this confrontation has not been without a true opposition. What has radically belied both of these positions is the biological evidence of unjust premature deaths which

neither of these ways of politically affirming that all lives have the same value have ever held potential to completely eliminate.[23]

For those of us who are familiar with the theorizing of biopolitics, the previous is hardly surprising. One of the most established and well-known claims in this interdisciplinary field is that political universalism recedes when life steps to the foreground.[24] When the general aim is to save, improve, secure, modify or foster life, the attention is focused on particular biological differences, regardless of any universal idea that might inspire this governance. For instance, Roberto Esposito has well written in a way that speaks to Fassin's account of South African politics of HIV/AIDS that when politics targets life, consequently turning itself into biopolitics, and thus when the corporeal dimension becomes

> the true interlocutor – the subject and object of government – the principle of equality above all else is up for discussion, insofar as it is inapplicable to something (such as the body) that is constitutively different from all others according to criteria that are at times determinable and alterable.[25]

And yet, it is not that the scholars of biopolitics have seen political universalism as absolutely incompatible with the domain of life. Instead, especially recently a number of seminal theorists of biopolitics, such as Esposito, Giorgio Agamben and Antonio Negri, have all brought forward different ideas on how political universalism might still be made operative in relation to the domain of life.[26] In spite of the insightfulness of these ideas, however, these so-called theories of 'affirmative biopolitics' have remained somewhat cryptic and no general consensus have emerged over how life and politics could be brought together in a way that would make it possible, for instance, to speak about politics of life that also in practice affirms everyone's freedom and equality. In fact, lately the critique and development of different versions of affirmative biopolitics has only intensified and

[23] Fassin 2007, 265–270.

[24] See e.g. Foucault 1998; Agamben 1998; Esposito 2013.

[25] Esposito 2013a, 110.

[26] See e.g. Agamben 1999; Esposito 2008; Negri 2008.

today it seems that discussion and competing paradigms of affirmative biopolitics are just increasing.[27]

In this work we are not interested in reviewing these different theorizations as such. What we are interested in, however, is bringing the field of biopolitical thought into an intimate connection with the above-introduced problematics of the contemporary HIV/AIDS governance insofar as this thought resonates with these problematics. This is necessary, as even though references to biopolitical theories have been made in the critical studies of the global HIV/AIDS response, extensive and systematic attempts to introduce these theories to this context are still lacking, especially when it comes to affirmative biopolitics. And yet, already on the basis of what we have written here so far, it is clear that the solution to the currently unsolvable problems of this governance cannot be anything but '*affirmative-biopolitical*.' Somehow the political universalism already present in the contemporary liberal public health ethos must be made to fully resonate also with those lives which are at present left behind, somehow we must come up with a way how at least the ideas of freedom and equality can be fully affirmed in relation to the lives of those people who are currently imprisoned at the bottom of the global HIV/AIDS-related power hierarchy. This is a perception which is currently shared by virtually everyone, even those who openly advocate mere intensification of the response along its current lines. For instance, it is maintained in the latest UNAIDS strategy that, as the crisis is now at least in principle eradicable, the time has come to acknowledge and act on "the fact that too many people continue to be left behind."[28]

However, as we want to biopolitically think our way through the currently unsolvable political problematics of the global HIV/AIDS response, our engagement with the field of biopolitical theory cannot be a straightforward one. Due to the above-mentioned lack of consensus over how political universalism and the domain of life can be brought together, we do not currently have a ready-made theoretical corpus available to us which we could simply introduce and then according to already established rules just apply to the case of HIV/AIDS. Instead, we must assemble and articulate such a corpus and rules ourselves. Thus, before we apply affirmative-biopolitical thought to our case, we must contrast the field of

[27] See e.g. Reid 2013; Vatter 2014; Vaughan-Williams 2015; Prozorov 2016.

[28] UNAIDS 2015b, 28

biopolitical theory to the problematics of the global HIV/AIDS response and try to find those lines of thought which are relevant in relation to our case. In other words, we have to locate those biopolitical theories which can explain why the universal political ethos of the contemporary global HIV/AIDS response fails to fully materialize in the marginalized contexts and how it is in principle possible to go beyond this impasse. Only after this, we can move to elaborate how the theory of affirmative biopolitics can be made operative in relation to the global HIV/AIDS crisis and what are the prospects of us coming up with a truly affirmative-biopolitical praxis in this context.

In this way, our study will not only address empirical issues but also theoretical and methodological ones. Our main question that will guide our quest to find a political solution to the currently unsolvable problems of the global HIV/AIDS governance is: what is the relation between liberalism and biopolitics in the context of the global response to HIV/AIDS? We will give our answer to this question by breaking it down a series of sub-questions, which in turn will define structure of our chapters. In Chapter 2, we will focus on questions: why biopolitical thought has become so pervasive today and why we have ended up in a situation which demands that also the current problems of the global governance of HIV/AIDS must be considered from this perspective? What are the central tensions, contradictions and paradoxes that currently make the full realization of liberal public health ethos impossible when it comes to the globally marginalized people who are affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic? What are the lines of affirmative-biopolitical thought that might enable us to think our way through this impasse, especially in relation to the freedom and equality of the most marginalized sufferers? In Chapter 3, we will concentrate on questions: how can we actually put the theory of affirmative biopolitics to use in relation to the concrete problematics of the global HIV/AIDS governance? How can we study the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS so that we can affirmatively politicize this response and thus articulate in this context a viable possibility for transformative political subjectivization and action?

From Chapter 4 onwards we will bring the theory of affirmative biopolitics into contact with the currently unsolvable empirical problematics of the global HIV/AIDS governance. In Chapter 4, we will narrow our focus to the problem of freedom and ask: what kind of difference does it make when the situation of the globally marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers is viewed from the perspective of the theory of affirmative biopolitics? What kind of difference even regarding the empirical findings and political recommendations of the critical studies of the global HIV/AIDS

governance emerge when the situation of the globally marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers is viewed from the perspective of affirmative-biopolitical thought? Can we use this difference to articulate a divide between liberal freedom and affirmative-biopolitical freedom and thus introduce the possibility of affirmative-biopolitical subjectivization and praxis into this context? In Chapter 5, we will follow the design of Chapter 4. In this chapter, we will pose the same questions in the same way than in Chapter 4 but this time our focus will be on equality instead of freedom. Finally, in our concluding chapter we will summarize our answers and further discuss them regarding the prospects of concretely transforming the contemporary global HIV/AIDS response.

## 1.4 From Immunity to Immanence

As can be understood from the previous, our study will involve a number of investigations of different issues of biopolitics in relation to the global HIV/AIDS governance. This will introduce complexity and difficulty into our study as the language we are forced to use is at times philosophical, at times biomedical and at times even literary theoretical. The reader is simply asked to bear with the terminology because the biopolitical problems which we will encounter along the way are complex and difficult due to their inherent nature, and thus the thought that describes and explains these issues will be unavoidably complex and difficult to a certain extent too. Yet, this does not mean that our eventual solutions to these issues would be particularly enigmatic or ambiguous. On the contrary, as we will see, it is very much possible to identify and deduce a clear-cut and even axiomatic responses to the majority of these problems.

All the above-mentioned is already present in Chapter 2. In this chapter, we will run into various definitions of the term 'biopolitics' but we will also show what is the elementary sense of this term that lies underneath the different ways of using the term and why it is essential to address many political problems of our time biopolitically, including the problems that haunt the contemporary HIV/AIDS governance. In addition, in this chapter we will use Esposito's biopolitical theory of immunity and with the help of this theory situate liberalism and the currently seemingly unsolvable problems of the global governance of HIV/AIDS into a biopolitical context and argue that from this perspective these problems are essentially solvable as there is nothing natural in these problems. Finally, in this chapter we will review the different approaches to affirmative biopolitics especially

with the help of Tom Roach's work on the biopolitical legacy of early AIDS activism. We will search for an affirmative-biopolitical approach that might in principle overcome the current limitations of the liberal approach to HIV/AIDS and through our criticism of Roach's work argue that a suitable approach can be brought forward by reading Esposito's theory of affirmative biopolitics from the perspective of Gilles Deleuze's and Michel Henry's ideas on the absolute, or radical, immanence of life.

In Chapter 3, we will also move from intricacy toward lucidity. In this chapter, first, we will argue by revisiting those theories which we have earlier deemed useful that the absolute immanence of life is affirmatively communicated in the world through art; particularly through art which addresses our bodily finitude: the most dispossessive and universally shared part of our lives. Second, we will discuss the use of art in biopolitical theorizing and maintain especially with the help of Arne De Boever's biopolitical theory of the novel that from all the different genres of art it is literature which is the most suitable genre for us to use in relation to affirmative biopolitics. Thirdly, however, we will problematize too eager readings of art's political potential on the basis of the concrete materiality of life and Jacques Rancière's thought. We will emphasize that what art can offer in relation to concrete reality is only aesthetic alienation from the prevalent discursive practices and not an actual revolution. As such, artworks cannot change the world and thus aesthetic alienation and concrete political action should be held separate. In fact, confusing these two is a mistake that makes the affirmative-biopolitical usefulness of art to disappear, especially in relation our work. After all, as we will further argue in this chapter by relying on Michael Shapiro's recent work, the usefulness of literary works for us lies solely in a way how they characteristically introduce aesthetic alienation onto the level of individual subjects. As a result of this characteristic, it becomes possible to use literature in introducing into our familiar worlds a relation between the governmentally constructed subject positions and the affirmative-biopolitical subjectivization, which enables us to foundationally critique and think different ways of overcoming the excessive worldly attempts to abduct our lives. Finally, in this chapter we will highlight that our way of approaching literature largely converges with the 'materialist criticism' of literature, as this criticism has been theoretically articulated by Elaine Scarry. Accordingly, we will connect our approach into this methodological orientation and through this orientation position our study in relation to the tradition of using literature in the study of international relations. We will emphasize how our approach to literature does not fully follow any previously established ways of using literature in this field, although our approach cannot be consider to be completely detached from these ways either.

Even if it might feel strange to some scholars of the global HIV/AIDS governance, in the following two chapters we will analyze literary works. In these two chapters we will empirically study the situation of the globally marginalized people affected by the pandemic through a set of literary works and seek to show how even the most marginalized individuals can be seen on the basis of their lives to be actually free and equal in a more extensive sense than they can be understood on the basis of the currently hegemonic liberal-minded public health ethos. The literary works that we will focus on are Carolyne Adalla's *Confessions of an AIDS Victim*, Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*, Meja Mwangi's *The Last Plague* and Yan Lianke's *Dream of Ding Village*. All these works have been selected on the basis of their resonance to the concrete problems of the global governance of HIV/AIDS in relation to the marginalized locations of the world and all these works are read by contrasting them to the political limitations of our current perceptions of these problems.

These two empirical chapters are divided in a way that Chapter 4 will focus on freedom and Chapter 5 on equality, as we already mentioned earlier. In Chapter 4, we will address the possibility of allying freedom with the full-blown political affirmation of life and investigate the global governance of HIV/AIDS by reading Adalla's *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* and Kincaid's *My Brother*. Through these two works we will highlight the difference between the liberal freedom of abstract persons, which is operative within the current global response to HIV/AIDS, and the idea of a more extensive freedom that emerges when this liberal freedom is viewed from the perspective of lives that are lived by certain central literary characters of these two books. In Chapter 5, we will in a similar manner concentrate on Mwangi's *The Last Plague* and Yan's *Dream of Ding Village*. We will address the difference between the abstract liberal equality of persons and the idea of a more extensive equality that again emerges when liberal equality is viewed from the perspective of lives lived by central literary characters in these two works. In this manner, through these two chapters we will eventually introduce affirmative-biopolitical ideas of freedom and equality into the context of global HIV/AIDS governance. Through these two ideas we will sketch a political relation that consists from the prevalent liberal policies and from the viable possibility of affirmative biopolitics, which on the basis of the affirmation of these ideas of freedom and equality, possesses genuine potential to go beyond the limitations of the current global response to HIV/AIDS, even regarding the most globally marginalized individuals of our world.

Finally, we will end our study with a concluding chapter. In this chapter we will summarize our findings and discuss their significance in relation to the future of the

global governance of HIV/AIDS. Especially we will focus on our prospects of truly transforming the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS, along the affirmative-biopolitical lines. We will elaborate what kind of concrete political acts as such are in this context faithful expressions of affirmative biopolitics and whether we may have already seen them during the history of the global response to HIV/AIDS. Lastly, we will identify the outlines of the most desirable form of the global HIV/AIDS response, towards which the affirmative-biopolitical praxis should in principle attempt to push this response.

# 2 THE POLITICS OF ABSOLUTE IMMANENCE

## 2.1 Biopolitics

The Swede Rudolf Kjellén was probably the first one who used the term 'biopolitics'. Kjellén viewed the state literally as a form of life. For him, the geopolitical demands existed in a close connection with the organicist conception of the state which meant that state behavior and unity could not be fully explained through sovereignty or constitutional theories. Instead, this behavior and unity were expressions of life itself. The geopolitical problems were not fundamentally artificial but stemmed from the natural instinct of life to organize itself into a form of an organism and from the natural drive of an organism to secure and express its vitality through growth. Although his *Grundriss zu einem System Der Politik* (*Outline for a Political System*), published in the year 1920 and originally written in German, has been quoted by the contemporary scholars of biopolitics,[29] it was already in his book *Stormakterna* (*Great Powers*) from the year 1905 where Kjellén wrote: "These [great powers] are thus forms of life; from all the life forms in this world the most impressive. As such they must also be made to become a subject of, so to say, *biopolitical* study."[30] Later in his *Staten som Lifsform* (*The State as Form of Life*) from the year 1916, Kjellén self-quotes the previous passage and immediately in the following sentence expands the argument: "Here lies already in a nutshell the political science, which I now want to scientifically legitimate and more closely define."[31]

In his time, of course, Kjellén was not alone with his views. Roberto Esposito and Thomas Lemke have both recently provided summaries of the historical deployment

[29] Esposito 2008, 17; Lemke 2011, 10.

[30] "De [stormakterna] äro sålunda former af lif; af alla lifsformer på denna jord de mest imposanta. Som sådana måste de kunna blifva föremål äfven för ett så att säga *biopolitiskt* studium." Rudolf Kjellén 1905, 23. Emphasis in original. My translation.

[31] "Här ligger redan in nuce den statslära, som jag nu velat vetenskapligt motivera och närmare bestämma." Rudolf Kjellén 1916, 33. My translation.

of the term 'biopolitics' and written how especially in the beginning of the 20th century this term was used in a political thought which saw politics simply as the continuation of life at another level. Politics was fundamentally subordinate to nature and thus politics had to incorporate into its praxis principles which were seen as directly stemming from nature's original characteristics.[32] For example, in certainly one of the earliest texts which explicitly discusses biopolitics – a text which has been nevertheless for some reason ignored by both Esposito and Lemke – an author called G. W. Harris, in his short essay published in the year 1911, demands that Britain must abandon its too democratic policies and cease the

> fatal habit of endeavouring to find places for men, instead of men for places. By the term 'bio-politics' we mean a policy which should consider two aspects of the nation: in the first place, the increase of population and competition; in the second place, the individual attributes of the men who are available for filling places of responsibility in the State.[33]

If this line of thought feels uncomfortable at the outset, this is probably because in the third and fourth decades of the 20th century this biological configuration of politics became even more popular and even more intense. Authors deploying the term 'biopolitics', certain Nazi theoreticians in particular, started increasingly to connect various political issues to the problems of pathology and degeneration. According to these authors, similarly as in the field of medicine, in the field of politics the healthy anatomy and physiology of the 'state-body' simply could not be defined and known without a recourse to pathology. From this perspective, the state organism was to be governed by identifying and removing the actual and potential diseases from the state-body. Consequently, politics begun to assume a somewhat paradoxical double of role of being a result of nature's impulses but at the same time being something which must act on behalf of nature and detect as well as eliminate the organicist risks. The march of this line of thought, however, was soon interrupted. Due to the Second World War and the Nazi regime's atrocities, which

[32] Esposito 2008, 17; Lemke 2011, 10.

[33] Harris 1911, 197.

rationale was largely derived from the biological understanding of politics, this explicit biologization of politics immediately lost its appeal almost completely.[34]

Yet, the notion of biopolitics did not disappear from our lexicon. To a certain extent, the notion has even consistently continued to carry the same meaning it had in the 1930s and 40s as still today some extreme right-wing movements deploy the term in the above-mentioned 'Nazi spirit' and diagnose the social crises as emerging from the alleged struggle between different races, racial mixing and degeneration.[35] In a more sophisticated discourse, however, the notion has been deployed very differently during the post-World War II era. First, in the 1960s in France a new body of theorizations emerged that used the term 'biopolitics' but did not anymore subordinate politics to biology. Instead, these theorizations asserted the necessity to take biology into account in order to 'biopolitically' guide and govern the forces of life according to different human ideals, such as justice. Around the same time in Germany the term 'biopolitics' acquired a similar meaning. In Germany the biopolitical thought was in particular stimulated by the famous 1972 Report of the Club of Rome *The Limits of Growth* which through scientific modeling and computer simulations emphasized the looming demographic and ecological limits for the global economic growth. In this context, the to-be-developed 'biopolitical interventions' were understood to be especially necessary in order to preserve the natural environment of humanity. These, so to say, 'early post-World War II era' theorizations of biopolitics, however, were not exclusively limited to these two countries or even to the Continental Europe. Especially regarding the latter variant of biopolitical thought, the spectacular biotechnological innovations of the 1970s, such as the transfer of DNA and in-vitro fertilization, broadly raised concerns about the fragility of the boundary between nature and culture even beyond the limits of demography or ecology. As a result, this variant of biopolitical thought swiftly expanded itself well beyond the German borders as the necessity of biopolitical interventions were debated on a much wider scale – a debate which, of course, is still ongoing, even if these biopolitical theorizations of the 1960s and 70s have been largely forgotten.[36]

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[34] Esposito 2008, 16–19; Lemke 2011, 9–15.

[35] Lemke 2011, 15.

[36] Esposito 2008, 19–21; Lemke 2011, 23–29.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Anglo-American world also came up with a biopolitical research approach of its own in the early post-World War II era. This Anglo-American resumption of biopolitics happened in the mid-1960s and this particular biopolitical research paradigm is, in fact, the only one of the early post-World War II era paradigms which is still alive, even if its influence today is quite marginal. This Anglo-American approach to biopolitics is formed around the naturalistic understanding of politics. Within this approach, a set of biological concepts and methods are used in order to investigate and explain political behavior. Yet, this approach does not give a similar role to the ideas of pathology and degeneration as the biopolitical thought of the pre-World War II era. In this way, the approach does not have built-in tendency to advocate for eugenics and other dubious 'remedies'. Rather, this approach fundamentally maintains that, due to the biological basis of our political present, contemporary politics cannot really be anything radically different than it is today. Politics is primarily only nature repeated, sometimes slightly misshapen, but never anything truly different.[37]

Although these early post-World War II era scholarly efforts to think 20th century politics through the lens of biopolitics have been less controversial than the biopolitical thought of the early 20th century, these efforts have been problematical in their own way too. Again, Esposito and Lemke have provided good summaries of these problems and there is no reason to fully repeat them here.[38] Nonetheless, the main problem which all of these early post-World War II era biopolitical approaches have faced in relation to the technological developments of our time is worth re-telling. This re-telling, after all, helps us to highlight the simultaneous difficulty yet necessity to understand our present biopolitically, especially insofar as this word refers to the intertwining and simultaneous blurring of the boundaries between biology and politics that is so central to our time.

In relation to the above, the main problem of these approaches revolves around the unfounded presupposition which characterizes them. In short, whether it is the natural being of humanity or the basic biological order of nature which is inserted at the basis of the approach, and thus elevated as something to be preserved against the biotechnological development or the perverted excesses of politics, the questions which the late modern life and politics present to us become threatening

[37] Esposito 2008, 21–24; Lemke 2011, 15–21.

[38] See the above-mentioned works.

yet unaddressable. Regardless of the ideal which drives the approach, the technological development of modernity prevents a simple backward move which would lead us back to the stable and naturalistic order imposed by anthropocentric politics or biology. This is due to the fact that the technological developments of modernity have not just made us increasingly aware of the possibility of a technologically-driven self-destruction or revealed the fundamental artificiality of humanism but also increasingly blurred the very distinction between nature and culture. On the one hand, we are stuck with problems that concern our relationship with technologies that have the capacity to shape our biological evolution into totally new directions. These are clearly problems that biology as such cannot offer clear answers. On the other hand, we are puzzled by questions such as what kind of legal protection human embryos deserve, a sort of question to which it is impossible to even try to provide an answer without going well beyond the 'natural rights of men'.

And yet, it can be still further emphasized that these are the type of questions which just cannot be ignored. These questions are simply too deeply intertwined with so many problems which haunt our present. This is also the case in relation to HIV/AIDS. At the heart of the HIV/AIDS crisis there undoubtedly lies the tendency of late modern technologies to carry life beyond distinctions which we had for a long time based our lives and politics upon. Peter Sloterdijk has written that due to modern technological developments threats have emerged to life which are not anymore solely localizable as springing from the proximity of other people as such but which stem from the living environment and the very life of individuals; threats such as microbes, viruses and different forms of environmentalist terror. As Sloterdijk states, it has only become possible for an HIV infection or a gas attack 'to happen' after the possibility for an attack to "an organism's, or life-form's, environment and immune defenses was shown in its perfect technical explication."[39] Sloterdijk thinks that as a result of these technological developments the focal point in late modernity has become the anxiety over the livable conditions, or 'air-conditions' as Sloterdijk has choose to term these arrangements dependent on technology, a sort of artificial prostheses, with the help of which the individual life is still considered to be possible. This anxiety can be observed all around our culture, from high politics to all the way down to the things mundane such as the late modern novel which, according to Sloterdijk, has largely gone beyond the mere

[39] Sloterdijk 2009, 29.

representations of individual destinies in favor of portraying these subjects as entangled within their immediate environments, as extended entities of ”individual *and* breathing space.”[40]

Are we then losing the possibility of politics altogether as it seems that we have lost the shared world on the basis of which we could collectively organize our lives and societies? Is the technologically mediated demarcation from this shared world the only possible response to the many problems of our time, even if it is the technological development which has caused many of these problems, or this development has at least made us aware of them? As Sloterdijk and many others, and decades earlier also Martin Heidegger, have emphasized, there are enormous risks involved in this technology-driven development: we could be losing our proper relationship to our being and become only mindless machines without the possibility to affect our own destinies.[41] And yet at the same time, going radically the other way and attempting to pursue some sort of non-technological and more authentic being seems to be practically impossible too – or at least it is something which comes with a cost that seems intolerable.

We can again illustrate this in relation to HIV/AIDS. As Asha Persson and Christy Newman have elaborated, the pharmaceutical treatment of HIV/AIDS is one of the primary sites of late modernity in which the risks and inevitability of technology are intertwiningly present. Persson and Newman discuss the side-effects of an effective and popular antiretroviral drug called 'efavirenz' which can have a number of troubling effects on a person’s everyday sense of self, including insomnia, confusion, cognitive disorders, depression, depersonalization, psychosis, and suicidal ideation – effects which are at odds with the implicit aim of HIV medicine to restore and secure the self by way of immunological integrity and strength. In relation to efavirenz, then, an individual might have to make a troubling decision, whether to use the drug and whether to prioritize one's psychic sense of self or one’s immunological self.[42] What this means in an extreme case, if a substitute medication is not available, is that one can get stuck in a following situation: If one prioritizes the immunological self, one becomes even more dependent on, and also more vulnerable to, pharmaceutical technologies as one must put one's fate on the ability

[40] Ibid., 98. Emphasis in original.

[41] See e.g. Heidegger 1977; Derrida 1983; Baudrillard 1991; Campbell 2011; Sloterdijk 2014.

[42] Persson & Newman 2006.

of these technologies to resolve the psychic symptoms sooner or later. If one prioritizes the psychic self, one can perhaps live more 'authentically' for a while but one is nevertheless also destined to depersonalize sooner or later as the HIV infection progresses. Thus, it seems that there is no easy exist. Even if we would like to escape modernity and go beyond the reach of its technologies, it seems that modernity has already penetrated to, and now exists as intertwined with, our lives so completely that what anymore lies properly outside of modernity is death.

But then again, what this must mean is that there exists an intimate connection between life and death at the heart of our time. If it is true that life has been permeated to its core by modernity, the thing which most properly still prevents the 'end of history' from becoming our present, what still most saliently makes modernity an epoch among others, is the relationship which modernity has towards death. Without taking into account the persistent non-disappearance of death in our time, modernity simply cannot be defined. This was, of course, something which Michel Foucault already understood. Unlike the already introduced biopolitical theorizations which have had a rather limited influence, Foucault's thought has today become for many almost synonymous with the way the term 'biopolitics' is understood. For Foucault, the threshold of modernity is "the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques."[43] And yet, as Foucault goes to elaborate, even though it is life which moves at center of the discourse, the transformation must be grasped especially in relation to death.

In a manner that has today become very familiar for us, Foucault maintained how roughly during the eighteenth century the old right of the sovereign to decide over the life and death of its subjects, to take life or to let live, started to disappear and was to a large extent displaced by the power to foster life or disallow it to death; to make live or let die. This power acted on humans as biological beings, instead of political or juridical subjects which could be killed without impunity. The domain of political power was expanded into man insofar as man is a living being. Foucault does not claim that earlier the collective life of subjects was completely irrelevant to political power but nevertheless holds that traditionally the political questions concerning life were raised in a rather simplistic manner; for example, large population could provide many troops for the sovereign's army. This is in contrast

[43] Foucault 1998, 141–142.

to the modern development which, in Foucault's works, culminates to the fact that the population comes to be considered as a set of processes which management is the fundamental basis for the state's power.[44] What gets invented is that the population has dynamics of its own which depend on different circumstances. For instance, population has a mortality rate, average life expectancy, birth rate and morbidity level which all are a result of different set of variables. Accordingly, what becomes the fundamental task of the state is to know these population processes and to manage them in the best possible way. In other words, political power has to be able to rationalize the group of human beings constituted as population and invent strategies for the management of population dynamics in order to ensure the healthy life of the 'body politic'.[45]

According to Foucault, especially these changes explain the characteristically ambivalent role which death acquires in modernity. The old sovereign right to take life or to let live was always exercised in an unbalanced way. Although the classical theories of sovereignty maintained that the sovereign could decide over the life *and* death of its subjects, the sovereign did not really have the means to grant life to anyone in the same way than he could kill his subjects. It was really killing, and not deciding over lives as such, which was the core business of political power, the killing was the primary way this power functioned. As Foucault wrote, "death was the manner in which a terrestrial sovereignty was relieved by another, singularly more powerful sovereignty; the pageantry that surrounded it was in the category of political ceremony."[46] This meant that death did not really lie outside of power relations but at the center of them. The contrast to modernity is evident. In modernity, when the transcendental matrix is diminished and the political power establishes its dominion over life, death becomes "power's limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most 'private'."[47] Nonetheless, this modern attempt to constantly purify life from death can only make death an inescapable part of modern reality. Foucault highlights this by comparing the problem of morbidity in modernity to that of the Middle Ages when the problem was only raised in the times of epidemic outbreaks. These outbreaks

[44] Foucault 2007, 68–70.

[45] Foucault 2003, 242–247.

[46] Foucault 1998, 138.

[47] Ibid., 138.

were temporary disasters and death was something that suddenly swooped down on life. In modernity, however, the form, nature, extension, duration and intensity of the illness is prevalent in the population all the time, illness becomes something which has to be endlessly monitored and which one must be constantly wary of. In this way, death becomes "something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it."[48]

Influential and insightful as Foucault's work on biopolitics has been, his emphasis on the essential difference between the biopolitics of modernity and the political forms which preceded it is probably the most problematic aspect of his writings. This is already somewhat detectable in relation to the above-mentioned indirect reappearance of death as the horizon of the modern politics of life. Yet, the problem becomes much more pervasive when Foucault must attempt to situate Nazism and other totalitarian excesses of the 20th century within the limits of his discourse. Esposito has very well brought forward the ambivalence which results from this attempt. At the center of the ambivalence lies the relation between sovereignty and biopolitics in the Foucauldian discourse. While biopolitics was defined by Foucault largely as something which the classical sovereign right to kill is not, this seems to be in stark contrast with the mass murders conducted by regimes inside our biopolitical modernity. Thus, it is understandable that an indecisiveness creeps into Foucault's writings. Was sovereignty really 'replaced' by biopolitics or was sovereignty only 'complemented' by biopolitics? These are two different verbs which Foucault himself uses at different instances but it is very hard to have it both ways like this. Moreover, if the right choice of words is 'to complement', as Foucault's discourse otherwise seems to suggest, there still remains a question in which way does biopolitics complement sovereignty, especially if biopolitics nevertheless is still understood to be something that sovereignty is not?[49]

Foucault's recourse to state racism does not really help us here either, even if the 20th century state racism was undoubtedly a scenario in which biopolitics and sovereignty very clearly complemented each other inside our modernity. As Foucault writes on the basis of his investigations of Nazism and Soviet socialism, the biopolitical importance of racism lies in the fact how it fragments the field of the biological. Racism separates out the groups that exist within the population and

[48] Foucault 2003, 244.

[49] Esposito 2008, 38–43.

introduces a biological type caesura within this population. With the help of racism the state can establish a positive role to killing: "the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier."[50] This introduction of racism into his writing of biopolitics, however, does not remove the fundamental ambiguousness. The ambiguousness returns immediately when we consider his writings on racism against the emphasized importance of separating biopolitical modernity from the preceding era of sovereignty. Does the 20th century state racism imply that sovereignty can always break into our biopolitical modernity, that biopolitics is after all conditioned by sovereignty? If the answer is no, does this then mean that the most extreme political excesses of the 20th century such as the Holocaust and Stalinist terror were, in fact, ultimate expressions of biopolitics, perhaps a direction towards which the biopolitics of the liberal states that Foucault also so carefully analyzed is constantly being pushed too?[51]

As has become familiar, Giorgio Agamben has attempted to shed light onto this ambiguousness. Agamben's starting point is Foucault's inability to provide definitive answers to the above questions, although he otherwise praises the Frenchman. For Agamben, the root problem of the 20th century excessive political violence lies much deeper than in modernity. Agamben sees a clear formulation of the problem already in the classic Aristotelian division of life into two: *zoē* (the simple fact of living which is common to all living beings) and *bios* (the political life which is natural to human beings).[52] According to Agamben, the key problem within this division is the fact that it cannot be ever done once and for all. Man and beast or nature and culture cannot ever be completely separated from each other. Man is not born to *bios*, it is rather a condition which should be achieved by the human animal in order that one can truly be a human instead of an animal.[53] Thus, there cannot be any definitive criteria which would tell us what *bios* is without simultaneously marking off some aspects of our lives as not belonging to the realm of *bios*. The emergence of *bios* is conditioned by the active exclusion of life, even some human life, from its realm. This foundational connection between *bios* and the life excluded from it,

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[50] Foucault 2003, 255.

[51] On Foucault's account of liberal biopolitics, see especially Foucault 2008.

[52] Agamben 1998, 10–12.

[53] See especially Agamben 2004.

however, means that the excluded life does not exist completely outside of *bios*. Instead, it exists *as excluded from bios* – the life excluded is really included into *bios* as excluded. On a closer look, *bios* is then not to be defined against *zoē* but against, what Agamben calls, 'bare life': a form of life negatively produced in a liminal zone of indistinction between *zoē* and *bios*, a form of life stripped from all the positive content of the political community by the institution of sovereignty.[54]

For Agamben, bare life and sovereignty are coordinates around which the whole Western political tradition revolves. Inside this tradition there is no move from sovereignty to the era of biopolitics because the institution of sovereignty is originally biopolitical. The primary task of sovereignty has always been to ensure that the citizens of the polity can pursue 'good life', understood as something higher than merely being alive. Furthermore, this task has been always conducted by controlling bare life, those not fit enough for the polity or those who endanger its existence. In modernity this operation only acquires a more focal role. As the earlier, and the more stable, divisions between proper human life and what this life was consider not to be start to diminish due to the decline of the role of religion and the developments of technology, the administration of bare life moves from the political margins to the center. If in the pre-modern world bare life was constantly present yet rarely encountered as this life literally lingered on the borderlines of the polity, in modernity we are all partly bare life as, in addition to being juridical subjects, we are also governed as biological populations. The *zoē* has clearly entered into *bios*. According to Agamben, this is the decisive fact which makes possible the Nazi death camps. Even though the harsh treatment of bare life was not foreign to the pre-modern eras, which Agamben illustrates by paying attention especially to the Roman legal tradition and in particular to the legal figure of *homo sacer* who could be killed by anyone without impunity but not sacrificed, who was anymore in contact with the law solely in the form of the capacity to be killed, there was no need or means to extend this treatment to the masses. In modernity, however, this mass-murderous extension is exactly what we must witness. The *Muselmann*, the concentration camp inmate, is the most paradigmatic modern actualization of *homo sacer*.[55]

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[54] Agamben 1998, 12–14.

[55] Agamben 1998; Agamben 1999b.

Although Agamben's work is not always supported by sufficient evidence as he is sometimes more fond of provocative theses and hyperbolic examples than systematic use of sources, he seems to be right insofar as he sees the birth of biopolitics to precede modernity. Firstly, the further empirical evidence seems to support this. For instance, it is clear that modern biopolitics has a lot in common with 'classical biopolitics' of the Greco-Roman world. Even though we cannot find the notion of biopolitics from the classical texts, we can find from them a very similar concern over the quality of the population than the one which Foucault saw characteristic to modernity. Plato and Aristotle, as well as Spartan and Roman thinkers, do write about birth rate, childcare, education, health, mortality, immigration, eugenics, etc.[56] Secondly, what also seems to call into question the supposed radical break between the biopolitical modernity and the archaic ancient world is the ease through which certain classical accounts of biopolitical issues can be used to make sense of our present. Exactly along these lines, Mika Aaltola has written a book about the politics of the contemporary pandemic diseases. This book relies on the model derived from Thucydides' writings of the Peloponnesian War and with the help of this model the work well illuminates the present-day scares, fears and competing claims over different pandemics.[57]

Even more importantly, however, it is certain that Agamben is ontologically right. Irrespectively whether the historical evidence supports his thesis or not, bare life lies at the center of politics. As much as we might like to live only according to some noble truth or an idea that has nothing to do with our bodily existence as such, this truth or idea always needs the material support of our bodies to sustain itself. In fact, almost in a paradoxical manner, more we try to set aside our bare life in order to pursue some 'higher' end or goal, more we must exclude or at least somehow discipline this persistent 'nakedness' of life. As long as we are *living* beings, our bare lives will continue to play a focal role in our politics, even if we would want to behave or think otherwise. Any type of practice or any form of contemplation which seeks to deny the entry of bare life into *bios*, only reproduces the formula of its inclusive exclusion. This critique can be aimed at any form of political thought which explicitly or implicitly dismisses the materiality of our lives in favor of something else. Recently, Sergei Prozorov has nicely demonstrated this in relation to Alain Badiou's anti-biopolitical stance. As Prozorov writes, although Badiou's criticism of

[56] See especially Ojakangas 2012; Ojakangas 2016.

[57] Aaltola 2012.

'democratic materialism' as a specific form of biopolitics is largely valid, his attempt to transcend biopolitics altogether by introducing a new body of truth which sets aside all concerns with one's bodily finitude is less so. There is no idea without a relation to life. Thus, what lies beyond "biopolitics is nothing but the potentiality, if not the aspiration, for becoming biopolitical."[58]

What this does not, however, mean is that our ideas do not matter or that we should not pay any attention to them. On the contrary, our ideas matter because if there would not be any relation between our lives and our ideas there would be no need to speak about politics, nor life for that matter, at all. If this absolute non-relationality would be the case, we would self-evidently be either matter or spirit, as would everything else around us, and thus our 'existence' or our 'life' could not pose us any questions. Yet, this non-relationality is something we know is not the case. Our ideas affect our lives, or our lives are affected differently by different ideas. If there is a relation, or better a tension, which most fundamentally defines biopolitics it is this one. It is not irrelevant, for instance, whether *bios* is understood in terms of race, totalitarian fantasy, or liberal humanism – or according to any other criterion. The politico-historical trajectory of HIV/AIDS is once again a case in point. There certainly is a difference whether HIV/AIDS is seen as a chronic condition which can be handled through rather normal public health measures, a common perception today, or whether HIV/AIDS is seen as something radically other which must be projected outside the healthy core of the body politic by connecting it, for instance, to Africans, Haitians, immigrants, homosexuals, or drug users – a customary perception especially in the 1980s and still undoubtedly common in the 1990s.[59] It is safe to say that there probably are no HIV positive people who would like to go back in time and find themselves again captured in the latter scenario. But keeping in mind then the persistent violence which still at present haunts certain HIV positive people, even some of those who are subjected to very liberal governance, the question persistently remains what it is in these ideas, even in the liberal ones, which seem to make them so insistently to turn against life in the end? Is there something fundamentally wrong even in the liberal governance rationality, which at least in principle should be able to tolerate different ways and forms of life quite extensively? Or perhaps the problem somehow lies within HIV/AIDS itself?

[58] Prozorov 2014c, 960.

[59] See e.g. Watney 1987; Sabatier 1988; Sontag 1989; Patton 1990; Farmer 1993; Waldby 1996; Treichler 1999; Patton 2002.

Perhaps it is the HIV virus which makes life to appear in a form which governmental rationalities just cannot handle? If this is case, what do we do then? Are we stuck with a fundamentally violent management of life in relation to the global governance of HIV/AIDS, or can we perhaps somehow avoid this negation of life? These are questions which we must begin to consider next.

## 2.2 Biopolitics and Immunity

From all the different biopolitical theorizations it is the philosophy of Roberto Esposito which has most forcefully attempted to tackle the questions presented at the end of the previous section. This is due to the fact that, very conveniently for those of us who try to grasp the underlying biopolitical tensions at play in the global governance of the pandemic caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Esposito bases his theory of biopolitics on the notion of immunity. Furthermore, Esposito has also himself elevated HIV/AIDS to the status of one of the biggest indicators of the tensions of modern biopolitics and also explicated the manner, in which the negative side of biopolitics persistently haunts even the liberal management of life. Although Esposito has not taken this line of his thought as far as he could have taken it, which we will later point out, it is nevertheless by revisiting the work of Esposito through which we will in this section highlight the constitutive limits of liberalism and the difficulty of placing life anymore within these limits especially after the discovery of the HIV virus.

The term 'immunity' might today instinctively lead us think of the discipline of biomedicine. For Esposito, however, the notion of immunity has much more depth and explanatory potential than is commonly actualized in the field of biomedicine. In this sense, Esposito's thought can be situated within a larger body of critical works, in which this notion has been 'bubbling under' already for some time.[60] Similarly as in the case of these works, in the thought of Esposito immunity refers fundamentally to the productive power of the negative. As is familiar to us especially from the procedure of vaccination, immunity refers to protection which happens by reproducing "in a controlled form exactly that what it is meant to protect us from."[61]

[60] See e.g. Baudrillard 1991; Haraway 1991; Heller and Fehér 1994; Martin 1994; Luhmann 1995; Derrida 2005; Cohen 2009; Sloterdijk 2009.

[61] Esposito 2011, 8.

Even though this reference to the procedure of vaccination may again direct our attention to modern biomedicine, this type of immunization procedure has been with us way before the dawn of modernity. In fact, long before Élie Metchnikoff introduced the notion of immunity into the biomedical sphere, while explaining the successes of Louis Pasteur's vaccination experiments, the notion had been used to elaborate and make sense of the co-existence of, and recourse to, conflicting political and legal measures under one order. While this meaning had been attached to the notion at least since the times of the Roman Empire, when it still had a stronger communal connotation, Metchnikoff, leaning especially on Thomas Hobbes' thought of the self-defense as being the first 'Right of Nature', succeeded in individualizing the notion, after which it begun to refer more than anything to *self*-defense and *self*-preservation.[62]

Esposito maintains that in this transformation of immunity, from an old political and legal category into something which conditions our thinking over the possibility of preserving and maintaining our own lives, lies modernity's "most intimate essence."[63] Accordingly, by paying attention to this transformation Esposito thinks that it is possible to truly solve the unescapable enigmas of modern biopolitics, the ones we already highlighted in the previous section; namely, how did the era which has improved life to the previously unthinkable extent also ended up producing the Nazi concentration camps? What relation truly does the modern excesses of extermination bear with the modern political techniques which have adopted the improvement and fostering of life as their starting points? Are the two instinctively opposite '-isms' of modernity, liberalism and Nazism, really somehow related or not? From Esposito's perspective all these questions must be approached by inquiring into the meaning of immunity, as a protective power that is paradoxically attained through the negative. It is this meaning of immunity which best explicates the character of the knot which connects modernity's negative and positive trajectories to each other.

Esposito elaborates how the 'immunitary logic' of modernity can be already detected when we pay attention to the most important categories of the early modern political thought: sovereignty, property and liberty. All these categories, which seek to secure the existence of the modern rational individual subject, are

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[62] Cohen 2009; Esposito 2011.

[63] Esposito 2008, 55.

immersed in their own opposite in a way that they all include a negative element which goes against the expansion of this subject. Sovereignty protects and litigates the disputes between the juridical subjects but only by making these same subjects non-protected against the sovereign who can, in the extreme case, even kill these subjects without impunity. Property projects the proprietary subject as it secures the subject's access to things needed to maintain one's own life but the principle of private property simultaneously puts the proper existence of this subject in doubt as it can make the subject's personal identity literally identical with the things one has, or more alarmingly, with those things which one is lacking. The principle of liberty seeks to ensure that the individual subject can remain the master over himself and not fall into disposition of others but this also means that in order that this liberty can flourish in a society a series of checks, controls and blocking mechanisms must be installed which easily end up transforming liberty into its opposite. Thus, according to Esposito, the protection these early modern categories, as well as all the later modern immunization mechanisms, offer always comes with a risk of the negative element getting out of hand if their delicate balance is disturbed or if the protective demand suddenly grows so strong that it overflows.[64]

It is exactly this latter scenario which Esposito sees that took place in Germany after the Nazis came to power. The Nazis wanted so intensively to avoid the degeneration of life they fostered that they crushed the will and reason of the subject – the very features that the early modern political categories had still relied on when immunizing life. For Nazis the will and reason of the subject could not be used when immunizing life because in every living being the biological element was the strongest force.[65] Thus, without re-routing the modern 'immunitary machine' in any way, the Nazis wanted to preserve and support the development of life within the German race by intervening directly on the level of life itself. According to the immunitary logic, this could only mean that their primary tool had to become death – the negation of life.

Esposito emphasizes that contrary to first appearances the Nazis were never ‘against’ life in their policy but rather explicitly pro-life. He points to the fact that, despite being murderous, Nazis nonetheless launched the most powerful campaign of their era against cancer, restricted the use of asbestos, tobacco, pesticides, and

[64] Ibid., 57–77.

[65] Esposito 2012a, 71.

colorants, encouraged organic farming and diffusion of vegetarian cuisine. Doctors were also given a privileged status. Doctors were not only given a role regarding healing but also regarding the killing. It was the doctors, under whose supervision the holocaust was planned and conducted, which went even so far that, according to the Nazi regulations, it was only a doctor who had the right to open a gas valve. Moreover, without adopting the immunitary perspective it is hard to put all the pieces together concerning the trajectory of the Nazi regime from its birth to its end. From the perspective of immunity even the self-destruction ordered by Hitler in the final moments of the regime, when the irreversible contamination of the German race was only a moments away as the Russians were fast approaching the heart of the *Reich*, is easily understandable. It can be conceptualized as the culmination point of their obsession with the health of their body politic, their preoccupation to detect and remove the degenerative elements from this body. Hitler's Demolition Order can be grasped in terms of autoimmune illness, in which the protective apparatus becomes so aggressive that it turns against the body which it is supposed to protect.[66]

The central place given to the explication of the biopolitics, or better the thanatopolitics, of Nazism in Esposito's writings does not mean that he only associates the destructive side of biopolitics with the Hitler's regime. As the root of the problem did not lie in Nazism as such, the defeat of the regime did not bring the immunitary form of biopolitics to the end and thus did not completely remove the destructive powers of biopolitics from the modern equation. According to Esposito, the immunitary logic of modernity resurfaced especially in liberalism, which emerged victorious not only from its battle against Nazism but later also from its subsequent Cold War battle against communism.[67] In this regard, Esposito explicitly relies on Foucault's thought in which liberalism is not primarily understood as a normative political doctrine or an ideology. Instead, liberalism is understood more fundamentally as a particular way of biopolitical governance, which despite its cultivation of individual freedom and juridical equality of individuals, both in its classical as well as in its contemporary neoliberal variations, ultimately considers

[66] Esposito 2008, 110–45; Esposito 2013a, 79–87.

[67] Esposito 2013a, 100–11.

the preservation and development of life to be ends in themselves – something which the Nazis considered to be the case too.[68]

However, despite the fact that liberalism operates within the same biopolitical lexicon than Nazism, what separates them is their different relation to the bodily dimension of human existence. If man for Nazism was only the body, be it that this body was always spiritualized in racial terms, for liberalism, especially echoing the words of John Locke and John Stuart Mill, man is the owner of his own body. If in Nazism the individual body always belonged to the larger 'body politic' and the head of this body, the *Führer*, could do with this body what he wanted, in liberal thought it is the person occupying the body who has dominion over it. Therefore, one is able to use the body, sell the body and modify the body as one wishes. In other words, one is able to legitimately treat one's body as if this body was one's slave. In this way, the immunitary form of biopolitics, and its destructive tendency, "is split into two antithetical forms that are not unrelated: Nazism and liberalism, or State biopolitics and individual biopolitics."[69]

It is by this contrasting of liberalism to Nazism through which Esposito comes to accentuate also the destructive power present within liberal biopolitics and the specific apparatus of the 'person' through which liberal biopolitics utilizes this power and tries to keep it in check. In fact, this *dispositif* of the person has been the prime focus of Esposito's recent work.[70] Esposito's stated mission has been to uncover the effects of the "separation between person as an artificial entity and the human as a natural being, whom the status of person may or may not befit."[71] Esposito has traced the *dispositif* as far as ancient theatre, Christianity and Roman law, and it is especially the latter that points to its ability to not only give the status of the person to some, but also to reduce other living beings as something inferior to persons proper. The Roman legal tradition was never aimed only at granting the rightful status of the person to its subjects but also to turn other people under its rule into non-persons, i.e. things, best exemplified by the figure of the slave. According to Esposito, this was part and parcel of the Roman legal tradition even to the extent

[68] On Foucault's account of liberalism, see especially Foucault 2008.

[69] Esposito 2013a, 108.

[70] See e.g. Esposito 2012a; Esposito 2012b; Esposito 2015a; Esposito 2015b.

[71] Esposito 2012a, 9.

that the experience of personhood became characterized by keeping, or pushing, "other living individuals to the edge of thingness."[72]

Despite this inequality carved right into the basis of personhood, it was perhaps natural that the concept of the person, which was already severely battered by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century biopolitics and then eventually destroyed by the Nazi thanatopolitics, reappeared at the center of political discourse after the Second World War. When the concentration camps and other atrocities of Nazi Germany were revealed to the public knowledge, the need arose to more specifically define the fundamental rights of individuals that everyone could be seen to possess regardless of their status as citizens. For this task, the notion of the person was readily available. Hence, in the Declaration of Human Rights from the year 1948 the human being was argued to possess rights because of the very fact of being a person. In this way, the will and reason of the human subject were brought back and humanity as a whole was made the master of its own fate once again as everyone, regardless of the regime or the conditions in which they found themselves in, were given a possibility to transcend their corporeal matter – or this was at least the noble intention.

As we know, the promise still remains to be fulfilled. Despite the fact that the amount of humanitarian talk has just increased since the declaration, fundamental rights are still to be extended to all human beings. For Esposito here lies the key point. The neglect and disregard of right to life for millions of people in relation to starvation, disease and war has not occurred because human rights have not been extended far enough but because of the internal structure of these rights which stems all the way from the ancient idea of personhood. Esposito writes that

> a category defined in juridical terms, no matter how broad, becomes meaningful only thanks to the comparison and indeed the opposition with another category from which all other categories are excluded. […] [I]nclusion only makes sense to the degree to which it marks a limit beyond which there is always someone or something. Outside of this differential logic, a right would never exist as such, but instead would constitute a juridically irrelevant given; and indeed it wouldn't even be spoken of as such.[73]

[72] Ibid., 10.

[73] Esposito 2012b, 23.

In the case of human rights, then, the needed opposition is derived from precisely the fact that rights, as we understand them, are always related to personified human life in contrast to the living matter as such. This is something that was already strongly emphasized by Hobbes in the beginning of modernity. As Esposito has elaborated, for Hobbes it is the destructive ensemble of bodily needs, impulses and drives which create a demand for an institution – namely, sovereignty – that polices these corporeal excesses and thus guarantees the right to life to those it represents instead of the endless war of all against all. In this way, sovereignty grounds itself on an artificial extracorporeal core, which it separates from the bodily dimension. It separates the moral and rational part, which gives legitimacy to the institution and which the institution represents, from the "life understood in its materiality, in its immediate physical intensity."[74] In other words, the whole institution and the protection of life it ensures is based on the separation and protection of the person from the body unleashed.

A little later on, within a less absolutist liberal culture, this logic is replicated with only a minor twist. As already mentioned, in liberalism the sovereignty over one's body does not anymore belong to any external entity but this sovereignty is delegated to the very same person who inhabits the body. Nevertheless, this does nothing to solve the fundamental problem. Also within liberalism, genuinely all-encompassing rights become impossible because through the notion of the person it is impossible to realize equal protection for all living beings. In liberalism the differentiating function of the notion just moves more inside an individual who is now considered to be divided into two layers in a much more fluid fashion than within Hobbesian philosophy. In the case of liberalism, one is the center of juridical imputation as far as one is able to domesticate one's body, the animal layer inside the man. However, not everyone are capable of fully doing this and thus we see

> a series of intermediate steps, characterized by a presence of personality, which increases or decreases according to the point of view adopted. At its apex one finds the healthy adult, to whom can be awarded the title of being truly and properly a person; next there is the infant, who is consider to be a potential person; and then the elderly invalid, who is reduced to a semi-person; to the

[74] Esposito 2008, 58.

terminally ill to whom the status of non-person is given; to finally the madman who has received the role of anti-person.[75]

As Esposito maintains, this is the form of the 'immunitary current' which runs through liberalism: a current which seeks to cultivate everything that can be personified, and even on the terms that can be decided by the 'persons' themselves, but which at the same time must abandon life not fit enough for this status to the mercy of these very same decisions.[76]

Of course, on a purely abstract level of liberal philosophy, this does not yet pose that big of a problem. As those who rule under liberalism are supposed to be rational and moral, they should be able understand that they too have been infants, probably will turn into old and senile, can get ill, or that they can even go mad. Thus, they should be rational and emphatic enough to abstain from excesses against these subjects and actually try to ensure that from these inferior positions it is at least possible to spring back to personhood.[77] First real cracks only appear in practice when life is encountered in even more ambiguous forms than in its proper, potential, semi-, non- or anti-personhood and in situations which nevertheless demand that a decision on the status of this life must be made. It is in these zones of indistinction between personhood and bare life that Esposito, and also many others, truly see the greatest potential existing for liberal violence inside our biopolitical modernity – violence which undoubtedly shadows the liberal treatment of people, for example, in relation to the past and the present colonialism(s), different conditions of 'statelessness' and certain humanitarian triage measures.[78]

Nonetheless, there are even more damaging cases for the ethos and the rationale of liberalism that arise from the techno-biopolitical pressures of the late modernity. Esposito has offered a reading of these pressures but for some reason has not really connected this reading with his work on liberalism, even though his writing on these pressures strongly resonates with his immunitary account of liberalism – especially insofar as this writing touches the topic of the HIV/AIDS

[75] Esposito 2012b, 26.

[76] Esposito 2012a, 103.

[77] See e.g. Rawls 1971; Rorty 1989.

[78] See e.g. Arendt 1994; Duffield 2007; Dillon & Reid 2009; Nguyen 2010; Esposito 2012a.

pandemic.[79] Very much contrary to the objectives of the liberal tradition, Esposito emphasizes that what HIV/AIDS does is that it ravages "the identity of the individual as the form and content of its subjectivity […] the disease destroys the very idea of an identity-making border: the difference between self and other, internal and external, inside and outside."[80] This refers to the fact that the immune system's CD4 T cells, in which the HIV resides, have under normal conditions the task of activating and directing the immune defenses but in the case of HIV the activation of these cells paradoxically makes them more hospitable to the virus and actually helps the virus to replicate. Therefore it is incorrect to say that the virus simply evades the immune system, rather the virus uses the immune system's own mechanisms to harm it. In this way, what gets affected is not just health but the entire ontological scheme, as the defense mechanism which is thought to guarantee individual's integrity in the face of other organisms, reveals its deficiencies by itself assisting the progression of the virus which eventually will undermine the system completely, exposing the body to every germ, and causing the body to implode. Working exactly in the opposite way than immunity which internalizes the external, AIDS turns the body inside out by the "externalization of the inside."[81]

Given this significance of the HIV/AIDS pandemic for this account of liberalism, one might have expected Esposito to pose in his work the question of the purpose, legitimacy and efficiency of the liberal governance rationality in the contemporary era of the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. This engagement has so far not taken place, but the question remains of the capacity of liberalism to respond at all to this kind of ontological blow, given its immunitary orientation towards preserving and improving life by giving primacy to the personified individual. If the threat posed by HIV/AIDS is responded to in a liberal manner does it not paradoxically make the logic of intervention and the limit that would need to be transgressed in order to overcome AIDS the same? Does not the primacy given to the attainment of personhood place this standard of 'proper life' permanently beyond the full reach of the infected and thereby intensify the state of suspense and uncertainty felt by many? Do we not have here a case, in which it is not only those who happen to get excluded from liberal protection but also many of the included ones who will feel

[79] Esposito 2011, 145– 77.

[80] Ibid., 162

[81] Ibid., 162.

the ‘ungentle’ side of liberal biopolitics? In fact, the same answer will be given to all of these questions in the next section: ‘Yes’.

## 2.3 Immune Deficiency

The questions posed at the end of the previous section strike at the heart of the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS. Thus, even though Esposito has not contrasted his immunitary account of liberalism to the contemporary era of the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, there is nothing to stop us from doing this here. In this section, then, we are going to reflect the above questions in relation to the contemporary global governance of this pandemic in order to better highlight the inconvenience caused by the foundational limits of liberalism in the era of HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, as always when drilling down to the core of limitations, this move should also provide us at least some sort of clues how we might even go beyond these limits, if this is deemed as necessary. Yet, it should be noted immediately that by now these questions have not remained completely unaddressed in the public discussion surrounding the global governance of HIV/AIDS. Liberalism conditions the global response to the pandemic so deeply that it probably has been impossible in this discussion to avoid stumbling upon at least some of the issues touched by the above questions – especially as liberal individualism also plays a foundational role in the biomedical framings of the immune system, as we already implied in the beginning of the previous section.

Infamously, some of these issues surfaced in the public discussion when the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, questioned the causal connection between HIV and AIDS in his speech at the Thirteenth International AIDS conference, held in Durban in the year 2000. Basing his view on the so-called HIV/AIDS denialism, which characterized the official South African response at the time, Mbeki stated, among many other things which were dubious, that it seemed to him “that we could not blame everything on a single virus.”[82] Ed Cohen has written an insightful analysis of the uproar which Mbeki's speech caused. Cohen maintains that, although Mbeki's claims were mostly wrong, what is still noteworthy is the emotional and defensive outburst which the speech provoked. After all, by questioning the causal connection, what Mbeki emphasized was that the true causes of AIDS are poverty,

[82] Mbeki 2000.

deprivation and social and economic disadvantages, 'causes' which are also recognized to be significant barriers to the global HIV/AIDS response by many of those who otherwise were offended by Mbeki's speech. It is thus likely that the dispute had also something to do with the insecurity felt by Mbeki's opponents over the means of healing, and the fragility of these means. By questioning the connection between HIV and AIDS, Mbeki also came to question the suitability of the highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), the most effective way to pharmacologically treat HIV/AIDS, for the poor people of South Africa and for the other disadvantaged people of our world. In this way, Cohen thinks that Mbeki crossed a line of appropriateness. Mbeki attacked the shared premise of liberalism and biomedicine, according to which the primary task of both politics and medicine is to protect and empower the atomistic individual person who otherwise gets swallowed by her living environment.[83]

Although there is no doubt that HAART can enhance and save lives and has already done so virtually everywhere in the world, there are nevertheless good grounds to continue questioning it. This is not say that HAART should not be made available for some, that there is no point in investing on the development and research of antiretroviral drugs, or that Mbeki's denialist policies would have not flirted with thanatopolitics as a whole population of poor Africans were as a result denied an access to HAART.[84] Rather, the point is that even when HAART is made available among the globally marginalized, there remains something persistently beyond remedy. Moreover, this is not the case only in some of the worst off areas of our world but even among the celebrated success stories of the Global South, in the countries such as Brazil, where the universal access to HAART has been the official policy since the late 1990s and the overall quality of life has as a result increased dramatically but only at the cost of rendering many of those who already were the most marginalized to be even more so.[85]

As physician-anthropologist Didier Fassin has maintained, what is beyond remedy is history. With HAART it is impossible to remedy the series of historical injustices that most of those who have died had carried within their bodies, and most of those who still will die will carry within their bodies, as the pandemic has

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[83] Cohen 2008.

[84] Decoteau 2013, 104–106.

[85] Biehl 2007.

followed the fault lines of the past centuries of colonization and globalization. Furthermore, although history is beyond remedy, it is not at all irrelevant for effectiveness of the treatment but many times the decisive issue. This is due to the fact that in order to be effective HAART demands not only one's access to drugs, but also one's adherence to treatments and attendance of regular check-ups, where side-effects are dealt with, the patient's response to the drugs monitored and from time to time the drug cocktail altered, as the virus in the course of time becomes resistant to certain drugs. All this is easier said than done. In the globally marginalized conditions, where the basic health infrastructure is often lacking, what the successful attending to the therapy demands is what historically has been taken away from the people living in these conditions: their ability to rise above them.[86]

Vinh-Kim Nguyen, another physician-anthropologist, has well brought forth the resulting paradoxical consequences which often follow from the roll out of HAART to those most in need of relief. In the case of these people, the plans and the rational calculations of the global governance of HIV/AIDS regularly materialize in an unexpected manner. This is primarily because in these plans and calculations it is impossible to know beforehand every individual physical response to HAART and the resulting amount of health counseling which individuals happen to need. Yet in the marginalized conditions, every additional need might be decisive. For the infected people living in these conditions, the need for additional counseling can severely affect their ability to successfully follow through their therapy. As a result, for instance, they can develop a drug resistant HIV which is even more difficult to treat and thus just deepens their already desperate situation. These plans and calculations, then, simply have no means to settle the randomness which characterizes the individual bodily response to HAART and the pure chance which often plays a large role in determining people's access to HAART or their ability to successfully follow through their therapy. This means that all these people can do in order to 'insure' themselves against the random setbacks which might happen anytime in their life-long therapy, is to try to achieve a some kind of privileged position which allows them to access drugs more easily than the majority, allows them to access better drugs than the majority, and also allows them to be more capable than others in overcoming social barriers if needed.[87] But what about these

[86] Fassin 2007.

[87] Nguyen 2010.

others then? This seems to be a question to which the liberal logic at play within the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS cannot offer an answer.

Moreover, although framed above in relation to HAART, 'these others' do not only refer to a selection of globally marginalized people who happen to carry HIV virus at the moment in their bodies and struggle with the demands of their drug therapies. For instance, Hakan Seckinelgin has showed how in the case of the globally marginalized this same random selectivity persistently cuts through the global governance of the pandemic in other ways as well, and even in the case of the most celebrated and the most egalitarian minded global policies. As within the global response the general premise is that it is the atomistic individual person who is to be educated, empowered and whose endeavors must be supported, the social context of the disease always ends up neglected in a one way or another – even though the contextual factors are highlighted as significant barriers to the effectiveness of preventative interventions. Despite this highlighting, what this overtly individualized education, empowerment and support in the end rely on, and work for, is that the individual persons are simply able to rise above their social contexts and take full control of their own lives. As a result, the people targeted by the global response are actually abstracted from their local socio-political realities and everything in their lives that stand in the way of this abstraction becomes problematic. The aspects of their lives which involve ways, customs or habits that do not go along with these abstractions end up getting ignored or marginalized and the success of the response becomes dependent on overcoming these ways, customs and habits, regardless of their role in people's lives.[88]

As I have myself argued elsewhere, the paradoxical consequences of this abstraction can be well further accentuated by paying attention to the gender-based governance of sub-Saharan HIV/AIDS. Because this governance derives its legitimacy and ideals of gender equality and balanced sexual relations from the abstract liberal juridical and normative reality, the issues concerning the gender and sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa are presented ultimately as homogeneous and undynamic, despite the vast work done by African feminists and other researchers who highlight the relevance of heterogeneity and dynamism of sexual and gender relations in Africa. Due to this, the effectiveness of the gender-based governance of sub-Saharan HIV/AIDS becomes intertwined with wiping out this heterogeneity and

[88] Seckinelgin 2008.

dynamism – differences which have made it possible for some sub-Saharan women to possess more agency over their lives than others. In this way, this governance works not for the benefit of all but actually against the agency of at least some of these women. Furthermore, as we are dealing here with a deadly disease which haunts especially the powerless, this is something which does not only reduce their opportunities but also channels death their way.[89]

The fundamental contradiction at work here seems evident. By elevating the abstract strictly bordered person as the natural atom of the global response, concurrently reducing the contextual factors as epiphenomenal, the global governance of HIV/AIDS works for the generalizing of the liberal immunity discourse beyond the individual bodily level, in which the virus has already severely wounded the idea prevalent within this discourse over how the preservation of life should function. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as a result, especially at the level of the globally marginalized communities and societies, this discourse then again faces the same problems than at the individual level. In both cases, the supposed 'natural' workings of the discourse do not work. In neither case, is immunity fully under control and damage is caused also to unintended targets.

Therefore, the most suitable way to understand the simultaneous saving and the indirect abandoning of lives which the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS facilitates is to use the symptomatology of immune deficiency itself. If from the perspective of immunity, the Nazi thanatopolitics, all the way up to its intended self-destruction, can be grasped in terms of autoimmune illness, in which the protective apparatus becomes so aggressive that it turns against the body which it is supposed to protect, it seems that the dynamics of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the globally marginalized locations are the same for the liberal immunitary biopolitics as the HIV virus itself is for the immune system. The dynamics of the pandemic and the virus itself are both something that these two immunization mechanisms cannot handle in the way they are supposed to. In both cases, immunity is unable to fully protect life. Furthermore, in both cases, the mechanisms of the immunization do not only fail but begin in themselves to contribute to the gradual destruction of that which they should try to protect. In the case of the HIV virus, the mechanisms of the immune system help the virus to replicate and thus destroy the body’s integrity in the face of harmful infections. In the case of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the liberal

[89] Ailio 2011.

immunitary mechanism of the person begins to produce paradoxical results as by attempting to include people under its projection it also begins to indirectly abandon certain individuals of this population to the mercy of the HIV virus.

And yet, while the nature of this indirect but structural form of violence can be rather gloomily conceptualized in terms of immune deficiency, connecting this violence to immunity discourse's internal problems actually also allows for something hopeful to appear. By connecting this violence to this discourse, this violence can be understood to be a result of policies that are ultimately based on problematic ideas. After all, especially when it comes to immune systems today, instead of being able to anymore offer all-embracing explanations of the nature of the encounter between foreign pathogens and body's own tissue, the contemporary immunity discourse is actually troubled by this encounter. The contemporary immunity discourse is troubled by the interaction that goes on between these two elements, and between other much more specific and subtle elements, which the general encounter between the pathogen and body's tissue puts to play. In the era of HIV/AIDS and other late modern immunological anomalies, the strict separation of the immunological self and the hostile environment does not seem to hold anymore and it also seems that these two are not engaged in a total and eternal war against each other. Thus, as Esposito and others have emphasized, it seems that the total separation and the radically conflictual relation between the immunological self and the hostile environment must be questioned altogether. Moreover, it seems that new models of immune system must be developed by using more hospitable metaphors than 'attack', 'battle' or ‘war’ and by being faithful to the internal contradictions of the prevalent discourse, which actually points to the fundamental indistinguishability of 'attackers' and 'defenders'.[90]

The development of these alternative models of the immune system are important in their own right as the immune system perhaps is, as Donna Haraway classically put it, the ultimate “map drawn to guide recognition and misrecognition of self and other in dialectics of Western biopolitics.”[91] Thus, along these lines, it is possible that these alternative models might have the potential to make us imagine new and more peaceful ways of living together in general. Yet, on a more immediate note, this simple realization that there can be a different 'immunological' tomorrow

[90] See e.g. Haraway 1991; Martin 1994; Cohen 2009; Esposito 2011.

[91] Haraway 1991, 204.

already directs us to notice the ultimate contingency of the contemporary consistency between biomedicine and liberalism within our late modern biopolitical atmosphere. This realization points to the fact that there is fundamentally nothing necessary about their interplay, in which biomedicine continuously corporealizes bellicose liberal assumptions and liberal policies easily find support from biomedicine – something which has been lately also emphasized, for instance, by Ed Cohen and Melinda Cooper.[92] Thus, from this perspective, we can understand that there is neither nothing natural or inevitable about most of the problems that haunt the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS, not even those which manifest themselves through the difficulties of accessing and successfully utilizing life-saving HAART in the globally marginalized locations. On a closer look after all, as Susan Craddock has well put it, the development and the current hegemonic position of this particular pharmaceutical technology is a result of deliberate political choices rather than a natural consequence of neutral technological development. This hegemony is a result of punitive trade agreements, consistent political lobbying and market-driven dynamics characterizing contemporary pharmaceutical research and development. As Craddock emphasizes,

> it takes a great deal of money, hours of negotiations, and consistent political coercion to make sure that people cannot access cheaper generic antiretrovirals or benefit from an AIDS vaccine with limited market potential.[93]

Therefore, in addition to other problematic aspects of the global governance of HIV/AIDS, also the problematics attached to the deployment of this technology can change – or, in fact, this is something which can in principle *be changed* through political action.

There is no need to fall into apathy then. Regardless of the fact that some of the most difficult problems haunting the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS are very complex and lie very deep at the heart of modernity, these problems are fundamentally not insoluble. Even if these problems cannot be reduced to efficiency or the scale of the contemporary global response, and thus not solved either

[92] Cohen 2008; Cooper 2008.

[93] Craddock 2007, 1053.

through intensifying or optimizing our current efforts, there still is something that can be done to resolve them. As this current unsolvability results from the excessive artefactuality of the privileged liberal efforts to save, protect and manage life, to the extent that these efforts attempt to make life personified property, what is needed is that we make this artefactuality our starting point. In other words, we must not neglect or attempt to bypass but rather accept and attempt to make something out of the fact that HIV/AIDS crystalizes the paradoxes of the contemporary liberal management of life. As Tom Roach has put it in his work on biopolitics and HIV/AIDS, our offset must be the manner in which, "by calling into question the validity of the identity categories assigned to it, AIDS in turn questions the efficacy of a politics founded on such categories."[94]

But the real question then becomes, what lies beyond all the liberal categories and policies that AIDS denaturalizes? When the strictly bordered individual atom gets denaturalized, and the detrimental consequences which result from the privileging of this atom are brought forth, what do we have left? What it is actually that AIDS forces to emerge from behind the veil of liberal quasi-naturalism? Moreover, what happens to the politically progressive content, which liberalism nevertheless certainly has in addition to its thanatopolitical side? What happens in particular to the ideas of freedom and equality that are parts of the ethos of the modern liberal tradition, even if these ideas are in certain instances in practice undermined? After all, what else do the globally marginalized individuals who are currently exposed to the immune deficient violence need than precisely freedom and equality? To what else could we base progressive politics, or can we somehow reclaim these ideas? Can we in the contemporary era of HIV/AIDS move the complete affirmation of life at the center of biopolitics and still somehow ally these ideas with this affirmation, or must we completely abandon them? Thus, in short, even if it seems that the possibility of perceiving something new and progressive is intertwined with the way AIDS denaturalizes our present, what can we make of this hope? How can we realize it?

[94] Roach 2012, 107.

## 2.4 Affirmative Biopolitics

By posing the above questions, we move into an even more unknown terrain than the one we have been dwelling on so far. From this perspective, it was no coincidence that Roach's work on biopolitics and HIV/AIDS was quoted at the end of the previous section. On the contrary, bringing up his work at this stage was a purposeful move from my part because his work *Friendship as a Way of Life: Foucault, AIDS, and the Politics of Shared Estrangement* is a unique work insofar as it has already explicitly addressed some of the questions which I just presented. Roach has paid attention to the history of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the struggles of certain people hardest hit by this pandemic in the early years of the disease in order to bring forth a model of political participation and action which he thinks can best tackle the challenges posed by the late modern governance of our lives. While building his model, Roach has underlined connections between the early politics of HIV/AIDS and theorizations which revolve around the theme of 'affirmative biopolitics': a form of biopolitics that seeks to avoid all negations of life by taking the shared 'common-ness' of life as its starting point, in contrast to those more familiar forms of biopolitics which address life on the basis of some predetermined idea which is negatively defined (i.e. liberal biopolitics that addresses life by excessively privileging the artefactual idea of the 'person'). In this way, even if Roach is not even nearly as famous as most of the other theorists whose names have featured in the previous pages, Roach's work nevertheless provides us an ideal starting point in this section. By reviewing Roach's work, we are able to see how the early HIV/AIDS-related struggles strongly resonate with certain affirmative-biopolitical ideas presented by much more famous authors than Roach and also how difficult it is to generalize on the basis of these particular ideas a model of affirmative biopolitics which could really address the contemporary problematics that surround the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As Cindy Patton has written, the early AIDS activism's "critical insight, as moments of shattering institutional façades, seemed to work only once."[95]

In this section, however, we will not be satisfied with such pessimism. Instead, this pessimistic diagnosis will eventually be confronted by revisiting Esposito's theory of affirmative biopolitics, which Roach has somewhat surprisingly neglected. Unlike Roach, who ends up associating the potential of affirmative biopolitics solely

[95] Patton 2002, 21.

with the crumbling of our worldly modes of human existence which our inescapable bodily finitude forces us to recognize, the strongest branch of Esposito's ongoing work on affirmative biopolitics takes one step further and seeks to arrive at affirmative-biopolitical praxis with the help of the immanent materiality of life which the crumbling of our worldly human existence can be actually seen to accentuate. And yet, in spite of the fact that Esposito's approach to affirmative biopolitics will prove out to be more fruitful for us than the one we can find in Roach's work, it is not that we will dismiss Roach's work completely. On the contrary, as we will see, the focal importance placed on befriending bodily finitude by Roach also resonates strongly with Esposito's theory of affirmative biopolitics. As a result, rather than simply choosing Esposito's theory over Roach's, we will use Esposito's thoughts to take Roach's model of political participation and action further; and thus, also deploy Roach's work to underline the relevance of Esposito's thought for us. After all, if there is going to be any viable and truly affirmative political alternative to the HIV/AIDS-related indirect violence machinated by the current global governance system, it is obvious that this alternative will bear some sort of connection to the political legacy of the early AIDS activism. As affirmative biopolitics cannot be based on any predetermined idea, the affirmative alternative to the current HIV/AIDS crisis naturally cannot base itself on any such idea either but this alternative has no other choice except to especially rely on the brute bareness of those bodies that are at the moment hardest hit by this pandemic due to the political identifications attached to them. Accordingly, as Roach's account will soon tell us, this is precisely what the early AIDS activist already sought to do.

When Roach's background in queer studies is taken into account, it comes as no surprise that Roach has concentrated primarily on the early years of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Especially in relation to these early years of the AIDS crisis, queer politics crosses paths with the politics of HIV/AIDS more generally in a manner that makes these two forms of politics inseparable from each other, at least for a moment. In particular, Roach sees as important the special sense of togetherness that was prevalent early on among the so-called community based AIDS service organizations (ASOs) which sprang up in the US in the immediate aftermath of the emergence of the crisis. According to him, ASOs should not be only understood as emergency-response networks of the people affected who were deeply dissatisfied with the biased and inadequate health information from medical and governmental authorities of the time. Although the ASOs of the early 1980s, when the illness was still strongly associated especially with the 'irresponsible lifestyle' of homosexual men, clearly were also this, and these organizations attempted to provide a proper

support and care for those who were otherwise stigmatized by the public discourse, something else was cultivated within these organizations too. Roach gives special attention to the AIDS buddy system which was developed in the early 1980s in the New York City by an ASO called Gay Men's Health Crisis. Roach writes that the buddy system importantly shifted the focus from sexuality to friendship. In the buddy system a bunch of volunteers simply offered a person suffering from AIDS the much needed practical and emotional support that the government, public health services and often even the families at the time were not really able to provide. And yet, even if the buddy system was motivated by a functional form of friendship, it offered an ethical model which provoked new radically democratic subjective and social formations.[96]

Roach continues that the essence of the buddy relationships cannot be really captured through traditional philosophical or popular models of friendship:

> Montaigne's 'soul-fusion' in which selves merge and endure beyond the grave; Aristotle's complete friendship as the non-threatening cradle of common virtue; Plato's teleological ideal, which begins in lack and culminates in an otherworldly Good; reified, sentimental representations offered by the culture industry – all of these friendships are impotent when death is ubiquitous, imposing, impending.[97]

Instead of relying on to ideas of transcendental unity, the buddy relationships were founded on the bald fact of each friend's bodily finitude. Buddying were to begin at the point in which the 'normal' friendships ended. In this way, especially in the early years of the HIV/AIDS crisis, buddying formed an extremely difficult form of friendship. Each meeting of the strangers always demanded an uncomfortable and awkward openness to alterity, a receptivity to otherness, and respect for the foreignness in the friend and the self. With the inescapable bodily finitude radically foregrounded there was no possibility to subsume the differences into an identity.

[96] Roach 2012, 111–113.

[97] Ibid., 113.

The buddies were brought together solely by the thing which cannot be shared with one another – death.[98]

Yet, the buddying and other social support services did not satisfy all members of Gay Men's Health Crisis for long. Most notably, one of the organization's co-founders, Larry Kramer left the organization already in 1983, due to his frustration with the political impotency of the organization, and eventually famously formed the far more directly political organization: AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). Here, however, Roach sees an intimate connection. According to Roach, the early ethics of the AIDS buddy system and the later political AIDS activism are inseparable from each other. Roach writes that

> [t]he complicated affects produced in the buddy relation (discomfort, frustration, love), the impersonal ethics encouraged (nonrecognition, openness to alterity, respect for absolute difference), and the constitutive abandonment to finitude (engendering intense feelings of belonging, belonging-as-such) find expression in ACT UP's inventive activist tactics, including die-ins (a form of protest in which activists play dead in charged public spaces, most famously Saint Patrick's Cathedral), and the Ashes Action (a protest in which ACT UP members threw ashes of dead friends and lovers to the White House lawn).[99]

What Roach is arguing is that the turning into friendship as shared estrangement within the buddy system, at the moment when many gay experiences of AIDS profoundly questioned all the dominant frameworks of telling 'truth' about the illness, paved the way for the later politics which based itself on this same common estrangement. In the era when the only certain fact for many was that death was omnipresent in life, the political AIDS activism had really no other possible basis for its existence than this shared bodily finitude which had been already cultivated within the AIDS buddy system. In this way, Roach maintains that the cultivation of this finitude eventually led to an appearance of political common-ness which had no proper identitarian limits as it derived its form and movement solely from the non-shareable deaths which non-shareability everyone nonetheless shares. From this perspective, it is easy to understand the political logic which Roach sees to

[98] Ibid., 114.

[99] Ibid., 117.

characterize the die-ins and Ashes Action. These acts were public stagings of this shared common-ness against the different institutions which attempted to normatively contain and control this common-ness by dubiously demonizing especially the 'lifestyle' of homosexuals. This form of AIDS activism publicly cherished the aspect of our lives which Foucault considered to be the most private dimension of modernity, death, and thus connected this bodily finitude not solely with individual morbidity but also with collective potentiality. According to the formula which resonates especially with the Agambenian view of affirmative biopolitics, these public AIDS mourning rituals of activist rendered visible the-form-of-life, a form of life consisting solely of bare life, against which all normative life is defined. Death was brought "out of the closet in order to expose the biopolitical manipulation of life."[100]

Even if empirically, when referring to the role of particular organizations and acts, Roach's story can in places seem simplistic, connecting the early AIDS activism to the theme of affirmative biopolitics is an insightful move. As especially in the early years of the pandemic, the experience of this deadly illness alienated many people from all the official information, ideas and views which concerned their own lives, the early AIDS activism can be very well seen as a process in which bare life attempts to take a political form. As there were no positive identitarian identifications available to them at the time, the activists really had no other choice except to organize themselves around this bareness of life. In this sense, the activists had to attempt to give this bareness a political form that would be inseparable from its existence, something that would be a form-of-life, hyphens here emphasizing the uniformity of life with its form, instead of a form of life that always somehow negates bare life.[101] Yet, these specific terms by which this political configuration can be named are not important as such. As Roach also does himself, this political configuration can be as well named by using other terms than the Agambenian ones. For example, at certain parts of his book Roach abandons the Agambenian concepts and refers to this configuration by using the Hardt and Negrian ideas which revolve around the term 'multitude': a group of people who cannot be classed under any other distinct category, except for their shared fact of existence.[102] Instead of the

[100] Ibid., 147.

[101] See e.g. Agamben 1998, 103–105; Agamben 2000, 3–12.

[102] Hardt & Negri 2000; Hardt & Negri 2004; Hardt & Negri 2009.

specific terms used, however, what is important is the question which concerns the value and sensibility of this perspective in the first place. Even though the early AIDS activism seems to resonate with Agambenian and Hardt and Negrian views of affirmative biopolitics, what does all this matter anymore as the times have changed and AIDS activism or queer politics do not necessarily have to completely revolve around bare life or shared fact of our bodily existence unlike in the early years of AIDS? Thus, simply put, as we are not in Roach's case dealing with a work of history as such, what is the point of connecting the early AIDS activism to the these theories of affirmative biopolitics? How does this connecting aid our political analyses of the present?

This is, of course, a question which relevance and difficulty Roach also acknowledges himself. After Roach has carefully elaborated the impersonal ethics of the AIDS buddy system, connected this ethics to the radical politics of AIDS activism and to the theme of affirmative biopolitics, he cannot help but to acknowledge an essential contradiction as he attempts to translate this perspective into something which would hold political value also at present. In a passage, which deserves to be quoted here at full, as it so strongly resonates with the problematics that generally haunt the theories of affirmative biopolitics, Roach writes:

> How can a relation that bespeaks the anarchical contingency of all relationality in any way comprise an ethical framework, ground a political program, or establish the terms of a social contract replete with rights and duties? Just as affect always exceeds emotion, the asubjective force of friendship likewise creates a surplus uncontainable by political forms and institutions. In this surplus lies the potential to do, make, say, and think differently. Although friendship is by design incapable of cohering in an epistemological object deemed 'society' or 'politics,' we must nonetheless seek out those social and political forms that best accommodate or approximate the antisocial nature of friendship. Only in these forms might we break away from the inherently inequitable and vicious hierarchies of identitarian difference. This is all to say that the impossibility of instituting friendship in something like the AIDS buddy system must be affirmed as a contradiction: Instead of throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater *we must tarry within this essential paradox and valorize those communal forms that acknowledge and respect the impossibility of sociality as such*.[103]

[103] Roach 2012, 117–118. Emphasis added.

But is this conclusion that is italicized in the above the only possible one? On the one hand, it seems correct, as Roach's discourse seems to suggest, that affirmative biopolitics must give a focal role to the bareness of our lives, that shared difference which separates our lives from our ideas. On the other hand, if the practice of affirmative biopolitics only consists of the search of communal forms that seek to maintain the impossibility of sociality as such, it seems that the whole argument here is close to turning very problematical in relation to our present. In particular, when dealing with the contemporary HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is highly ambiguous how the answer to the political problems could simply be the re-valorization of communal forms which try to stay true to the fundamental alterity of our lives that HIV/AIDS has revealed. It rather seems that this type of valorization of communal forms could only, as Roach's discourse seems to suggest, ragefully protest against all kinds of institutions which cannot do anything else for this community except constantly negate it. Although purely theoretically this might pass as some sort of answer, in practice this is highly unsatisfactory. A similar political configuration of bare life which was born in the early years of the pandemic might still be imaginable today, as HIV/AIDS continues to highlight the contingency of modern identity categories. It is nevertheless hard to believe that at present there are many people who would want to somehow really stay true to this political form and completely avoid getting entangled with any institution. Instead, probably nearly everyone of those who still today are forced to live in as close proximity to death than the early Western AIDS activist did would not mind to trade this 'authentic commonality' to the pharmaceutical therapy provided by the state, society, or any other kind of institution.

And yet, although we can criticize Roach for excessive radicalism here, it seems that we cannot nevertheless lose our contact with the non-identitarian dimension of the early AIDS activism without simultaneously losing the sight of affirmative biopolitics. Symptomatically, the sociologist Nicholas Rose, in the context of mapping out the development of the advanced liberal governance in the recent decades, writes about early AIDS activism in the following way:

> while initially relations between the activists and the conventional biomedical community were antagonistic, gradually an alliance developed. The HIV/AIDS community, and the identifications it fostered, came to provide key elements for the government of the virus. That is to say, it was through their identification as

> members of this community, that those in 'high risk groups' were recruited to their responsibilities as biological citizens; health educators came to realize that it was only by means of the pathways provided by AIDS activists that they would be able to gain the allegiance of the active gay men who were their primary target. In allying itself with the health establishment in promoting the message of safe(r) sex, AIDS activists, in return, would have their say in the organization and deployment of social resources, and indeed gain the resources necessary for their activities.[104]

In the above, as Rose largely jumps over the initial phases of AIDS activism by just briefly characterizing these phases as 'antagonistic', and then as he really begins his story from the later phase when there already existed certain identifications and interests which were shared by the activists and governmental authorities, he can with ease situate the AIDS activism within the trajectory of liberal public health governance in general. From this perspective, the early activists just taught something to the governmental authorities. By problematizing the dubious AIDS discourses of the early years, the activists gave governmental authorities a valuable lesson through which the authorities came to recognize the interests and views of the activists as largely legitimate. After the activist and governmental authorities found themselves on the same page, the HIV/AIDS crisis could be responded more efficiently, and eventually this led to the governmental appreciation of the views of its active citizens regarding other public health issues as well. Therefore, at present, we can see these activist as pioneers of the new type of active ethical relationship taken towards one's own biomedical condition, something which has under the liberal government of today "become routine and expected, built in to public health infrastructures."[105]

But is it then so that the radical democratic or affirmative-biopolitical character of AIDS activism got immediately betrayed after the activists abandoned the cultivation of asocial communal bond as such? Was the activism afterwards governmentalized so intensively that it could anymore only pave the way for the contemporary ideal of the active biological citizen? Especially if we take into account, along the lines elaborated in the previous section, the thanatopolitical consequences which the ideal of individual activeness can today have in certain

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[104] Rose 2007, 144.

[105] Ibid., 147.

underprivileged circumstances, it becomes at least tempting to reason in this manner. And yet, if this incompatibility is the case we seem to end up in a dead end. We end up in a position which is analogous to the line of philosophical reflections on community which runs from Georges Bataille to Maurice Blanchot, and from Jean-Luc Nancy to Giorgio Agamben.[106]

Although Nancy has recently returned to the theme of community[107] – after being preoccupied for years with related concepts such as compearance, co-appearing and we[108] – and emphasized the difference which he now thinks separates his thought from Bataille's and Blanchot's, the general line of argument within this tradition has been as follows: Unveiled to us by our limit experiences that push our existence beyond our identities – experiences which we can acquire precisely though friendships, love and death – our lives involve aspects that we cannot properly grasp or fully comprehend. As a result, our lives are fundamentally something which no one can completely claim to properly own, and therefore, our lives are neither something that can be shared with one another. This non-sharability, however, is not contrary to community as such. In contrast to all particular communities which must at least presuppose that there exists some sort of proper substance which is shared by the every member of the community, this non-sharability provides the basis for the universal community. It is this non-sharability of our lives which we all share beyond any identitarian limits. In relation to this non-sharability we all exist in common. Yet, although this is naturally true, it has proved to be extremely difficult to take the next step within this line of thought. After all, in the final analysis, what all this seems to imply is that this universalism is inexpressible in the political terms familiar to us – except in a completely negative manner. As Agamben summarizes this in his own characteristic way, even though the State can recognize any claim for identity, "what the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity."[109] Agamben continues that when this happens and "wherever these

[106] See e.g. Bataille 1988; Blanchot 1988; Nancy 1991; Agamben 1993.

[107] See Nancy 2016.

[108] See especially Nancy 2000.

[109] Agamben 1993, 85.

singularities peacefully demonstrate their being in common there will be a Tiananmen, and, sooner or later, the tanks will appear."[110]

The almost unbridgeable opposition between the state and community, the nearly total schism between identity and difference, the practically absolute contrast between the imposition of our lives within artefactual borders and the full unrestrained affirmation of life. This is the direction towards which this discourse is then heading. And yet, if we consider us humans to be more or less evolutionary forms of life and not God's image, if divinity has not interfered to our birth, and if the ultimate horizon for our existence is then life, and thus nothing else than life, how come we have here ended up placing our own cultural constructs, such as identity, state and society, so strictly outside of life? If the ultimate horizon for our existence is life, should not life be the ultimate horizon of our cultural constructs as well? This at least instinctively would seem to be the case. Maybe there is then still something we have not yet fully acknowledged here? Perhaps it has not been life after all what we have in this section so far affirmed but only the finitude of our own selves and our own thoughts?

This is precisely what Esposito would here consider to be our problem. Esposito has lately written in relation to Nancy's work on community that Nancy's difficulty to articulate political ramifications is a result of a too much privilege given to the exposure to otherness at the expense of the content that we actually share. Esposito maintains that from Nancy's perspective it is nearly impossible to take the next step and arrive at something politically meaningful because what we seem to be almost only sharing is our non-subjectivity. Thus, according to Esposito, instead of sharing what we might be after we have been exposed to otherness, we only share that what we are not. We fundamentally share only the fact that we have 'nothing-in-common' and this naturally blocks right away every attempt to truly express this common-ness in political terms as nothing cannot be turned into something without losing precisely this 'nothing'.[111] However, whether Nancy has ever actually suggested that we share only 'nothing' is up for debate as in his most recent take on the question of community Nancy critiques Blanchot along these same lines. Nancy writes that what eventually distances his thought from Blanchot's is that for him community "does not simply consist in escape [*fuite*] and vanishing. It is all this

[110] Ibid., 86.

[111] Esposito 2013b, 84.

in a much more present and concrete [*actuelle*] manner – in the efficacy of relation, proximity and contact."[112]

And yet, on a general level this does not invalidate Esposito's critique, be it that Nancy might be a wrong target for this criticism. What remains a relevant message transmitted by the above Esposito's critique also from the perspective of Nancy's most recent discussion of community, is that we must adjust our perspective a little when it comes to the general lines of how community and universality are often thought together within the post-Heideggerian tradition of contemporary philosophy. What is needed is that we leave behind the idea of our language being the ultimate transcendental of our lives even more forcefully than has been often done and really focus on that what we most fundamentally are before and beyond any human world; namely, something that perhaps Nancy would not but Esposito certainly would call, life.[113]

There are good reasons for us to follow Esposito's choice of words here. After all, as Michel Henry has insightfully emphasized, the above actually is what life most fundamentally is. Life is that what we are irrespective of our thoughts, before our consciousness and our entry into our human worlds. Life is certainty, it is that what we cannot really doubt even if we would want to because life simply is what we most fundamentally feel and know that we are. Life is life. And yet, when this claim is taken seriously it cannot mean anything else than the fact that our own thoughts, consciousness or human worlds are neither anything else than life. In short, life is everything what every living being is, without nevertheless being generically separable from these individual beings. Life is radical immanence, it is the reality that every living being absolutely holds in common. And of course, in other words, this means that also "the essence of community is life; every community is a community of living beings."[114]

Esposito does not refer to Henry's work on life, even if Esposito also emphasizes that in the final analysis we share precisely 'life-in-common' instead of nothing-in-common. Yet, Esposito is not as conceptually clear on this as Henry. This is most likely due to the fact that Esposito has only reached this conclusion quite recently.

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[112] Nancy 2016, 78. Brackets in original.

[113] On this terminological difference between Esposito and Nancy, see Esposito 2010b, 112–113.

[114] Henry 2008, 119.

In fact, Esposito's oeuvre, from *Categories of the Impolitical* to his biopolitical trilogy – *Communitas*, *Immunitas*, *Bíos* – and beyond, all the way up to his recent work on the *dispositif* of the person, can be read as a trajectory that moves toward this insight before eventually culminating in it and afterwards continuing along its lines. First of all, *Categories of the Impolitical* ends with a discussion of 'the community of death'.[115] Then, in *Communitas*, Esposito still does not radically depart from this perspective. In *Communitas*, Esposito strongly emphasizes that what we share is nothing-in-common but already in the end of this book Esposito with the help of certain Bataille's ideas refers to the "unbreakable interweaving of humanity and animality […] certainly another and extreme mode for breaking the identity of the subject through its violent rootedness in that animal."[116] Along these lines in *Immunitas* and *Bíos*, the question of life is present from the start but it is not until the very end of *Bíos* when the question of life is fully inscribed into that of community. From this moment on, it is life which is firmly integrated as the focal point of Esposito's thought, even to the extent that Italian philosophy as a whole is soon-to-be-named by Esposito as 'living thought.'[117]

The move in Esposito's thought from nothing-in-common to life-in-common and his potentiated enthusiasm over life is particularly indebted to Gilles Deleuze. In the last pages of *Bíos*, Esposito turns to Deleuze's final essay *Immanence: A Life* and finds especially important Deleuze's analysis of Charles Dickens' novel *Our Mutual Friend* (in French *L'ami commun*). This is a novel which according to Deleuze better than anything else describes the common-ness of the immanence that runs through us – the absolute immanence that Deleuze, similarly as Henry, calls life, or '*a* life'[118]. Deleuze uses the indefinite article to emphasize the necessarily indefinite nature of life because life cannot be pure immanence if this immanence can be fixed to *a priori* subjects or objects. Thus, unlike *the* life of an individual, Deleuze maintains that *a* life is necessarily vague because it exceeds our capacities to measure it as *a* life lies underneath and beyond our identities as bodies and organisms. And yet, this *a* life is anything but unreal in relation to our bodies as organisms. On the contrary, *a* life is precisely what our bodies as organisms are revealed to be in their essence after

[115] Esposito 2015c, 156–200.

[116] Esposito 2010a, 134.

[117] Esposito 2012c.

[118] Deleuze 2001, 27.

the accidentality of our identities become clear to us – accidentality that is nevertheless not the same thing as irrelevance because naturally *a* life can only "coexist with the accidents of *the* life that correspond to it."[119]

This claim is clarified by Deleuze's reading of *Our Mutual Friend*. What happens in the novel is that a disreputable man is dying and those taking care of him begin to show eagerness, respect, and even love, for his slightest signs of life. But when the man comes back to life, his saviors turn cold again and this man himself becomes once again mean and crude. Deleuze writes that it is thus between the life and death of this man when there is a moment when *a* life makes an appearance. When the man is still in coma, in the suspended state between life and death, *the* life of an individual starts to give way to an impersonal yet singular mode of life that is freed from the accidents of identitarian life. As a result, this is the moment when everyone empathizes with the man. This is the moment when the man can become their 'common friend' – *l'ami commun*. According to Deleuze, this is a moment of haecceity, or 'thusness', in which *the* life of this man turns

> neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. The life of such individuality fades away in favor of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life.[120]

Esposito praises this Deleuze's analysis for its ability to show how our worldly being is fundamentally infused by the common-ness of life and also for the way how this reading invites us to see the one in the other. According to Esposito, Deleuze's reading does not privilege either being or life over each other. Instead, this reading puts these two in an immanent reciprocal relation which posits our worldly being and life in an equal footing. Deleuze's reading shows how these two exist as co-implicated with each other. In this way, it is particularly noteworthy how, very similarly as in Roach's work, it is here befriending death and foregrounding bodily finitude that get elevated by Esposito as something through which the contingent or accidental nature of worldly ideas is accentuated and the immanence of life

[119] Ibid., 29.

[120] Ibid., 29.

makes an appearance; however, with one important difference. Unlike in the case of Roach's work, in Esposito's reading of Deleuze, worldly ideas and life are not frozen as each other's opposites. On the contrary, as Esposito emphasizes the movement between these two, their reciprocal immanence, he is able to maintain that Deleuze's analysis does not describe only something trivial or theoretical in relation to worldly politics but Deleuze's work, in fact, points to a formula of affirmative biopolitics which rationale is to overcome biopolitical negations of life in practice. Thus, in Esposito's reading of Deleuze, befriending death does not only expose the negative biopolitical manipulation of life by revealing the contingency and accidentality of our worldly ideas but this exchange actually alludes to the 'norm of life' which arises out of this exchange as the clash of impersonal and ideational modes of life provides us with a transformative idea.[121]

Esposito then maintains, similarly than Henry, that this immanent reciprocal relation between our worldly being and life proclaims the impossibility of sacrificing or dominating any part of life in the name of the totality of life. From the perspective opened by Deleuze, as Esposito states, "every life is a form of life and every form refers to life."[122] Or, as Henry expresses this with bit more clarity, any attempt to oppose the totality of life and the individual, "to establish a hierarchical relation between them – is pure nonsense."[123] Henry continues that this actually

> amounts to opposing the essence of life with something that is necessarily entailed by it. When one political system or another advocates if not the elimination of the individual at least its subordination to more essential structures or totalities, even a greater community than it, this is not a community. The totality, for example, of a bureaucracy is an abstraction, which has taken the place of life and claims to speak and to act in its name. In life the individual is never an unnecessary excess or subordinate; instead, it is the proper mode of phenomenological actualization of this life.[124]

[121] Esposito 2008, 193–194.

[122] Ibid., 194.

[123] Henry 2008, 121.

[124] Ibid., 121

Yet, on top of what is said by Henry in the above passage, Esposito also emphasizes how the norm of life is neither "unrelated to the going beyond a semantics of the person."[125] In this way, Esposito maintains that the norm of life does not only proclaim the impossibility of sacrificing or dominating any part of life in the name of the abstract totality of life but also denounces every attempt to do this in favor of some artificially privileged dimension of life. Thus, the norm of life ultimately calls into question not only the totalitarian attempts of sacrificing and dominating individual life but it also points to the questionability of sacrificing or dominating impersonal life on the basis of some abstract individual right. What we have here, then, is the formula of Espositoan affirmative biopolitics, or a politics *of* life, that "always comes as a reaction to a politics focused *on* life."[126] This is the formula of the fundamental biopolitical conflict for Esposito; a conflict in which the finitude of "the human body is central."[127]

However, it is not the case that Esposito can mean that this conflict is meant to be somehow won once and for all. There is not meant to be a final victory in this conflict because it is the existence of the tension between immunization (politics focused *on* life) and 'communization' (politics *of* life) which makes the worldly affirmation of life possible as such. This is logically so, even if Esposito himself is not always completely clear on this. In some of his visions, Esposito clearly contradicts the logic of his own affirmative-biopolitical thought. In particular, this happens when Esposito discusses the overturning of different conceptual pairings in *Bíos*; for example, when Esposito, along with the Hardt and Negrian vision, starts to dream about some sort of communitarian world of 'flesh' to come. In these pages, while addressing the dynamics of globalization that strive for making the whole globe a single unified political body, Esposito writes that after the whole globe has been enclosed into a body, it ceases to be a body anymore as there is nothing outside of it and thus nothing left to define it. As a result, after all kinds of negating bodily borders are gone, we are only left with the living flesh of the multitude.[128] Here, however, rather than approaching the immanently conflictual knot between immunity and community, Esposito is actually just turning immunity and

[125] Esposito 2008, 194.

[126] Esposito 2015a, 143. Emphasis on original.

[127] Ibid., 143.

[128] Esposito 2008, 159–169; Hardt & Negri 2004, 189–227.

community, or body and flesh, the other way around. As Kiarina Kordela well highlights, this is a move which betrays the logic of Esposito's philosophy in relation to its strive to go beyond the negations of modern biopolitics and provide an offset for truly affirmative politics of life. Placing flesh into the place of the body only inverts the hierarchy of the modern biopolitical immunitary paradigm, "that is, the presumed secondary element turns out to be the primary – and, in doing so, it can be as exclusive and nonuniversalist as the immunitary paradigm, only with a difference in character casting."[129]

Elsewhere, however, Esposito gives much more opportune examples. Especially his discussion of organ transplants and birth very well capture the logic of his non-aporetic version of affirmative biopolitics. As Esposito writes, in organ transplants the body must be made to momentarily suspends itself in order that it can expose itself to its outside and "save what still bears inside."[130] This refers to the fact how in organ transplants the defenses of the immune system must be put to halt, as otherwise these defenses reject the implanted life-extending otherness, despite these defenses being normally something that defend the subject. Similarly in birth the whole procedure is made possible by a deviation from the 'normal' immunological criterion. Yet, in the case of birth, this deviation is not a result of the external suspension of the immune system but is due to the internal activation of the immune defenses during pregnancy. The immune system of the mother is working on a double front and directed towards controlling the fetus but also towards controlling itself. The immune system sees the fetus as otherness in relation to the mother but it also treats the mother as otherness in relation to the fetus. In this way, this twofold activation of the immune system causes an equilibrium of the whole that ends up immunizing the mechanism itself from an excess of immunization. All this, however, is dependent on the foreignness of the father. If the paternal sperm is not foreign enough the blocking antibodies will not be produced and a miscarriage awaits. Thus, Esposito concludes that contrary

> to the metaphor of a fight to the death, what takes place in the mother's womb is a fight 'to life,' proving that difference and conflict are not necessary destructive. Indeed, just as the attack of the mother protects the child, the child's

[129] Kordela 2013, 176.

[130] Esposito 2011, 149.

> attack can also save the mother from her self-injurous tendencies – which explains why autoimmune diseases undergo regression during pregnancy. This is the outcome of the dialectic that develops in the immune system between antibody cells and self-regulatory cells: in their mutual opposition, they promote each other's growth. Like a tug of war, the equilibrium of the whole is determined not by subtraction, but by the sum of the forces that oppose each other. In the same way, self-regulation is determined by the force of the immune response. A perspective is thus opened up within the immunitary logic that overturns its prevailing interpretation. From this perspective, nothing remains of the incompatibility between self and other. The other is the form the self takes where inside intersects with outside, the proper with the common, immunity with community.[131]

Therefore, immunity and community are in the final analysis simply different sides of the same coin. Immunity is not radically separable or different from community and thus it is actually the excessive attempts that pursue to separate these two from each other which risk causing the inversion of biopolitics into thanatopolitics, instead of the more balanced attempts to immunize and communize life.

In fact, recently Esposito has even been able to elaborate something practical along these lines. In a short article in which Esposito reflects the key themes of his own thought in relation to concrete politics, Esposito has brought forward that his idea of affirmative biopolitics does not demand violent escape or flight from the structures and mechanism that protect and seek to ensure the vitality of our lives as such. Instead, although his idea of affirmative biopolitics undoubtedly does proclaim that we should free ourselves from certain overtly powerful modern immunitary mechanisms, this should only be done to the extent that we along these lines find out ways to create new structures and mechanism of immunization. Although again not stating the following very clearly, Esposito's text nevertheless implies that these new structures and mechanisms should be such that they aim at striking and maintaining the balance between immunity and community. These structures and mechanisms should be premised on protecting and preserving not abstract totality or any artificially privileged dimension of life but the radical common-ness of life as such: the absolute conflictual immanence of it. What these structures and mechanism could be is still something that remains to be seen

[131] Ibid., 171.

because at the moment it is hard, for instance, to think what kind of law would protect the 'common', instead of 'private' or 'public', as Esposito in this article explicitly confesses. Yet, Esposito emphasizes that there are already political struggles underway that clearly go into the right direction. According to Esposito, for example, the fight against the planned privatization of water, the battle over energy sources, and the struggles seeking to re-examine and resist the intellectual property rights of pharmaceutical companies that prevent the manufacture and distribution of cheaper generic drugs in the marginalized areas of our world obviously match with his idea of affirmative biopolitics.[132]

This last example, of course, takes us nicely back to the concrete politics of HIV/AIDS and together with the two other examples points to the fact that from the Espositoan perspective it is not necessary to keep the foregrounding of death and befriending bodily finitude separate from positive political struggles. Thus, by reading Esposito in a manner that we have done here, nothing in principle remains of the fundamental incompatibility between the political radicalism stemming from the foregrounding of death and befriending our bodily finitude and the positive forms of political struggles which aim for concrete institutional transformations. If we just do not treat the sharing of bodily finitude as the ultimate end point of affirmative biopolitics, and thus paradoxically attempt to turn bare life as such into something positive, we can avoid here making conclusions that actually mask the full political potential of foregrounding death and befriending our bodily finitude.

In other words, then, if we treat the foregrounding of death and befriending bodily finitude strictly as *means* through which we estrange our *thoughts* from the negative biopolitical abduction of life, *and* accordingly bring forward the transformative and normative power of life, along the lines of Esposito's reading of Deleuze, we open up here a direction that seems to be very promising from our perspective. Or, to be more precise, when considering the fact that today there exists certain globally marginalized people who are detrimentally affected by HIV/AIDS not only due to the existence of a lethal virus but also due to the liberal management of this disease, while nevertheless being individuals who precisely crave freedom and equality which liberal ethos to them promises, this direction seems to be the only possible one. From the perspective of above considerations, this direction is the only possible one which we can anymore take if want to think

[132] Esposito 2013b, 87–90.

how the current situation could still be genuinely transformed for the better. After all, as the normative dimension of life points to the unnaturalness of *all* violent imprisonments and hierarchies constructed in the name of fostering life, does it not actually also make it possible for us to perceive what freedom and equality mean as separated from the immune deficient limits of the contemporary liberal response to HIV/AIDS? This is something that the norm of life undoubtedly does as the unnaturalness of imprisonments and hierarchies are simply another ways of saying 'freedom' and 'equality'.

Accordingly, for the remainder of our study, the above *affirmative-biopolitical ideas* of freedom and equality will lie at the center of our attempt to bring forward a way out of the currently unsolvable political problems of the global HIV/AIDS governance. For the remainder of our study we will seek to introduce these ideas into the world of the global HIV/AIDS governance by addressing this governance from the perspective of the bodily finitude of the people currently subjected to the liberal immune deficient form of violence. In this way, we will attempt to show how even these people subjected to liberal immune deficient form of violence are actually *already* – on the basis of their lives *as such* – free and equal in a more extensive sense than proclaimed by the liberal ideas of freedom and equality. Thus, along these lines, we will seek to show how the lives of these people can only be fostered better than already done by the intensification of the valorization of the radical common-ness of life in the world of HIV/AIDS governance – something which can be done in this world through a political process that tries to make this world to fully respect, realize and organize itself around the affirmative-biopolitical ideas of freedom and equality.

And yet, before we move on and attempt to apply this theoretical model to the concrete governmental world of HIV/AIDS, we should still make one more clarification that concerns the terms we have in this section deployed. This clarification concerns, on the one hand, the relationship that lies between the terms 'affirmative-biopolitical', 'material', 'impersonal', 'immanent', 'common-ness', 'universal', 'freedom' and 'equality', and on the other hand, the relation that these positive terms bear with the more negative expressions used, such as 'the *unnaturalness* of imprisonments and hierarchies' or '*uncontainable* by political forms and institutions'. First of all, it is important to note that all these positive terms should be seen as interdependent. As we have elaborated above, it is the inescapable impersonal materiality of our lives that immanently indicates to us the universally shared common-ness of our lives; the common-ness which in turn

normatively proclaims that from the perspective of politically affirming life any sort of politics which falls short of fully valorizing the freedom and equality of all living beings is contradictory. Secondly, however, and as can be already detected by paying close attention to the previous sentence, it is also the case that talking about universal political affirmation of life detached from all negation is simply impossible. The truly universal political affirmation of life can only happen as a reaction to a worldly ordering of life that negates life in the first place and thus affirmative biopolitics, or any universal politics for that matter, is necessary accompanied by the negation of that negation which at first negates our fundamental commonness.[133] All this is then something that the reader should keep in mind while addressing the following chapters, in which for the sake of readability and clarity the above positive terms and the related negative expressions are often used independently, despite the fact that these terms and expressions actually form a whole.

[133] Cf. Prozorov 2014b, 36–39.

# 3 THE AFFIRMATIVE POWER OF THE BODY

## 3.1 The Excess of Finitude

In the previous chapter we highlighted how the problems of the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS cannot be reduced only to the scale of the response, the logic of profit prevalent in the pharmaceutical industry or to the existence of conflicting interests between States and different interest groups within the global governance networks of HIV/AIDS. Instead, the most central, and much more difficult, problems of the global governance of HIV/AIDS stem from the internal contradictions of modernity, which the case of HIV/AIDS explosively manifests. In relation to the global governance of HIV/AIDS, the combination of liberal governance rationality and the late modern management of life turn the good intentions of liberalism into a structural violence against certain marginalized individuals. In the previous chapter, however, we were also able to argue that these problems are in principle solvable. Yet, as we stressed, these problems can only be overcome through affirmative-biopolitical transformation. This transformation cannot be achieved through relying onto any predetermined idea but this transformation must be based on introducing affirmative-biopolitical ideas of freedom and equality into the context of the contemporary global HIV/AIDS governance with the help of the bareness of those lives that are currently in this context subjected to the immune deficient form of liberal violence. Accordingly, we ultimately concluded, along the lines of our reading of the political legacy of the early AIDS activism, that our attempt to bring forward this political alternative must be allied to befriending the bodily finitude of these individuals and foregrounding the quintessential marker of their finitude; namely, death.

And yet, while in the previous chapter we were able to argue this by relying for a large part on the historical example provided to us by the early AIDS activism, now we must take one step further. The question now becomes how can we concretely put this political potential of our bodily finitude to use in relation to the contemporary problems of the global governance of HIV/AIDS? How can we actually befriend the bodily finitude of people currently subjected to the immune deficient form of liberal violence and politically foreground their deaths? Thus, in other

words, although in principle our model of politicizing the contemporary global HIV/AIDS governance looks clear, we must now bring forward how the 'in-principle-politicization' of the world of global HIV/AIDS governance can be turned into an actual politicization of this world here and now. In short, we must establish how it is possible to take our model to the level of concrete problems of this governance and effectively apply our model to these problems in a way that can even change our political perception of them by pointing to tangible new possibilities for political subjectivization and action.

A suitable starting point for us in this chapter is Nancy's work on death and community. After all, this work of Nancy, which we already encountered in the previous chapter, elaborates on a general level the basic mechanism which makes our bodily finitude inherently political probably better than any other work. Nancy's work on death and community assumes as its starting point the fact that human beings cannot possess their own deaths as their object of knowledge. The human being can only be aware of its own mortality insofar as its fellow human beings die. This awareness calls the human being outside and beyond oneself. We can only encounter our own bodily finitude, that we are something more than we can ever know that we are, by the way of the other's finitude. The nature of this experience is fundamentally dispossessive and shared. It is something that cannot be anyone's private property or any collective property. This experience is precisely 'common': it joins together everything that is living solely on the basis of its finite character and without being capable of imposing any proper identitarian limits. In this way, this experience more forcefully than anything undermines all claims of immanence made by any political system, social order, governmental idea, etc. The totality of life cannot be captured under a full human command because we cannot appropriate or objectify death: "the unmasterable excess of finitude."[134] In fact, this finitude interrupts any such attempted captures by pointing to a being-in-common which revolves around the impossibility of this capture. From this perspective, our bodily finitude simply becomes the "communication of community itself that propagates itself or communicates its contagion *by its very interruption*."[135] Thus, in an indivisible manner, our bodily finitude simultaneously communicates our being-in-common and exposes any attempted worldly abduction of this common to its own meaninglessness, turning all these excessive exercises ultimately into senseless

[134] Nancy 1991, 13.

[135] Ibid., 60. Emphasis in original.

deployments of sovereignty, which by Carl Schmitt's influential and here very fitting definition: "emanates from *nothingness*."[136]

And yet, the fact that our bodily finitude cannot have a proper worldly status of its own, does not mean that our established modern political formations would not attempt to transfigure death by attaching transcendent public meaning to it. For example, as Nancy notes, our societies commonly deploy collective ways to reminisce their dead heroes and sacrificial victims in an attempt to turn these deaths into celebration of society's existence.[137] The empty center of social power is regularly concealed with glory, as also Agamben has lately maintained.[138] However, if we accept that our bodily finitude really cannot have *any* proper worldly status on its own, this must mean that beyond the ceremonial transfiguring of the sensations brought about by our bodily finitude, any type of worldly politics always transfigures our finitude to a certain extent. In fact, from this perspective it must be that even the most technocratic forms of modern biopolitics conduct this move.

The classic study of Elaine Scarry on the destructive and world making powers of torture and war gives us outlines on the basis of which we can accentuate this. Scarry has maintained that, due to the fact that pain and death do not have objectifiable significance of their own, it becomes possible to use pain and death to give certainty to all kinds of fictional ideas. Firstly, in relation to inflicting physical pain in torture, Scarry writes that physical pain "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned."[139] With this statement Scarry does not maintain that physical pain would not be true at all. On the contrary, she emphasizes that, although pain does not have any objectifiable significance of its own, pain is very much real when encountered. In fact, pain is so real that it transcends the world of words. From this break stems the usefulness of pain for various political authorities. If physical pain increases and decreases according to the demands of an authority, this makes the otherwise fictional authority to feel very real. In this way, the material factualness of the

[136] Schmitt 2005, 32. Emphasis added.

[137] Nancy 1991, 12–14.

[138] Agamben 2011.

[139] Scarry 1985, 4.

human body can be borrowed to lend a fictional construct "the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty'."[140]

Secondly, Scarry continues that same goes for killing in a state of war. The object of war is to kill people in order that the ideology on the behalf of which the killing is conducted can be inscribed into materiality. The goal of war is to out-injure the opponent, to create and reassert positions of authority on the basis of one's capability to cause mayhem and destruction. Thus, the logic is largely the same both in war and torture. The object of war is to kill people and torture "mimes the killing of people by inflicting pain, the sensory equivalent of death, substituting prolonged mock execution for execution."[141] What becomes manifest both in torture and war, then, is how especially in the crisis situations, when there exists some sort of lack of belief into the ways of doing things desired by authority, power typically turns into sensations caused by our bodily finitude. With the help of this unescapable realness, established powers attempts to transfer the status of 'reality' into the politically made up world. Thus, through this type of procedures it becomes possible to set in motion a process of perception that allows "invented ideas, beliefs, and made objects to be accepted […] as though they had the same ontological status as the naturally given world."[142]

Eric Santner has recently praised the above-mentioned work of Scarry and written how her discussion of the political significance of the extreme attributes of the body also points to the most central dimension of modern biopolitics, which nonetheless usually escapes the analyses of the modern governance of our lives.[143] According to Santner, this dimension goes largely unnoticed due to the fact that it cannot be directly addressed by modern governmental representations and abstractions. In this way, Santner expands Scarry's argument and maintains that Scarry's work actually refers to the 'leftover part' of our bodily existence that *always* conditions the governance of our lives, even when this governance does not conduct any exceptional measures. Naming this part 'flesh', Santner writes that this is a part which cannot be directly incorporated into the conceptualizations of our bodies because this part lies between the materiality of our lives and this very same

[140] Ibid., 14.

[141] Ibid., 61.

[142] Ibid., 125.

[143] Santner 2011, xv–xvii.

materiality as it is presented to us within the space of representation made possible by the symbolic order of language. And yet, this part cannot be excluded or removed from human life. Consequently, Santner emphasizes how this supplementary part is actually "the very 'stuff' that binds subjects to that space of representation."[144] Recalling Agamben's perspective on the inclusive exclusion of bare life, Santner writes that it is the bareness of this part that people encounter if they do not take a governmentally created subject position. Therefore, Santner maintains that this is a part that is constantly generated and exploited by the modern biopolitical governance; yet, in manner which cannot be recognized by this governance insofar as it wants to maintain the illusion of its quasi-immanence. After all, this part fundamentally points to "its own ultimate groundlessness – its lack of an anchoring point in the real."[145]

But if the experience of our absolute being-in-common can be especially attained by befriending our bodily finitude and foregrounding death, and thus by leaving behind the world in which our finitude is only present as an object of inclusive exclusive transfiguration, how do we get beyond the negative view after all that affirmative-biopolitical praxis can only be spontaneous finitude valorizing collective organization which will disintegrate fast, as it is naturally impossible to maintain this 'outer-worldly' organization in the world for very long? Is there really no way available for us how we could bring our bodily finitude affirmatively *into the world*? It seems that by asking whether we are able to do this is or not, we are actually posing a question whether we can indicate a worldly way of addressing our bodily finitude that does not inclusive exclusively relegate the non-worldliness of this finitude as subordinate or secondary in relation to its transfiguration. Thus, from this perspective it seems that the only way we can actually bring our bodily finitude into the world affirmatively, and not just philosophically grasp the non-worldly nature of this finitude, is to transfigure this finitude in a way that nevertheless simultaneously interrupts this act of transfiguration.

Given the heterogeneity of different works touching the topic of our bodily finitude which we have thus far scrutinized, it is rather surprising that regarding the above questions all of these works point to the same direction; namely, to the direction of art. In fact, in the previous chapter we already saw in relation to

[144] Ibid., 4.

[145] Ibid., xxi.

Esposito's praising of Deleuze's reading of Dickens' novel *Our Mutual Friend*, a worldly way of addressing our bodily finitude which does not inclusive exclusively transfigure this finitude but interrupts this transfiguring while nevertheless providing us a worldly representation of this finitude. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the death of the disreputable man is portrayed not by attaching to this death a transcendental meaning. Instead, it is portrayed by observing how the worldly identitarian definitions concerning this man crumble when his death is getting closer and closer. In this way, *Our Mutual Friend* provides us a worldly way of addressing death that remains faithful to the dispossessive and shared nature of our bodily finitude. By reading *Our Mutual Friend* in this manner, we can find from it a worldly way of bringing our finitude into the world which disturbs the worldly abductions of finitude because the novel simply presents the human finitude as something that exists before and beyond any identitarian definitions attached to our finitude, while nevertheless resisting the temptation to fix human finitude into anything else except to the crumbling of these very same identitarian definitions. As a result, *Our Mutual Friend* can be read as a worldly communication of the reciprocal immanent relation that runs between life and our worldly being. From this perspective, as we elaborated in the previous chapter, the novel alludes to the norm of life that calls into question all human attempts to quasi-immanently capture, sacrifice, dominate or hierarchize life.

While not going as far as alluding to the norm of life, Nancy's work nonetheless again nicely generalizes the above reading. In relation to his discussion of the political potential of death, Nancy has stated that literature is an important medium in relation to our finitude in a sense that it "does not reveal a completed reality, nor reality of completion."[146] By being explicitly only writing, literature has no definitive means to create reality. Literature cannot carve itself into materiality and thus literary works are open to infinite re-writings and new interpretations. Consequently, Nancy writes that it can be said that literature "does not reveal, in a general way, *some thing* – it reveals rather the unrevealable: namely, that it is itself […] a work."[147] In this way, Nancy continues that literature is able to give voice to our being-in-common without really enunciating it. By bearing a close relationship to the worldly sense making, explication and transfiguration of our bodily finitude insofar as these acts are also to a large part linguistic, literature brings forth "a voice

[146] Nancy 1991, 63.

[147] Ibid., 63. Emphasis in original.

of community articulated in the interruption."[148] Through its inability to impose a final meaning to our finitude with words and sentences, literature can communicate our exposure to the unmasterable excess of our finitude, literature can emphasize that there simply does not exist words or sentences which could make this excess anyone's property.

As we already mentioned, however, when we want emphasize the importance of studying artworks in relation to the theme of the body, we do not have to only rely on Deleuze, Esposito or Nancy but we can turn to virtually any work we have referred so far while discussing these topics. For example, because of the ability of literature to allude beyond itself, Santner has emphasized the importance of studying literature next to modern biopolitics. According to Santner, modern literature, and modern arts in general, testify that especially against the dogma of the French Revolution, the 'people' just cannot be unproblematically put in the place of the king as the bearer of sovereignty. Santner writes that this is a common false belief which leads to the masking of the real basis of the modern biopolitical authority: precisely the 'leftover' part of our bodily existence that cannot be directly addressed by the modern conceptualizations of our bodies. Yet, Santner maintains that this part is nevertheless addressable through the works of many modern artists. Modern artworks frequently bring this part in front of our eyes by trying to represent and talk about things that cannot be explicitly seen or discussed within the limits of modern rationality. In this way, these works almost in a paradoxical fashion revolve around the absence that is nevertheless present within our biopolitical modernity. Although Santner's own analyses of this leftover part concentrate almost exclusively on modern literature, this claim is best clarified through his discussion of Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Death of Marat*, which according to Santner's own words serves "as a kind of allegory for my project as a whole."[149]

Santner relies on the art historian T. J. Clark's writings on the painting in question. This painting of David's was released into the public realm in the year 1793 and is according to Clark a milestone in the history of modern art. Jean-Paul Marat, of course, was a murdered French revolutionary leader – a martyred hero of the revolution for some, a villain for others. Thus, David's picturing of Marat was self-

[148] Ibid., 62.

[149] Santner 2011, 89.

evidently a political matter. The painting was about turning the political truths of the revolution into flesh. This was, however, an impossible task. The direct conversion of revolution's politics into painting was not anymore possible under the revolutionary and postrevolutionary conditions unlike in the earlier contexts of the political theology of kingship when the legitimate representation of politics and the political persona of the king were undividable. David could not make Marat to embody revolution because there was no agreement what the revolution was, and whether Marat was indeed its hero or crook. In this way, the painting had to attempt to picture disagreement and contingency which, however, put under new type of pressure the selected apparatus of representation and eventually made the artwork in question an inaugural modernist painting. As the painted body of Marat was no figure of the king, it could not represent the 'people' in the same manner as the painted body of the king really represented all the subjects of the king's realm. After the revolution, the people were not anymore people due to their shared subjection to the king but they were the people solely because they declared themselves to be the people in all their difference. Thus, understandably *The Death of Marat* could not be a traditional portrait of the sovereign. Instead, the painting features a dying Marat at the bottom half of the painting while the upper part of the frame is just largely dark empty surface. According to Santner, David's painting illuminates how the representation of the revolutionary and postrevolutionary people is as much about absence than it is about presence. The modern people cannot be represented yet it is possible to give this absence a presence through artistic means.[150]

In addition to Santner, also Scarry underlines the importance of studying art along these same lines. Scarry cites Virginia Woolf's essay *On Being Ill* where Woolf ponders how strange it is that the English language which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear has no words for the headache: "The merest schoolgirl when she falls in love has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her, but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry."[151] And yet, this does not mean that artistic expression could not tell us anything about pain. Instead, Scarry writes that it is in fact highly important to note how rarely one comes across a play, film or novel which is not just incidentally but centrally and uninterruptedly about bodily pain. Moreover, Scarry continues that it is even more noteworthy that in those rare occasions when physical pain actually

[150] Ibid., 89–94.

[151] Woolf 1967 cit. Scarry 1985, 4.

makes an appearance it cannot be overlooked how even the greatest of writers simply shout at pain or resort to name-calling.[152] We have here then again a presence of an absence in art – something due to which Scarry has repeatedly turned to artistic representations when she has wanted to illuminate the difficult relation that runs between our language and the materiality of our lives.[153]

This view that the significance of art revolves around its indirect ability to refer to the not fully masterable aspects of our lives by pointing to the limitations of our representations, gets nicely philosophically clarified in Henry's work on art. Henry, whose insightful philosophy of life we touched upon in the previous chapter, has emphasized especially in his work on Wassily Kandinsky how art gives us access to the shared reality of our lives by exposing us to experiences and sensations brought about by the artistic self-expression which nonetheless cannot ever be completely captured within the limits of the created artwork. Instead, as Henry elaborates in relation to Kandinsky's thoughts on abstract painting, the selected methods and means of this artistic self-expression are always more or less contingent and subjectivist. Therefore, the expressive dimension of art which touches us cannot lie primarily in the 'art object' but in that which exceeds this object – in that expressive desire which forces an artist to pursue the creation of the artwork without ever being able to completely 'finish' it or get it absolutely 'right'. In this way, Henry maintains that when an artwork resonates with us it can indeed show us life in its absolute immanence. Artworks can show us life in its absolute immanence not through a straightforward objectification of life but by increasing our certainty that there exists a 'vibration' of life that exceeds our knowledge of it. For Henry, art is life's worldly auto-affection. Through art life can experience itself more strongly in the world. Henry continues that this is true in relation to *all* art even if in some forms of art this truth is more concealed by objectivist representations than in certain other forms of art, such as abstract painting or music.[154]

Finally, we should bring forward how art actually plays a significant role even in Roach's book on affirmative biopolitics and HIV/AIDS, which we in the previous chapter praised for its pioneering spirit, even if we also criticized the work for its eventual excessive radicalism. Despite this criticisms, it is noteworthy how one of

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[152] Scarry 1985, 10–11.

[153] Scarry 1985; Scarry 1988; Scarry 1994; Scarry 1999.

[154] Henry 2009.

the chapters of Roach's book is dedicated to the late AIDS activist and artist David Wojnarowicz whose art, according to Roach, very uniquely articulates the sense of an affective excess that provokes us to recognize the common-ness of our being. In this way, despite Roach's hesitancy over the possibility whether the excessive affections of our lives can at all be properly translated into traditional worldly forms of politics, Roach nonetheless maintains that Wojnarowicz's art is actually able to give some sort of worldly voice to the affective excess on which the early non-identitarian AIDS activism was built upon. Roach begins his account of the uniqueness of Wojnarowicz's art by concentrating on the entries of Wojnarowicz's diaries from the mid- to late-1980s in which the artist postcoitally reflects upon his random and anonymous sexual encounters and tries to express the shared sensations produced in these encounters of identity-less bodies. Roach emphasizes the rawness of Wojnarowicz's language and the lack of grammatical structure in his autobiographical writings: the manic and surrealistic character of the prose which apparently the author himself deemed a failure.[155] Nevertheless, Roach maintains that it is precisely in relation to Wojnarowicz's inability to communicate his anonymous carnal sensations in a manner which would have satisfied him that we detect an extra-linguistic form of communication arising from these writings. It is in relation to this inability that Roach thinks that what Wojnarowicz himself calls 'the living sense of desire' truly comes to life. According to Roach, this inability points to "a hunch, a sneaking suspicion, that a self other than ego exists and that a community other than one founded on identity and property is possible."[156]

After concentrating on these earlier entries of Wojnarowicz's diaries, Roach continues by turning his attention to the more explicitly political entries of these diaries which are written more close to Wojnarowicz's death to AIDS-related complications in 1992. Roach thinks that these later entries of Wojnarowicz communicate the same inability of self-expression than the unsuccessful descriptions of his sensation acquired through anynomous sex encounters. This time, however, the manic and surrealist prose of Wojnarowicz targets the politicians, lawmakers, religious leaders and health care officials who continue to demonize the people living with AIDS while Wojnarowicz's own condition is getting worse. This time Wojnarowicz's writing is full of nihilistic rage and murderous desire which derives its power from the nearness of his own death and his witnessing of

[155] Roach 2012, 128.

[156] Ibid., 133.

the countless deaths of his fellow sufferers. According to Roach, Wojnarowicz's rage is directed towards all those bigots and bureaucrats who attempt to harness the sense of the common-ness which Wojnarowicz feels through his abandonment to the radically shared finitude. In this way, Roach thinks that in the end Wojnarowicz's writing circumvents a simple reactive nihilism. Roach concludes that Wojnarowicz's writing brings forward and gives life to the monstrous figure already sketched in Wojnarowicz's painting from the year 1984 entitled *A Painting to Replace the British Monument in Buenos Aires*. The subject of this painting the 'thirty-seven-foot-tall one-thousand-one-hundred-and seventy-two-pound man', which forges the connections between nihilism and the capture of the common in imperialism and global capitalism, is again here in Wojnarowicz late writings on HIV/AIDS threatening to burst into all-destructive killing spree but is nonetheless held together by the recognition of the common-ness brought about by the imminent death. In this way, Roach writes, by obviously leaning heavily onto his view of AIDS activism in general, that through "locating a life giving force in an unsharable death, Wojnarowicz activates the politics he senses in the erotic."[157] His writings "are nothing if not manifestos of the political potency of befriending finitude in both sex act and activism."[158]

These works which we have reviewed above are self-evidently different in relation to each other but all of these works nevertheless agree that our bodily finitude, or the absolute immanence of life in general, can make an affirmative worldly appearance through art. And yet, while this undoubtedly points to the fact that, if we want to use the political potential of bodily finitude affirmatively in relation to the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS, we also must turn to art, it still remains unclear how we can actually do this? With what kind of art we can affirmatively befriend the bodily finitude in relation to the contemporary immune deficient form of HIV/AIDS-related violence? If we look at the above-mentioned works alone it seems that any type of art would do in principle. Nonetheless, in practice it remains hard to understand what listening to music or looking at abstract paintings could offer us here. Therefore, we clearly need some sort of criteria through which we can make distinctions between different forms of art in order to be able to choose artworks that fit our purposes. Moreover, and intertwined to the choice of the right artworks, we also need to know what is the

[157] Ibid., 137.

[158] Ibid., 147.

relation of artworks to the concrete governmental world of HIV/AIDS? Even if artworks can in principle bring our bodily finitude affirmatively into the world, and thus communicate life in its absolute immanence, how far does this communication really take us in relation to our attempt to concretize our model of politicization in this context? What is the effect that artworks actually have when it comes to the concrete governmental world of HIV/AIDS? How should we understand the relationship between art and actual affirmative-biopolitical subjectivization and action?

## 3.2 The Biopolitics of the Novel

We can begin our search of answers to the questions presented at the end of the previous section by noting that the idea of using art in relation to studying the difficult situation of the globally marginalized people affected by HIV/AIDS is not completely new. So far, however, this has been only done quite superficially and actually in a manner that tells us how we should *not* attempt to use art if we want to bring forward through art something that we could consider to have affirmative-biopolitical significance. The most notable example in this negative sense is João Biehl's otherwise excellent study of the politics of HIV/AIDS in Brazil. In his study, Biehl teamed up with an artist and freelance photographer Torben Eskerod whose photographs of the Brazil's marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers Biehl included in his study "where words and numbers fell short."[159] In other words, the photographs of this population were straightforwardly included in Biehl's book "in order to do justice to the singularity of its many lives."[160] Yet, given the politics of representation that always seems to follow photography – something that has been lately also brought forward in relation to HIV/AIDS photography picturing the globally marginalized[161] – we can immediately wonder what kind of justice can be done to singularity through straightforward use of photography? In fact, this inconsistency eventually even surfaced in Biehl's own writing, as he came to write in the end of his study, how the photography in question "captures the singularity of the lives that

[159] Biehl 2007, 5.

[160] Ibid., 16.

[161] Bleiker & Kay 2007.

compose the book."[162] As surely if something defines singularity, it is that singularity cannot be *captured* into images that can be, for example, copied or reprinted.

And yet, this does not mean that a responsive reader of Biehl's work cannot acquire a sense of singularity of the lives depicted or that photographs would be a completely wrong medium for the task. If we read Biehl's work along those lines that we just elaborated in the previous section, it rather seems that Biehl's work can give a responsive reader a sense of singularity of the lives depicted – yet, only indirectly. As Biehl's work features two heterogeneous accounts of these lives, which through their interplay produce an estrangement from the representations deployed – from the 'words and numbers' and photography alike – the responsive reader can understand that there exists singularity in these marginalized lives that is alluded to but not captured by Biehl's work. After all, the level of detail in a photograph is ungraspable though 'words and numbers' but it is not that this printed photograph on a piece of white paper is identical with life either.

The contradictory conceptualization of photography in Biehl's work then well highlights that while artistic representations can help us to bring forward life's not fully masterable character, we cannot treat art straightforwardly as revolutionary other in relation to the governmental use of 'words and numbers'. As Jacques Rancière has influentially and consistently throughout his works emphasized, art is as much about compositions, movements and organizations of words, bodies, colors and sounds as the concrete governance of our lives is. Accordingly, for Rancière, the political significance of art lies solely in the fact that while intertwining with governance, art can inside artistic modernity break the relation of necessity between the determined form and determined content because art is practiced autonomously in modernity unlike during the pre-modern eras. Modern people are thus treated by Rancière as privileged in a sense that artistic modernity is able to break the 'rules' of the society which make certain expressions automatically go together with certain kind of material practices and consequences. The modern artistic representations can produce feelings of dissociation, estrangement and alienation from the prevalent distribution of the sensible by pointing to the equal aesthetic worthiness of different systems of representation. In this way, modern artistic representations can even aid us to problematize the perceived inevitability, sensibility and legitimacy of the social order. And yet, this does not alter the fact

[162] Biehl 2007, 407.

that art does this not on the basis of its difference from governance but on the basis of its resting on the same foundation than the concrete governance which also needs to affect our sense perception in order to properly function.[163]

While Rancière does not explicitly address governance, art or politics from the perspective of biopolitics his ideas of artistic modernity are useful to us. Later on we will illuminate the nuances of these ideas better, but already now Rancière's argument that it is nearness between art and governance which makes art political, helps us to proceed. This argument gives us criteria to start with when we want to think how we should approach and make distinctions between different forms of art, given our aspiration of politically bringing the immanence of life in contact with the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS with the help of art. From this perspective, the first question to ask becomes what kind of art, while being able to bring affirmatively the unmasterable character of life into the world, nevertheless most thoroughly touches the prevalent way of doing things within the concrete governmental world of HIV/AIDS? In general, what form of art overlaps with the way how our lives have at present become biopolitically so intertwined with the governmental use of words and numbers?

Although at present we have come accustomed to seeing references to virtually all forms of art in biopolitical texts, there seems to be one form of art that stands over others when it comes to viewing these texts from the perspective of the previous questions; namely, literature. Across very different texts which can still be associated with biopolitics, literary works have frequently provided passages and references through which the mentalities driving the biopolitical abduction of life in the modern times have been illustrated and also flights from these mentalities have been imagined. It was already Foucault who did not only spend considerable time early in his career studying literature in relation to madness, epistemes and discourses but also in his explicitly biopolitical writings choose to refer to authors like Marquis de Sade and D. H. Lawrence.[164] Later on, in the works of other seminal theorists, such as Hardt and Negri, Agamben and Deleuze, literature has also played an important role. For example, one single literary figure has made an appearance in the works of all these lastly mentioned theorists; namely, Herman Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener, whose phrase 'I prefer not to' has been debated over its

[163] See e.g. Rancière 2006; Rancière 2010; Rancière 2013.

[164] See e.g. Foucault 1998, 135–159.

subversive possibilities.[165] Naturally, however, it has not been only Melville's work that has gotten attention by Hardt and Negri, Agamben or Deleuze. As we have already seen to a certain extent, references to writers such as Dickens, Kafka and Proust have also been a common feature in their works. Deleuze even, especially in reference to the two last-mentioned literary authors, came to passingly define literature as something seemingly very relevant for affirmative-biopolitical theorizing: "a passage of life within language that constitutes Ideas."[166]

In the even more recent theories of biopolitics literature has been persistently present in a similar fashion too. In addition to praising Deleuze's reading of *Our Mutual Friend*, Esposito's immunitary theory of biopolitics mentions, for instance, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Esposito writes that especially these works well capture the circuit of modern immunitary crisis: more the protagonist wants to free oneself from degeneration, more the protagonist ends up pushing oneself towards the destiny of expulsion and annihilation.[167] In a similar spirit, Sloterdijk has also turned to literature and read the works of Hermann Broch as highlighting the modern isolation of people to separate protective 'atmospheres'. According to Sloterdijk, Broch's late modern writing well captures the spirit of the late modern politics because Broch's plots do not anymore "take place between people, but between respiratory economies and their respective residents."[168] Furthermore, also Jacques Derrida in his recently translated two-volume lecture series *The Beast and the Sovereign* makes this same move. When Derrida begins to discuss biopolitics, it is Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* to which his discussion very soon turns.[169]

And yet, although widely used by seminal theorists whose works can be associated with biopolitics, the references to literature do not have an established role in the works of these authors. By reading the works of these above-mentioned theorists, we cannot find a general theory or systematic formula on how to use

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[165] Deleuze 1998, 69–90; Agamben 1999a, 243–271; Hardt & Negri 2000, 203–204.

[166] Deleuze 1998, 5.

[167] Esposito 2008, 124–126.

[168] Sloterdijk 2009, 99.

[169] Derrida 2009; Derrida 2011.

literary works in relation to biopolitics and no one of the above-mentioned theorists have even pursued such a thing. This does not, however, necessarily mean that the frequent use of literary references by these theorists in relation to biopolitics is a pure coincidence. On the contrary, the fact that these theorists have not elaborated the connection of literature and modern biopolitics is most likely due to the fact that no one of these theorists has paid attention to the history of literature insofar as this history relates to modern biopolitics. Due to this, what has been left without attention is the natural point of connection which modern biopolitics and literature actually share. As has been emphasized by Rancière, literature as a specific form of writing is not terribly old. Instead, we have practiced literature in this way that we do today only for a few centuries. In fact, the birth of literature coincides with the dawn of modernity, at least insofar as this somewhat ambiguous term refers to the prosaic literary works written after the rise of the so-called novel form. Along these lines, Rancière maintains that whatever political potential literature has it is clear that this political potential will stem from this connection which literature bears to this particular historical transformation.[170]

In this spirit, yet writing explicitly in the context of biopolitics, a literary theorist Arne De Boever has recently emphasized how the rise of the modern novel coincides with the rise of the modern biopolitical governmentalization of life.[171] According to De Boever, together with the 18th century rise of the modern novel, everyday life of particular individuals, in contrast to mythic, legendary or divine life, works its way into the center of literary works for the first time in history. For the first time, what becomes central in the writing of a literary work is the organizing of the content and the form of the story in such a way that it transmits not legends or myths but authentic type of accounts of individual experiences. As this is synchronous with the similar need to capture the processes of mundane life within the political realm, De Boever thinks that the modern novel form of writing can be seen as a literary expression of the same mentality that gave rise to governmentality and biopolitics, as Foucault described these in his lectures.[172] De Boever writes that

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[170] See e.g. Rancière 2011a; Rancière, 2011b.

[171] De Boever 2012; De Boever 2013.

[172] Foucault 2003; Foucault 2007; Foucault 2008.

> [t]o govern the lives of ordinary people – to program their freedom of movement, regulate their health and reproduction, foster their life until the point of death – is both the project of governmentality and in certain sense that of the novel.[173]

And yet, while literature can be seen to be a part of the same modern mentality that gave also rise to modern biopolitics, the modern novel is a problematic expression of this mentality. As has been well established by different theories of modern literary work, the novel is an inadequate form of representation in relation to its yearn to present us life in its completeness because writing does not ever fully match with life – an argument which also we have already touched upon in our work. Consequently, there is no need for us to extensively repeat this argument here but we should nevertheless dwell on this issue still for a while as this dwelling helps us to better explicate the ambivalent character of modern literature. For example, while summarizing the different ways of theorizing the incommensurable relation between the writing contained by the novel and the particular lives that the novel tries to depict, Timothy Bewes has put it nicely and plainly that the novel is simply "a form defined by its failure."[174] On the one hand, the novel contains similar type of storytelling than which humanity has always practiced: it is striven by the human passion to discover meaning and establish an order of things, as Roland Barthes has maintained.[175] And yet, on the other hand, this modern form of storytelling is different. It is a different in a sense that it cannot anymore create the same sense of internal coherence which, for instance, the legends and myths still could. Due to the complexity of thoughts, feelings, moods and desires, which the authentic representation of modern living must take into account, the characters of modern novels are simply not as suitable to be heroes of stories as protagonists of the legends and myths were. Unlike legends and myths, the modern novel is actually characterized by what Santner calls 'twitchings' and 'fluctuations' of narrated life as the author tries to force the life of the characters to fit into a coherent whole.[176]

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[173] De Boever 2013, 45.

[174] Bewes 2010, 44.

[175] Barthes 1975.

[176] Santner 2006; Santner 2011.

In a very illustrative manner, Georg Lukács understood all this already in the beginning of the 20th century. Written during the inaugural years of the First World War, Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel* emphasized how the novel is the most representative art form of modernity because the spirit of the novel coincides with the spirit of modernity in general. Lukács contrasted the modern novel form of writing especially to the Greek epic and the Christian writings of the Middle Ages and wrote that while in these earlier narrative forms everything extensively made sense, all the pictured empirical phenomena had an inherent transcendent meaning in them, in the modern novel this type of totality of meaning which is immanent to life is no longer present. And yet, it is not that the desire for the totality has been lost. On the contrary, as within modernity in general, in the modern novel the quest for finding the meaning of life becomes coextensive with the perceived particular reality of life. Although totality has been lost, the hero of the modern novel does not give up. The hero of the modern novel still tries to restore the totality of meaning by turning into oneself. This hero attempts to recognize one's true self by getting entangled in adventures that test and challenge the protagonist in order that the essence of life could still be properly recognized and articulated. In this way, as Lukács has very well put it, the novel is "the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality."[177]

De Boever makes only a passing reference to Lukács in his work, even though his biopolitical reading of the novel shares with Lukacs the stance that modern literature enables us to view our modern ideas of life through a critical lens due to the similarity of the novel and the spirit of modernity in general. Thus, unlike the apparatuses which really do promote and drive the modern biopolitical abduction of life, the modern novel is an apparatus which allows for a reflective attitude to be taken towards this mentality from which the novel and the modern biopolitical project both originate. Therefore, De Boever maintains that when read in a right way the novel does not contribute to the modern aspiration to capture all life within the limits of modern ideas but the novel also provides a critique of this aspiration insofar as the novel surfaces the impossibility to accomplish the total unity between the modern discourses and life. De Boever writes that in this latter sense, the novel even holds some concrete political potential. The novel can provide us a literary retreat from the modern biopolitical project; a retreat which can even "begin to

[177] Lukács 1971, 56.

infect the territory that surrounds it by injecting into it some degree of dehiscence, subversion, and crisis."[178]

In his two books on biopolitics and the novel, De Boever has illuminated this political potential of the novel by turning to certain contemporary literary authors whose works he has contrasted to the genre's classics and modern biopolitical project in general. For example, De Boever has read contemporary literary works written by authors such as J. M. Coetzee, Paul Auster, Yann Martel, Tom McCarthy and W.G. Sebald. As those familiar to contemporary literature can see, De Boever has concentrated especially on authors whose works are characteristically metafictional. This does not, however, mean that De Boever would associate the political potential of the novel only with metafiction. On the contrary, in his work De Boever constantly draws intimate connections between these contemporary metafictional novels and much older literary works, which he thinks all display the same political potential. For instance, De Boever has read both Martel's *Life of Pi* and Coetzee's *Slow Man* as rewritings of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which was already published in the year 1719 and which is often declared to be the first English-language novel. According to De Boever, both *Life of Pi* and *Slow Man* are similar survival tales than *Robinson Crusoe*. They both are, as De Boever puts it while reading *Life of Pi*, repetitions of "Defoe's theologico-political tale for the twenty-first century."[179]

We can clarify this claim through De Boever's discussions of these two novels. Plot-wise, Martel's *Life of Pi* tells a story about a boy named Pi who must attempt to recall and apply his father's zoological principles as he struggles to survive at the sea with his father's zoo animals after the ship that was supposed to take him from India to Canada sinks. The plot of *Slow Man* concentrates around a man who, after losing a leg in a bike accident, is eager to refuse all the help offered by the Australian welfare system because he rather prefers to take care of himself. In this way, despite their differences on the surface, these two stories are both essentially struggles over the maintenance of one's sovereignty after the prerequisites of doing so have largely been lost, much like in the case of the castaway Crusoe, who struggled to impose his own order over the premodern chaos which was prevalent in that remote Caribbean island where he shipwrecked. Martel's and Coetzee's stories,

[178] De Boever 2012, 143.

[179] Ibid., 38.

however, are different from Defoe's in a sense that these two stories explicitly bring forward the absurdity of this task and it is this explicitness which makes these two contemporary novels more suitable for De Boever to concentrate on than Defoe's classic.

Both Martel's and Coetzee's stories bring forward this absurdity by making a metafictional twist. In the case of the former, this happens when the narrator's original survival tale with animals is eventually complemented by another version of the happenings which the narrator tells to investigators who do not believe his original animal story. In this another version there are no animals who survive the ships' sinking with Pi but a group of co-passengers who just engage in an animal-like behavior in order to survive. And yet, all along Pi insists that the first version of the story is true and it also ends up in the official report. As De Boever notes, however, this does not relieve the metafictional tension of the novel. Due to Martel's decision to include these two versions of the same story into his book, the reader is left puzzled whether to believe in the first version, the second one or neither one of these versions. As the reader can naturally only ponder this on the basis of Martel's text, there are no means available for the reader to get past this dilemma. Even if the reader would like to believe in the first version, as Pi himself insists we should, this still leaves a doubt that this story which praises the techniques of modern zoo keeping and Pi's sovereign-like ability to successfully deploy them is actually founded on repression of his traumatic memories, the story is founded on an illusory harmony of order and meaning behind which something else than Pi's 'sovereignty' is actually running the show.[180]

In the case of *Slow Man*, similar metafictional twist happens when the disabled man is visited by a woman who turns out to be the author out of whose imagination the man's story has sprung. From this point on, the question whether life with one leg can still be fully lived is turned into question whether this kind of pondering is truly meaningful at all, whether this type of dressing up of life which inevitably turns one's life into character-life is truly life at all? De Boever points out that the answer which Coetzee's *Slow Man* and also Coetzee's many other novels leaves us is 'no'. Novel writing and life are in the end only allegorically connected, they are connected by the way in which the character life made up by the novelist always replaces the

[180] Ibid., 37–38.

life which exists before and beyond the narrative.[181] De Boever concludes, then, that these thoughts which Martel's and Coetzee's novels stimulate are disturbing for the novel as a genre but even more so for the modern biopolitical project. After all, in relation to the novel as a genre these thoughts only point to the impossibility of us ever being able to fully undermine the transcendent textual authority of the author. From this perspective, every novel can be read in way that questions the novel's original ethos of authentically representing the life of modern individuals. As De Boever emphasizes, even Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* can be from this perspective easily read in this way:

> Crusoe may have been the master of his island, but his life was still written by Defoe. In spite of all his attempts to attain sovereignty, his precious self-governance was still exposed to the whims and wants of Defoe.[182]

This disturbance nevertheless is only something minor because it actually guarantees literature's future possibility by assuring that new unique novels can always be written. As the project of the novel form of writing cannot ever be completed, it can in principle be continued infinitely.[183]

In relation to the actual modern biopolitical project, however, De Boever emphasizes that the failure of the novel is not supportive but it can even be subversive. Along the lines that are already somewhat familiar to us, De Boever maintains that the failure of the novel can be subversive due to the relationship of closeness which the novel and the modern biopolitical project share. Both modern novel and modern biopolitics try to establish a correspondence between human ideas and life but the novel in the end holds back. In this way, the novel eventually only represent the lives it seeks to authentically depict as secrets, even though these lives are spread on its pages. The novel can only point to life authentically through its failure to capture lives. Thus, by representing lives as secrets, the novel brings forward life as fundamentally unmasterable. The novel brings forward life as something which escapes the human ideas of life while nevertheless being nothing

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[181] De Boever 2013, 41–50.

[182] Ibid., 43.

[183] Ibid., 142.

else than this very same escaping.[184] De Boever continues in a way that especially resonates with the earlier thoughts of Rancière, that in relation to the actual modern biopolitical project, when the inability of the novel to put a final word on life is situated next to this novel's historical twin, the inability of the novel can make the ideas, identities, roles, categories and labels of life that are deployed within this project feel contingent or even irrelevant. As De Boever states, it is through its communication of this failure that modern literature realizes its place next to modern science and politics by "linking science and politics to the potential of that failure as well.[185]

And yet, De Boever does not pursue his argument much further from here anymore. In the end, De Boever is satisfied for his illumination of the novel as a kind of *pharmakon* in relation to the actual modern biopolitical project – as he puts it himself by explicitly borrowing this term from Derrida and Bernard Stiegler.[186] According to De Boever, the novel is in relation to concrete modern biopolitics simply something that cuts both ways. On the one hand, the novel is poisonous as it does contribute to the modern aspiration to capture all life within the limits of modern discourses; an aspiration that is in practice always bound to have negative and even thanatopolitical consequences if carried uninterrupted. On the other hand, the novel is curative precisely regarding this very same aspiration. Through its failure to put a final word on life, the novel testifies the impossibility of the modern biopolitical project to ever accomplish the uniformity between modern discourses and life. Through modern novel's recurring but perpetually hopeless attempt to accomplish the unity between writing and life, the modern novel can have a positive effect on concrete politics. De Boever writes that as a result of the novel's failure it can even make us "understand something about our scientific and political desires, and this understanding can inform whatever scientific and political realities we create."[187]

But what is then this 'something' that the novel can make us understand? What is this something, which according to De Boever, we can find not only from novels but also from other modern prosaic literary works that seek to capture life within

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[184] Ibid., 142.

[185] Ibid., 103.

[186] See e.g. Derrida 1981; Stiegler 2013.

[187] De Boever 2013, 103. Emphasis added.

the limits of a narrative? After all, as De Boever states, the biopolitical understanding of the novel extends well beyond the novel. The biopolitical understanding of the novel is related to all modern attempts to capture mundane life into a narrative. The novel is just an ideal type of such prosaic practice, and thus it is from the perspective of De Boever the most illuminating.[188] And yet, this does not remove the ambiguousness of De Boever's conclusion. Although historically literature and modern biopolitics are related, what is their actual point of contact through which the unmasterability of life communicated by literary works can not only be present in our contemporary biopolitical worlds but also make a difference in these worlds? This is something that De Boever's theory eventually leaves unclear. As a result, although De Boever builds a rather convincing case that we should turn to literary works when we want to bring the fundamental unmasterability of life within touching distance of concrete biopolitics, the question still remains how do we actually make the communication of this unmasterability and concrete politics touch? In a way that relates to the questions that we already presented in the previous section of this chapter, what is the route through which the literary communication of life in our worlds can become to bear an actual relation with concrete politics? How can this literary communication of life be connected with the appearance of concrete new possibilities for political subjectivization and action?

## 3.3 Aesthetic Subjects

We can begin this section by emphasizing the importance of answering to the questions which we presented at the end of the previous section. We can do this by showing how we risk easily slipping onto the wrong tracks on the basis of De Boever's theory, if these questions are not properly addressed. This due to the fact that there exists four different ways how the relationship of art and concrete politics is commonly conceptualized. Moreover, it is only along the lines of one of these ways that we are actually able to understand how it is possible to see literature in a concrete and systematic manner to affirm life's unique political potentiality in relation to the governance of our lives. Thus, in this section we will introduce these four different ways, and along the lines of our criticism and elaboration of these ways argue that in order that we can through literary works properly intervene into

[188] Ibid., 153–155.

the realm of the concrete governance of our lives it is necessary to refrain from exaggerating the direct subversive power of literature and understand the relation between concrete politics and literature correctly. In order that the literary communication of life's unmasterability in our worlds can point to anything tangibly political, we must understand how this can only happen by us remaining faithful to the aesthetic character of literature's politics; however, in a manner that recognizes how this aesthetic character nevertheless can be systematized.

Of course, anyone who has ever paid attention to the critical-minded studies which have attempted to elaborate the *straightforward* political effects of artworks has gotten accustomed to how these studies are always haunted by the conditional form. This is the case also in relation to De Boever's pharmacological theory of the novel. Insofar as De Boever flirts with this way of comprehending the political significance of art and tries to define the curative side of the novel as something which even possesses actual subversive power in relation to our modern scientific and political desires, De Boever's writing is full of conditional expressions. As a result, although it might seem at first that from this perspective the poisonous side of the novel is firmly haunted by the subversive side, it is actually the poisonous side of De Boever's theory which is revealed to be more unproblematical than the subversive side. After all, even if De Boever's reading of the novel rather directly points to the contingency of modern biopolitical power structures, this contingency is properly subversive only on the condition that the modern biopolitical governance is absolutely incapable to any flexibility, irony or change.

On a general level, and also specifically in relation to our work, we can safely say that this is not the case. Firstly, for instance, as has been extensively put forward by various empirical analyses which have illuminated the workings of modern biopolitical governmental rationalities in national and global contexts, especially liberal governing has been historically very good in remodeling itself in novel ways when it has faced new ideas or different crises.[189] Regarding this characteristic, some scholars have even emphasized that there does not exist a strict opposition between forms of rule and forms of resistance within liberal governance at all. Instead, as Andrew Barry has plainly put it, it is "in conjunction with specific political

[189] See e.g. Burchell et al. (eds.) 1991; Cruikshank 1999; Dean 1999; Lipschutz 2005; Miller & Rose 2008; de Larrinaga & Doucet (eds.) 2010; Neumann & Sending 2010; Walters 2012.

conflicts, scandals, accidents and other events that new forms of governmental practice often develop."[190]

Secondly, and despite whether we choose to believe in the above Barry's claim or not, we have already highlighted how particularly people in relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic are often governed by a recourse to the brute materiality of their bodies and not by any abstract ideology as such. Historically, HIV/AIDS sufferers have often felt how different political and governmental ideas, regardless how abstract or contingent they might feel, carry within them a materiality that cannot be escaped by simply thinking things in another way. It is precisely in this spirit that Achille Mbembe has criticized approaches which have attempted to subversively politicize the lives of the globally marginalized people by solely showing, for example, that their identities are invented, hybrid, fluid or negotiated. According to Mbembe, this is a form of political critique which sees everything "said once it has been shown that the subjects of action, subjected to power and law – colonized people, women, peasants, workers (in short, the dominated) – have a rich and complex consciousness."[191] Even though Mbembe does not explicitly mention in his critique the various works which have sought to do this denaturalizing of identities through literature, it goes without saying that Mbembe's criticism also applies to them. After all, especially the postcolonial studies, against which Mbembe primarily defines the relevance of his own work, has often been preoccupied with literary representations of postcolonial subjects when addressing the questions of identity and difference.[192]

But cannot literary works then provide us at least *explicit political visions* which we can strive for? By reading literary works, cannot we find in them insightful political ideas which we can begin to pursue in the real world, even if the full realizing of these ideas might be dependent on overcoming material obstacles which stand in the way of them? Although this idea might at first appear to avoid the problem of materialism, on a closer look it does not. As there must exist a concrete possibility that these ideas or visions can be actually realized, in order that these ideas or visions can be meaningful, it is necessary also from this perspective to presuppose that literary writing is able to somehow turn into a material

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[190] Barry 2004, 199.

[191] Mbembe 2001, 5–6.

[192] See e.g. Said 1978; Said 1993; Bhabha 1994; Darby 1998; Ashcroft et al. 2002; Bewes 2010.

expression of itself. Even in its sophisticated form, this perspective would have it that, although there must be a separation between literature and concrete politics in general, as without this separation literature would not have any special or privileged status, and thus no unique subversive power at all, there are times when literature overcomes this separation and produces new reality – or at least a concretely realizable vision of this reality. This is, of course, roughly the view of Deleuze in his *Essays Critical and Clinical*. In these essays, the works of literary writers such as Proust and Kafka are celebrated for their ability to literally metamorphose their writing into life. And yet, this can lead to only one conclusion. This conclusion is that, if these are the standards for politically significant writing, "among all those who make books with a literary intent [...] there are very few who can call themselves writers."[193]

Even though we have thus far been in agreement with Deleuze, regarding the above-mentioned conclusion we can make an exception. As Rancière has well elaborated, the logical consequence of Deleuze's previous conclusion is problematic not only in relation to Deleuze's own thought but also regarding the politics of art as such. Beyond the fact that by making the above conclusion Deleuze is introducing transcendence into immanence, which goes against the tendencies of Deleuzian philosophy in general, this introduction of transcendence into immanence also detrimentally blurs the politics inherent to art. Rancière writes that this is due to the fact that art's ability to communicate something indefinite beyond all the particular governmental distributions of the sensible is through this conclusion forced by Deleuze to become something straightforwardly concrete and meet with actual politics. In this way, the political nature of art in general, its ability to point to the contingency of all particular governmental distributions of the sensible, is lost. Because Deleuze associates the political potential of art exclusively with artistic virtuosity, it is not anymore art as such for him which holds political potential but it is rather certain literary geniuses who exclusively possess this potentiality. Therefore, as Rancière maintains, art's political potential is here in a dubious manner transferred from art in general to these geniuses and this also implies that political agency becomes associated with different 'geniuses' who appear to be able to master the language of life itself – Rancière even mentions here the Nazis.[194]

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[193] Deleuze 1998, 6.

[194] Rancière 2010, 169–183.

We can suitably further clarify this position of Rancière through his discussion of the conflicting criticism which the so-called realist writes of the 19th century, such as Gustave Flaubert or Honoré de Balzac, have drawn when their own time is compared to the 20th century leftist views. Rancière begins his account by highlighting how the reactionary critics of the 19th century accused both of the above-mentioned authors for their inability to really say anything at all. For these critics, what was the most difficult thing to accept was that these authors seemed to disregard any difference between high and low subject matters and hierarchy between foreground and background. Symptomatically, for these critics, these authors were literary writers of the 'new democratic times', they were writers whose works were full of democratic disorder as in these works anything and anyone could speak without respecting the old representational hierarchies. Rancière summarizes that this realist letter was to these critics a 'mute' and 'wandering' letter which spoke too much, to anybody and endowed the power of speaking to anyone at all. For these critics, this letter circulated in a socially harmful manner

> without any specific addressee and without a master to accompany it – in the form of those printed booklets that trail around just about everywhere, from reading rooms to open-air stalls, making their situations, characters and expressions freely available to anyone who feels like grapping hold of them.[195]

However, despite that the works of Flaubert and Balzac were embodiments of democratic disorder according to the reactionary critics, it was not that these writers ever wanted to be associated with democratic politics in their time. Balzac was of course a conservative Royalist and Flaubert, as Rancière tells us, equally despised both conservatives and democrats. Flaubert did not want to prove anything on any matter and was primarily interested solely in style as such. During his lifetime, Flaubert opposed all political commitments as he felt they would have stood in the way of practicing art only for art's sake. And yet, although this attitude of non-commitment was denounced by the reactionary critics of Flaubert's time, Rancière also emphasizes how almost a century later Jean-Paul Sartre criticized Flaubert for precisely this same reason but interestingly went completely the

[195] Rancière 2011b, 12–13.

opposite way than the reactionary critics who were Flaubert's contemporaries. In his well-known book on literature, Sartre accuses Flaubert for immobilizing language, removing words from their communicative and referential use, and thereby tearing the language and words away from anyone who would like to use them as tools for political debate and social struggle.[196] Thus, Rancière writes, how to Sartre Flaubert's prose is an epitome of aristocratic assault on democracy and not at all a 'mute' and 'wandering' democratic letter. For Sartre, Flaubert's writing served "the nihilist strategy of a bourgeoisie that had seen its death announced on the barricades of June 1848 in Paris and was seeking to ward off its fate by putting brakes on the historic forces it had unleashed."[197]

Rancière maintains, then, that these two completely opposite views concerning the character of Flaubert's prose highlight how there is no way around the fact that the politics which accompanies the modern arts in general has an unspecified character. According to Rancière, it is impossible to directly translate this politics of arts to the language of concrete politics, due to which the politics of modern arts has a tendency to put people who are the representatives of the already established political positions on the defensive – no matter which end of political spectrum these positions belong to. Rancière again emphasizes this by stating how in modernity when it becomes possible to practice art solely for art's sake, art explicitly breaks its direct relation to any external system of representation. Within artistic modernity the representations of our lives are simply not entwined by necessity with any such systems. Within artistic modernity there is no special sense of destination and meaning intertwined with the selected representations but the choice of the form, content and style of these representations is always more or less explicitly subjective and contingent, i.e. nothing in principle forces the modern literary writer to write in any particular way. Therefore, Rancière thinks that the political ethos of artistic modernity is fundamentally radically democratic as the artistic modernity does not, as such, privilege any specific representations over others. And yet, this also means that artistic modernity actually says very little about concrete politics. As Rancière writes in relation to the writings of Flaubert and Balzac, the political significance of the so-called realist novel is not at all based on the reproduction of facts in all their reality. Instead, the political power of the realist

[196] Sartre 1988, 112–119.

[197] Rancière 2011b, 8.

novel arises out of its showing of the world as something in which the sense and meaning of the world are always constructed with artificial prose of some sort.[198]

Accordingly, for Rancière, the political effect of literature or modern arts in general cannot be anything else than *aesthetic*. It is aesthetic insofar as this term refers to an experience which arises out of the interplay of different human faculties without this experience being something that can be reduced to any kind of sum of particular faculties. Aesthetic experience is not reducible to anything because it is an experience of something more than that which our faculties on their own or together grasp as such. Aesthetic experience is an experience of something that is felt when the capabilities, boundaries and functioning of our faculties are somehow blurred or disturbed. From this it follows that the politics that can be associated specifically with literature or art in general can only occur under the limits of this blurring or disturbing. As Rancière writes, the political effect of art occurs under the condition of

> an original disjunction, an original effect, which is the suspension of any direct relationship between cause and effect. The aesthetic effect is initially an effect of dis-identification. The aesthetic community is a community of dis-identified persons. As such, it is political because political subjectivation proceeds via a process of dis-identification. An emancipated proletarian is a dis-identified worker. But there is no measure enabling us to calculate the dis-identifying effect.[199]

Along these lines, Rancière maintains that what literature or art in general can offer in terms of concrete politics is solely "dissociation: a break in a relationship between sense and sense – between what is seen and what is thought, what is thought and what is felt."[200] As Rancière continues, there simply is no reason why

[198] Ibid., 14–15.

[199] Rancière 2009, 73.

[200] Ibid., 75.

> the sensory oddity produced by the clash of heterogeneous elements should bring about an understanding of the state of the world; and no reason either why understanding the state of the world should prompt a decision to change it. There is no straightforward road from the fact of looking at a spectacle to the fact of understanding the state of the world; no direct road from intellectual awareness to political action.[201]

And yet, although the above is largely true, there still exists a fourth way of conceptualizing the relationship between art and concrete politics which takes the above aesthetic view a bit further and even systematizes its political significance. Accordingly, beyond conceptualizing the relationship between art and concrete politics strictly in terms of direct intervention, straightforward visionary inspiration or coincidental overlapping, this fourth way is actually able to explain to us how modern literature's aesthetic communication of life as fundamentally unmasterable can be connected to the systematic appearance of concrete possibilities for political subjectivization and action. In particular, we can find this way of conceptualizing the relationship between art and politics from Michael Shapiro's recent work. In his recent work Shapiro has emphasized that the aesthetic alienation brought by artworks can systematically inform our political analyses, as soon as we study artworks from the perspective of the lives of those individuals who we find in different artistic genres. Shapiro calls such individuals 'aesthetic subjects' and maintains that these subjects introduce into our political analyses a possibility to not only critique the prevalent state of the world but also to simultaneously articulate, exemplify and bring into light how this state is thoroughly and radically democratically transformable, without nevertheless forcing the aesthetic dissociation to become anything other than itself.[202]

For Shapiro, the aesthetic subjects are thus avatars of our familiar worlds that "encourage hospitality towards ambiguous, protean and unsettled modes of selfhood and community."[203] The aesthetic subjects do not only aesthetically disrupt these worlds but through their disrupting of these worlds from the perspective of the aesthetic unconfinability of their lives also open up "spaces for new political

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[201] Ibid., 75.

[202] Shapiro 2013, 11–13.

[203] Shapiro 1999, 7. Shapiro also self-quotes this same passage in Shapiro 2013, xv.

thinking with empowering implications for new forms of subjectivization, for the welcoming of the new kinds of […] subjects into politically relevant space."[204] In this way, by being solely something more than is unambiguously captured in their representations, the aesthetic subjects both dissociate our thoughts from the authoritative ways of framing our lives and simultaneously also provide impulses for our political thinking in relation to our possibilities to challenge these authoritarian ways. Accordingly, for Shapiro, the vagueness of art is actually its virtue in relation to politics. As aesthetic subjects articulate their challenge not directly but as displacement from these authoritarian ways that frame the sense of our lives, the space opened up by these subjects for political thinking is actually larger than if these subjects would not be aesthetic. After all, although individual, the aesthetic subjects are not identitarian. Consequently, the space opened up by these subjects for political thinking is neither a space restricted by identitarian limits but this space has no clear limits at all. This space alludes to a non-identitarian political commonness that becomes in principle perceivable each time when the aesthetic subjects disturb the authoritarian tendencies of our worlds. As Shapiro puts this by using Rancièrian vocabulary while nevertheless giving a bit more concrete political weight to the aesthetic effect of art, the aesthetic subjects are "subjects whose experiences disfigure authoritative subject models and create space for an alternative community of sense."[205]

In this way, it is important to note here two things. Firstly, it is important to notice how by associating art's unique political significance with its ability to communicate the unconfinability of our lives and allude to non-identitarian political commonness, Shapiro's way of addressing artworks nicely resonates with the reasoning on the basis of which we have in our work already emphasized the importance of addressing the governance of life through art. Secondly, however, it is noteworthy how Shapiro's work also clarifies this reasoning. Shapiro's work brings forward how the very art-ness of artworks does not only as a matter of curiosity foreground our lives as unmasterable but how this foregrounding also has a systemic relevance in relation to concrete politics. By bringing aesthetic alienation onto the level of individual lives that dwell in artistically created worlds which have a familiar feel to us, artworks stimulate our political thinking in a way that enables us to view and politicize our concrete worlds from the perspective of a political outside that

[204] Shapiro 2013, 32.

[205] Ibid., 154. Quotation marks removed.

nevertheless lies inside these worlds; namely, from the perspective of the ambiguous, protean and unsettled political common-ness we are left with when individual lives inside these worlds become dissociated from their assigned roles and identities. Thus, by aesthetically disturbing our familiar worlds from the perspective of individual lives, aesthetic subjects do not only aesthetically alienate but also through this alienation leave us something on the basis of which a specific form of alternative political subjectivization and politics becomes conceivable. The aesthetic subjects leave us a sense of our individual and collective political existence that remains also in our concrete worlds when our capability to define this existence gets blurred.

In the previous manner, even if Shapiro explicitly hardly uses vocabulary that can be termed affirmative-biopolitical, his conceptualization of the relationship between art and concrete politics very naturally opens up into a direction which makes it possible for us to abduct and integrate this dimension of his thought as a part of our framework. In fact, in a manner that paves the way for the next section of our work, we can note that insofar as Shapiro's work touches literature, this feeling of naturalness does not even only stem from the resonances of Shapiro's thinking with our earlier theoretical discussions. Instead, this feeling of naturalness also stems from the way how Shapiro in particular discusses Gary Shteyngart's novel *Super Sad True Love Story*.

In a manner which strongly speaks to our work, Shapiro writes how Lenny Abramov, a principal character in Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, is a paradigmatic aesthetic subject. Shapiro tells us how Lenny, an employee of 'life extension' enterprise in a futuristic world, decides in the very beginning of this novel that he will never going to die. In the case of Lenny this is somewhat reasonable decision as the company Lenny works for is developing an infinite life extension services to those who are fit enough to qualify and who can afford them. By then briefly contrasting the antics of Lenny especially against Foucault's genealogy of biopolitics and the liberal governmentalization of life and death, Shapiro thinks that Shteyngart's novel registers a new phase in this development, one in which the neo-liberal economic privatization of life and death is close to its true completion. And yet, as in the novel Lenny's immortality and the death-avoiding life extension services both ultimately fail to materialize, Shapiro writes how Lenny in this story is ultimately not only a conceptual persona who is a product of the historically stratified power-knowledge practices of this futuristic world, which nevertheless looks a lot like the present, but also an aesthetic subject whose desires, thoughts

and feelings do not completely fit with his constructed personhood. In this way, Shapiro emphasizes how Lenny's trajectory through this novel can be read in a way that not only maps the ongoing development of neo-liberalism but also provides us a needed distance from this development so that our possibility to counter-actualize neo-liberal development is accentuated. Read from this perspective, Shapiro thinks that Shteyngart's novel mimics yet simultaneously opens up neo-liberalism for a possibility of politics that derives its inspiration from the existence of something else altogether than the novel's neoliberal world.[206]

And yet, beyond this brief analysis of Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, the relation of literature, bodily finitude and biopolitics has not really been explicated by Shapiro any further in his recent work. Thus, the question still remains how can we generalize specifically this kind of politicization of our worlds, which addresses the modern biopolitical governance from the perspective of the bodily finitude of aesthetic subjects, into an approach that is methodologically coherent, or perhaps there already exists a methodological orientation through which this kind of study of literary works can be conceptualized in general terms? Furthermore, what is the relation of this way of reading literary works to the other literary analyses of world politics that have been conducted especially within the discipline of International Relations? In addition, in practice, as we want to bring forward the incompatibility of the bodily finitude of aesthetic subjects with the textually created biopolitical worlds in relation to the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS, how are we to accomplish this? What kind of set of literary works enable us to best open up the contemporary governmental realm of the HIV/AIDS pandemic to the affirmative-biopolitical subjectivization, the more extensive ideas of freedom and equality than currently perceivable, and for the consequent possibility of us overcoming the impression of political impotency that even the insightful critical studies of the global HIV/AIDS governance have thus far left us with?

## 3.4 Literature and the Body

The above title is borrowed from the essay collection *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, which is edited by Elaine Scarry. Despite that this collection of essays is not that well known for the scholars of biopolitics, unlike it is

[206] Ibid., xvii–xix.

for literary theorists, already the title of this collection grabs our attention. This title after all consists almost solely of concepts that are of central importance for us. And yet, the essays contained by this collection are not about biopolitics. As such, these essays are not about biopolitics at all. What these essays are about, however, does not interest us here any less. This is because these essays are about the relationship of our language to our bodily matter in the literary discourse. These essays, and especially Scarry's introductory text which summarizes their arguments, insightfully points to the way in which "language both continuously absorbs and empties itself of material content."[207] As the argument goes, this collection of essays seeks to show how the material realm can be brought into the study of literature by registering the habitual manner how in literature "[t]he human voice, the written word, continually regulate the appearance and disappearance of the human body."[208] Furthermore, although this collection does not contain any explicit biopolitical discussion, the registering of this habituality is inserted into a very biopolitical framework. As Scarry elaborates, insofar as this collection has a structure, the consistent concern of it is, on the one hand, how the singularity of individual bodies have to disappear when they are assembled into abstract populations, and on the other hand, how the singularity of bodies often make a re-appearance in the literary works at the very moment when they are about to disappear, "as though to stop them from dropping off the edge of the page."[209]

According to Scarry, the act of counting most saliently shows the way how language can both absorb and empty itself of materiality. This verbal act illustrates how the material world can co-exist with the human voice almost identically or how this voice can make this materiality largely disappear by abstractly transcending it. In the former case, this act asserts a nearly one-to-one correspondence between itself and the material realm by simply expressing increases and decreases of the material content it calibrates. Also, in this case, the act of counting tends to be rather inseparable from the physical movement of the one who counts. After all, counting is frequently accompanied by tapping a finger, bobbing the head, slight bounce of the body, etc. In the latter case of counting, however, numbers and numerical operations are used in an abstract way. In this case, numbers and

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[207] Scarry 1988, viii.

[208] Ibid., ix.

[209] Ibid., xiii.

numerical operations are used to steer our attention away from the certain messiness of the material world that one does not want to directly encounter while nevertheless giving an account of this materiality. Scarry emphasizes how the 'body count' in war is probably the most striking example of this abstractization maneuver.[210]

Scarry continues that either way the use of language carries with itself a political component. Firstly, Scarry notes that when language that is thick with matter is placed side by side with language that has lost most of its material referentiality, the weightlessness of the latter becomes particularly noticeable and the possibility of human agency is emphasized, in particular when the matter in question is our bodily matter. In these occasions what gets underlined is that language cannot, independently of us as agents, absorb us or empty us from our materiality. Secondly, however, Scarry points out that due to the fact that language almost always bears some kind of reference to the material world, even when this material referent might not be directly visible on the surface of the text, more invisibility can often mean more actual danger. Excluding the material world is always dangerous because the more invisible one is on the surface of the text, the more possible it is that one's actual physical presence can be also put at risk. To be visibly at risk frequently invites rescue, and thus the missing body can serve political motives as well.[211] Again, the body count seems to be an appropriate example here.

Consequently, from the perspective of this so-called 'materialist criticism' of literature, Scarry thinks that the appropriate way of studying literary texts is the analysis of practices and political consequences of getting 'things' into words and out of words. Scarry writes that what matters has a substance and thus language in order to be meaningful has to act on substance. Language must make the matter 'bend' according to its own demands or it must attempt to bend itself in accordance with this substance. What Scarry means by materialism then has nothing to do with Marxism, as she emphasizes.[212] Instead of attempting to fill literary language with this sort of predetermined political content, when it comes to the analysis of practices and political results of getting things into words and out of words, the "[m]aterialist criticism simply observes the ways in which this may be done (as well

[210] Ibid., vii–viii.

[211] Ibid., xiv, xxii.

[212] Ibid., xxv.

as the costs in each direction)."[213] Moreover, Scarry maintains that literature is a particularly helpful medium for this kind of study because in literature even the most abstract uses of language are "exercised in terms of a centrally locatable person."[214] For instance, in the actual essays of the book Malthausian population theory is successfully criticized from the perspective of William Wordsworth's prosaic poetry and the republican political rhetoric of the years immediately following the American Revolution is read through Hannah Webster Foster's novel *The Coquette*. In relation to both of these examples, the abstract theories and political ideas resonate heavily with the selected literary works and yet it is emphasized how the certainty of the theoretical models and political ideas begin to immediately crumble when these authors try to make their characters to actually live through these models and ideas.[215]

Although there are certain differences between this collection of essays and our work, with the help of this collection we can bring forward an orientation of studying literature which we can see our own work to be part of. Thus, even if in *Literature and the Body* there are no explicit discussions of bodily finitude, aesthetic subjects or affirmative biopolitics, the resonance of its methodological orientation to our study is evident. As this orientation highlights the importance of questioning the abstract content of literary works from the perspective of the literary appearances of "the most extreme locus of materialization, the live body"[216], and encourages us to think of the politics that emerges as a result of this relation between concreteness and abstractions, it is almost as if this way of reading literary works which is put forward by the orientation would have been developed precisely for the purpose of analyzing literature from the perspective of our synthesis of biopolitical theories. More clearly than any other orientation of politically analyzing literature, along the lines of our elaborations, this orientation emphasizes politicizing *bíos* from the perspective of the bareness of life, the inherent impersonal common-ness of our lives. Thus, this orientation, only without explicitly saying it, precisely invites us to evaluate *bíos* from the vantage point of the norm of life that arises when the fact

[213] Ibid., xx.

[214] Ibid., xii.

[215] See Ferguson 1988; Smith-Rosenberg 1988.

[216] Scarry 1988, xxi.

that we are fundamentally unmasterable finite living beings is successfully communicated in relation to our attempts to transcendentally master life.

This articulation of our methodological orientation also enables us to position our study in relation to the long tradition of using literature in the study of international relations. From heyday of Martin Wight to Hayward Alker, from the post-structural 'textualizations' of world politics to the 'aesthetic turn' of international political theory and to recent Elizabeth Dauphinee's *The Politics of Exile*, a study of Bosnian War written as an actual novel, modern literature has persistently been an object of scholarly interest.[217] Situating literature as a part of popular culture, Daniel Nexon and Iver Neumann have usefully argued in their edited volume *Harry Potter and International Relations* that there has mainly been four different ways in which the international-relations scholars have been interested in literature. Firstly, these scholars have been interested in literature as a clear-cut element of political processes; for example, the content of literary works have been directly influenced by politics or the publication of literary works have caused diplomatic crises. Secondly, literature has been seen as a 'mirror' that enables us to reflect political processes in ways that exceed the conventional and customary ways of perceiving these processes. Thirdly, literature has been used as a data that acts as an evidence of shared norms, belief, identities and other widespread mental images of world politics. Finally, literature has been understood as constitutive in relation to world politics. From this last perspective, literature and politics have not been seen as strictly separate but as interconnected parts of shared larger structures. Literature and politics have been seen to both stem from and utilize the same myths, narratives, mentalities, problematics, discourses and stories which are the basic building blocks of our social consciousness. Accordingly, it has been brought forward that the study of literature is important not only as a second-order representation of political processes but also in its own right. Literature participates in the constitution of our shared reality and thus literature can enable, legitimize or naturalize different policies.[218]

As we can see from the previous, our approach to literature does not completely fit without difficulties into any of these categories. And yet, it is not that our

[217] See e.g. Der Derian & Shapiro (eds.) 1989; Wight 1991; Alker 1996; Bleiker 2001; Holden 2003; Sheeran 2007; Bleiker 2009; Moore 2010; Dauphinee 2013.

[218] Neumann & Nexon 2006, 6–20.

approach can be seen as totally disconnected from these categories either. Firstly, our approach shares with the constitutive understanding of literature the view that literature and politics should not been seen as strictly separate entities. Similarly as the studies that fall under this category, also our work emphasizes that it is possible to identify from literary works the same myths, narratives, mentalities, problematics, discourses and stories which are operative in the world of concrete politics. For us, however, the identification of these interconnections are not important in their own right. Instead, this interconnectedness of literary works and concrete politics is relevant for us only insofar as the shared myths, narratives, mentalities, problematics, discourses and stories found in the literary works clash with the unmasterability of finite bodies that are inhabited by centrally locatable persons of these works. In this way, secondly, our use of literature is not completely separable from the understanding of literature as a mirror which allows us to reflect political processes in ways that exceed the conventional and customary ways of perceiving these processes. Importantly, however, in our case this mirroring is not done in order to open up these conventional and customary perceptions to something new and indefinite that lies somewhere beyond these perceptions in the future but to a form of affirmative biopolitics that can in principle be immediately practiced here and now.

Paving the way for our empirical analyses of literary works which we will begin shortly, the contrasting of our work to the above categories also helps us to illuminate how little the evaluation of artistic quality of literary works has to do with our way of studying literature. Although we have thus far seen many references to acclaimed literary works while we have introduced the discussion which conditions the selection of our methodological orientation, from the perspective of the above-mentioned it is hard to seen anything necessary in this privileging of high-quality literature. As we are interested in the interconnectedness of literary works with the myths, narratives, mentalities, problematics, discourses and stories which are operative also in the world of concrete politics and the reading of these socio-cultural structures against the unmasterability of finite bodies that are inhabited by centrally locatable persons of these works, it is the content and not the quality which is decisive. After all, in spite of how good or bad the artistic quality of a literary work is deemed, it is in principle always capable of doing what is needed from our perspective; namely, *failing* to establish a total correspondence between the socio-cultural structures and the finite lives which the literary work seeks to present to us. Recalling Nancy's formulation, literature simply cannot turn the unmasterable excess of finitude into any kind of property.

And yet, of course, although in principle we do not discriminate against any literary work that covers the topics of HIV/AIDS crisis and the bodily finitude in the context of the globally marginalized sufferers, we will not be reading all such works in our study. Instead, we will concentrate on four different literary works which we have deemed as the most suitable for us on the basis of their content. These works are Carolyne Adalla's *Confessions of an AIDS Victim*, Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*, Meja Mwangi's *The Last Plague* and Yan Lianke's *Dream of Ding Village*. We have selected these four literary works because in addition to touching upon the topics of HIV/AIDS and the bodily finitude of the globally marginalized sufferers these works also feature characters that desire freedom and equality more extensively than the socio-political orders of their literary worlds allow for. Furthermore, all these characters try to use the fact that they or their loved ones are suffering and dying as a way of legitimating and promoting their desires for the more extensive freedom and equality. In this way, these characters try to integrate the suffering and dying they see and experience as parts of their political projects. Consequently, an internal tension is produced inside these literary works by their authors. This tension is equivalent to the tension that haunts the contemporary critical thought in relation to the concrete global response to HIV/AIDS. In the case of these literary works, as in the case of the current critical thought that targets the contemporary global response, the central question is how to make political universalism, which is contained by ideas such as freedom and equality, fully operative in relation to the marginalized lives that are forced to suffer and prematurely die in an unequal manner.

However, insofar as these literary works attempt to attach into the suffering and dying a clear-cut and determinate political meaning, they naturally fail. In each case, the sensations brought about by the encountering of bodily finitude ultimately remain unmasterable. Although these literary works attempt to politically tame our bodily finitude in distinctive ways, none of these works fully succeed in this. In this way, these works do not only question these particular attempts of politicizing bodily finitude but indirectly also guide us to see even in the HIV/AIDS-related marginalized suffering and dying something fundamentally incompatible with the transfiguring of these lives. Thus, in addition to internally critiquing their own attempts to politicize bodily finitude, these novels also enable us to bring our affirmative-biopolitical considerations into this context.

Finally, it should be noted that we will analyze these novels in two separate sets. As Adalla's *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* and Kincaid's *My Brother* resonate more

strongly with the theme of freedom than Mwangi's *The Last Plague* and Yan's *Dream of Ding Village*, we will read these two former literary works first. Through these two former literary works we will show how, on the basis of their lives, even the most marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers can be fundamentally seen as free from the contemporary liberal HIV/AIDS governance which only valorizes the freedom of abstract individual persons. Secondly, as Mwangi's *The Last Plague* and Yan's *Dream of Ding Village* speak more to the theme of equality than Adalla's and Kincaid's books, we will read Mwangi's and Yan's books especially in relation to this theme. Through these two books we will highlight the difference between the liberal equality of persons and the idea of a more extensive equality that emerges when this liberal equality is viewed from the perspective of the lives lived by central literary characters in these two works. In this manner, we will eventually bring forward a political relation in the context of the global response to HIV/AIDS which consists from the prevalent liberal policies and from the viable possibility of affirmative-biopolitical action and transformation.

# 4 THE POTENTIALITY OF LIFE

## 4.1 Liberal Freedom

The critical studies of the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS are far from being a homogeneous group. Despite that the unifying aspect of these studies is that they all have brought forward the problematic consequences of the global HIV/AIDS policies in relation to the globally marginalized people of our world, the traditions of thought that have informed these studies have varied. These studies have elaborated these problematic consequences and tried to think how we might be able to go beyond these problematics by leaning onto diverse critical schools of thought, such as feminism, post-colonialism and governmentality studies; and critical theorists, such as Arendt, Butler and Foucault, to name but a few. And yet, in spite of this variance, none of these works have been able to come up with a way how the problematics they have brought forward could really be solved, as we have already mentioned. In this way, although these analyses have insightfully shown how even the most liberal-minded HIV/AIDS policies have ended up leaving certain globally marginalized people irreversibly behind, these analyses have also in practice pointed out how difficult it is to properly critique the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS. Even though these analyses have established that this response systematically creates unjust outcomes, and thus should be politically transformed, the question has remained how? What else could we prescribe to correct the situation expect such things as freedom, equality and the better consideration of the difficult situation of those globally marginalized people currently left behind? What else could we prescribe expect those same things that are already acknowledged parts of the liberal public health ethos which the global governance of HIV/AIDS already applies to practice?

Even though not all of these works have been informed by governmentality studies or Foucault's thought more generally, we can accentuate the political impasse to which these works have pushed us by pointing out the resemblance of the situation to the impression that the governmentality and other Foucault-inspired scholars have typically created when they have studied liberal governance. After all, in relation to vast array of topics, ranging from the micro-level of the

liberal-democratic governance to the macro-level of the global liberal governance, governmentality and other scholars influenced by Foucault's historical genealogy of liberalism have repeatedly verified that, as Foucault put it, in relation to liberalism freedom is never anything other "than an actual relation between governors and governed."[219] At the heart of liberalism lies a mobile relationship between the production of freedom and the restraining of that which in the production of freedom risks limiting and destroying this production. Liberalism functions through producing and organizing freedom but this "very act entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats, etcetera."[220]

For instance, in relation to the liberal democracies of the West numerous Foucault-inspired studies have empirically highlighted how liberal governing indeed has through the autonomy granted to its subjects guided people's interests and actually excluded and restricted the possibilities of people's self-expression.[221] In addition, as non-governmental organizations have now become widely celebrated civil society actors in domestic and international politics, and as arrangements such as microloans encourage people to entrepreneurship in all four corners of the globe, scholars have gone back to reading Foucault in order to explain the rise of these phenomena.[222] As Foucault stated, civil society and the rational economic person, *homo œconomicus*, are important elements of liberal governing. In liberal thought, civil society is the reality arising from the interests of each rational individual part of it. Civil society is the social bond which results from the spontaneous synthesis between its rational members. In this way, civil society is something that has to be respected by liberal governance but not in way of leaving it completely alone. Foucault writes that civil society is a target of permanent governmental management not by the way of direct intervention but in a way of subtly regulating it and thus ensuring that the workings of individual rational interests guarantee the desired functioning of civil society. Liberalism has to ensure that the environmental conditions for civil society are such that the rational economic interests of individuals can work in a desired manner and lead to public good. As a result, liberal

[219] Foucault 2008, 63.

[220] Ibid., 64.

[221] See e.g. Burchell et al. (eds.) 1991; Cruikshank 1999; Dean 1999; Miller & Rose 2008.

[222] See e.g. Rankin 2001; Lipschutz 2005; Li 2007; Neumann & Sending 2010.

governance is characteristically a form of governance which manages civil society in order to ensure that the functioning of the economic freedom of individuals will have the maximal utility value. The management of civil society makes it possible for liberalism to attain its goals effectively.[223]

Furthermore, Foucault's insights on security that he presented together with his genealogy of liberalism have proven out to be valuable in relation to grasping the complex nature of our contemporary security arrangements.[224] According to Foucault, the idea of security is intimately connected to the management of our freedom and the governmental calculations of how to maximize the utility value of its interventions. Foucault famously wrote how security refers to organizing "circulation, eliminating its dangers, making a division between good and bad circulation, and maximizing the good circulation by eliminating the bad."[225] Thus, unlike safety which denotes to the condition of being safe from something, security is a technology that is intertwined with the risks it seeks to manage. Security becomes possible on the condition that insecurity is accepted as a possible outcome its 'game'. In this way, security operates on the condition that freedom and contingency become inherent aspects of its functioning. As Foucault writes, security is based on "the possibility of movement, change of place, and the processes of circulation of both people and things."[226] Then, if we think of the importance that is currently placed on maintaining the global circulation of goods, services, medicine, foreign aid, business travel, work-related migration, student placements and tourism, while the circulation of conflicts, terrorism, infectious diseases and global poverty are constantly feared, we can easily understand the value of Foucault's vision also in relation to this aspect of our lives.

And yet, although neither Foucault nor his followers have really claimed that liberalism can capture our being completely, that liberalism is all there is to life, the close association of freedom with liberal governance has nevertheless created an impression that our possibilities for conducting genuine political actions are very sparse indeed. In spite that Foucault-inspired analyses of liberal governance have been critical, insightful and informative, the tendency of these studies to unveil

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[223] Foucault 2007, 349–354; Foucault 2008, 294–312.

[224] See e.g. Duffield 2007; Dillon & Reid 2009; Elbe 2009; de Larrinaga & Doucet (eds.) 2010.

[225] Foucault 2007, 18.

[226] Ibid., 48–49.

increasingly subtle and complex constellations of liberal governance mechanisms without clearly pointing to us what lies outside these mechanisms has created an image of political impotency. This criticism has been self-reflectively even validated by certain governmentality scholars who have maintained that it is true that the blurring of our possibilities for genuine political actions is one of the main weaknesses of governmentality studies. If an impression is created that freedom is only a correlate for liberal governance, it also seems that this form of governance cannot be politically addressed at all.[227]

Even though the inability to properly politicize liberal governance is not exclusively a vice of governmentality or other studies that have been inspired by Foucault's work, the above nicely highlights the depth of the problematics we are here dealing with. Although also other traditions of critical analyses have been frequently haunted by the multifaceted nature of liberalism, and despite that the problem of freedom as such is not exclusively the subject of our work, the above exemplifies that when it comes to the failure of the critical studies of HIV/AIDS governance to elaborate a viable political alternative to the current liberal management of this disease, this failure has a context. Thus, this failure is not solely something that can be associated only with the critical studies of the global HIV/AIDS governance but this failure is a symptom of the deeper inability of critical thought to properly connect theory with our lived reality when it comes to our late modern present.

Naturally, however, this does not mean that we want to dismiss the insights made within the critical research tradition when it comes to the contemporary HIV/AIDS crisis. Instead, in relation to this crisis we want to precisely valorize these critical insights, and the critical spirit of this tradition in general, while nevertheless adding something new on top of them. Accordingly, when we now start to bring our model of affirmative biopolitics in contact with the empirical problematics of the global HIV/AIDS response, and thus attempt to go beyond the impression that the 'illiberal reality' persistently created by the global liberal HIV/AIDS policies is the final truth of the global response to HIV/AIDS, we will be moving very broadly on the interface between the marginalized lives found in our selected literary works, the governmental world of HIV/AIDS, and the tradition of critical thought in general. In other words, as we will now start to analyze certain literary works which in

[227] See e.g. O'Malley et al. 1997; Dean 2007, 84–106; Walters 2012, 68–81.

addition to touching upon the topics of HIV/AIDS and the bodily finitude of the globally marginalized sufferers also feature characters that desire freedom and equality more extensively than the socio-political orders of their literary worlds allow for, we are not interested in only how the lives of these characters speak to the concrete governmental world of HIV/AIDS or the critical studies of this governance but also how these works resonate with larger patterns of critical thought. We are interested in all kinds of ways how in relation to the governmental world of HIV/AIDS, the marginalized literary lives and the liberal and critical ideas over the general improvement of the situation of the marginalized HIV/AIDS suffers clash in a way that enables us to continue to push different critical insights forward in relation to the HIV/AIDS crisis while simultaneously also making visible an alternative political pathway that can in practice lead us out of the current unsatisfying situation.

Against the previous, it comes as no surprise that the two literary works which we will concentrate on in this chapter – before moving onto the remaining two in the next chapter – revolve around the theme of death: the ultimate marker of our bodily finitude. These two literary works, Carolyne Adalla's *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* and Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*, are both attempts to give meaning to death in relation to literary worlds which overlap with the concrete governmental world of HIV/AIDS. Both of these works pursue to provide a life of a globally marginalized HIV positive person, at the moment when this life is fading away, a proper identity which these lives are not seen as possessing at the beginning of these stories. Thus, these globally marginalized HIV positive characters are at the beginning of both of these stories borderline figures whose social status is uncertain. Is it their own fault that they are dying or should we rather see larger structures as causes of their unfortunate fates? Do these globally marginalized characters represent people who invite a rescue or did they get what they deserved? Is there something we can learn from these lives or are the reasons behind their lethal marginalization essentially ungraspable? Dilemmas such as these drive these stories forward.

And yet, as we will see, in neither case are these tensions properly resolved. In Adalla's novel, a young subordinate Kenyan woman, Catharine Njeri, who has just found out that she is HIV positive and due to the HIV/AIDS-related travel restrictions imposed by the US cannot take advantage of a scholarship granted to her by an American University, fails to tell her life story in such a way it could bring comfort and be a lesson to other people in a similar situation. In the case of Njeri, the

negative effects of the US travel ban are emotionally and socially so severe that these effects cannot be fully compensated by fashioning oneself into a tragic but a liberally political correct hero of an educational narrative. In Kincaid's *My Brother*, the US travel ban also gets a mention. However, in this book the US ban, which has actually been inoperative from the beginning of the year 2010, is not consider to be relevant in relation to a HIV positive man, called Devon Drew, who is the central character of the book and also Kincaid's late brother. Thus, *My Brother* is a memoir in which Kincaid tries to make sense out of her own confusion caused by the seeming meaninglessness of her late brother's reckless and short-lived life. In *My Brother*, Kincaid reminisces the time when her youngest brother was dying back in Antigua in order to render her brother's life somehow meaningful. Yet, in the end, also this attempt fails. Eventually, as we will point out, Kincaid's account of Devon's life can be read in a way that shows how the life of Devon cannot be made unambiguously meaningful even by the attempt of Kincaid to render this life as a part of her plea for extending the social opportunities and support which have enabled Kincaid to become what she is also to those who are lacking them. In the case of her brother, the marginalization, vulnerability, powerlessness, irresponsibility and incapability are so excessive that, when the plea is contrasted to the liberal mechanics of the global HIV/AIDS relief, it becomes clear that the political project advocated by the plea could only include the people like Kincaid's brother mostly as already excluded.

In this way, what will lie at the center of our reading of these literary works is two characters – aesthetic subjects – who point to something more than is captured by their literary representations. Not all life that in these literary works revolves around these two globally marginalized characters is brought properly inside the representational realm by the authors of these works as the meanings they attempt to give to the lives of these characters can be questioned. Even if these characters are written anew during these literary works in order to give them socially meaningful identities, it still remains possible for us to maintain that these new identities do not unambiguously accomplish what they are meant to accomplish. On the basis of these new identities, there does not unambiguously emerge increased potential for the liberation and salvation of the people who these globally marginalized characters represent. When we read these new identities from the perspective of the equivocality of the lives of these characters, it appears that these new identities do not unproblematically facilitate the improvement of the situation of the type of people these characters are closest to. Thus, eventually the two central globally marginalized HIV positive characters of these works cannot without

difficulties be consider to be the type of positive political figures which they are refashioned to be in Adalla's and Kincaid's works. On the basis of their lives, they are instead something else, they are something that is not fully defined in these works.

As we will point out, this unmasterability of these two lives which these works introduce into the context of the global HIV/AIDS governance is relevant also in relation to the present, even though the global response to HIV/AIDS has evolved and intensified considerably since the time of writing of these literary works. Regardless that certain HIV/AIDS-related content of these books is outdated, in both cases we are nevertheless exposed to the unmasterability of life which also in relation to the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS points outside liberalism. Thus, although in *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* the ambiguousness of the political refashioning of the story's heroine directly arises out of the effects of the US travel ban which is not anymore operative, and despite that in *My Brother* the treatment of HIV is not as advanced as is the case today, the political usefulness of these works has not faded. After all, when in our analyses of these literary works we view the lives of these ambiguous characters against the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS, it becomes clear how even in the current liberal-minded public health atmosphere there are no means available for us how we could really solve the ambiguousness of these two lives. Also in relation to the present, their literary representation as political figures whose lives directly facilitate the improvement of the situation of the globally marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers clashes with the current ways of managing the globally marginalized lives in a way that falsifies the identities given to these characters.

The ambiguity of the lives of these two characters, then, does not only help us to call into question the time during which these characters actually lived but also the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS. Neither in the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS can these characters be unambiguously seen as the type of political figures that unproblematically facilitate the salvation of the people who these characters represent. Also in this world, the endeavor to fit the lives of these characters into such political identity category is intertwined with problematic procedures. Similarly as in relation to the worlds where these characters actually lived, also in relation to the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS, the lives of these characters can only be made to fit into such political identity category by abstractly transfiguring these lives to be something else than they as such were. In this way, in relation to the past and the present of the global

response to HIV/AIDS, if the understanding of these characters as the type of political figures they are made to be unambiguously facilitates something this is not rescue but rather the continuation of indirect liberal structural violence against the people who these two globally marginalized characters are closest to. In both cases, the forcing of the lives of these characters into a political identity category facilitates forgetting and exclusion on the basis of a violent abstraction. Thus, if inserted anywhere along the trajectory of the global HIV/AIDS governance, this kind of understanding of these two lives is accompanied by the facilitation of immune deficient form of violence against the people whose rescue this understanding was supposed to unambiguously advocate. And yet, as there is nothing necessary in this kind of understanding of these two lives, there is nothing necessary either in this facilitation. In fact, from the perspective of the unmasterability of these lives, this facilitation is anything but necessary. On the basis of the unmasterability of their lives, these two characters are in principle *free* from any such arrangements that attempt to force them to their identities through which they become targets/facilitators of the HIV/AIDS-related immune deficient form of violence.

Accordingly, these books will prove out to be particularly useful in dissociating freedom from liberal governance in the context of the global response to HIV/AIDS. By reading these works in the above way, we do not have to settle for simply confirming how the liberal public health ethos that largely guides the global response to HIV/AIDS frequently ends up betraying its universality when it comes to realizing the freedom of the globally marginalized people. Against the lines that have been typically followed by the critical studies of liberal governance, we do not have to just verify how also in the context of the global HIV/AIDS governance freedom often turns into non-freedom in relation to people who cannot keep themselves as properly functional liberal subjects. Instead, in contrast to solely showing how freedom valorized by the global response to HIV/AIDS is not properly freedom after all when it comes to the globally marginalized people, the unmasterability of life communicated by these literary works here also enables us to open space for perceiving what alternative affirmative-biopolitical freedom in this context is; namely, liberation from whatsoever limit of this response that is deemed destructive and unnecessary from the perspective of life's absolute immanence that exceeds our capabilities to confine it. In this way, our reading of these two literary works will not only show the questionability of the liberal treatment of the globally marginalized people but also help us to introduce affirmative-biopolitical idea of freedom into this context.

In a more detailed way, we will return to this politically important difference that emerges between our work and the lines typically followed by the critical studies of the liberal governance of HIV/AIDS in the last section of this chapter. However, before this we will present our analyses of *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* and *My Brother*. Firstly, we will concentrate on *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* and read the abandonment of the novel's HIV positive heroine through the resonances that the heroine's own understanding of her abandonment bears with the critical studies which have commented on similar type of situations. On the basis of these resonances we will highlight how this abandonment, which results from nothing else than the heroine's bodily status, cannot be unproblematically turned into a comfort or lesson by heroine's liberal politicization of her own condition. This will enable us to politicize the heroine's own liberal politicization of herself and articulate in relation to the world of HIV/AIDS governance the difference between liberal pleas for freedom and affirmative-biopolitical freedom. Secondly, we will amplify this difference by concentrating on *My Brother*. We will similarly than in the case of Adalla's novel, read the understanding of HIV/AIDS-related marginalization that this memoir puts forward through the resonances that this understanding bears with the critical studies which have commented on similar type of situations. On the basis of these resonances we will argue that the marginalized life that occupies the center stage of this memoir is so marginalized that this life points to a nearly total position of exteriority when it comes to the mechanisms of the global HIV/AIDS relief. This means that this marginalized life cannot be politicized in a way that the author of the memoir eventually attempts to do this and thus the attempted politicization can be problematized in a manner that again points to the difference between liberal liberation and affirmative-biopolitical freedom. However, with the help of *My Brother* we will be able to articulate this difference more properly in relation to the roll out of the antiretroviral therapy among the globally marginalized than was the case with Adalla's novel. Consequently, *My Brother* expands our politicization to an important dimension of the current HIV/AIDS crisis which we were not able to fully enough cover by our earlier reading of Adalla's book alone.

## 4.2 From Gender Activist to Bare Life

*Confessions of an AIDS Victim* is the only novel by a largely unknown Kenyan writer Carolyne Adalla. The novel is an epistolary novel that tells us the story of a young Kenyan woman – Catharine Njeri – who in the first page of the novel characterizes her life as tragedy. This characterization is not by any means incorrect as the life

story Njeri is about to tell is very sad and unfortunate. Four months before the beginning of the novel, Njeri was granted a scholarship in order to continue her studies in an American university. As Njeri starts to tell her story, however, her enthusiasm over the scholarship has already faded away. Njeri is shocked because she has just found out that she is HIV positive. She acquired this information from the results of an HIV test which she took as a part of the immigration requirements. As a result, Njeri now does not only have a deadly virus in her body but, as in the world of novel the US travel ban is still operative, she cannot either travel to the US in order to continue her studies.

The letter that the novel revolves around is a letter that Njeri writes to her friend Marilyn. Njeri states that she writes this letter in order to tell Marilyn about her tragic fate and in order reflect her own life and emotions. According to Njeri, writing seems to be the only way she can emotionally vent her feelings and to understand her present state. In addition, she hopes that her letter could be made public after she has gone in order to bring comfort to other people in a similar position and to be a lesson for people who are not yet HIV positive. In this way, Njeri's writing also has an explicit political aim. Njeri's urge to reach a wide audience makes Njeri's narration a political activity in the Arendtian sense. From the Arendtian perspective, narration is an essential way through which a human being can bring oneself into the public sphere and interact with this sphere. Narration is a way of being in contact with the public sphere and to influence this public sphere by joining it as oneself.[228] This is also a central theme in Njeri's letter. Njeri wants to find a way to express herself to other people. She feels that her story deserves to be told to a wide audience and she wants her story to have a wide affect.

This task, however, proves not to be an easy task. The shock caused by the fact of being HIV positive is so strong that it is hard for Njeri to articulate her experience. Njeri's narration is trembling and often quite chaotic as she tries to express her feelings. Njeri writes: "as I write, I am visibly trembling. […] 'It is not possible; it is not true.' I have said these words over and over during past three days. It is like a dream from which I hope to be shaken awake."[229] After a while Njeri continues, "I cannot fathom the idea, but an AIDS victim! – that is what I am now."[230] This

[228] Arendt 1998, 181–188.

[229] Adalla 1993, 1.

[230] Ibid., 2.

trembling and chaotic character of Njeri's narration does not only stem from the fear of physical death and pain. Njeri can already imagine the stigma attached to the disease. She writes, "[p]retty soon I will be faceless and nameless. Catherine, the beautiful name my mother gave to me, will only be mentioned in hushed voices and by wagging tongues."[231]

Njeri's fear of stigma is so powerful that at one point of her letter Njeri considers the possibility of concealing her state from other people for good. Njeri ponders that it is better that she keeps her HIV infection as a secret as long as possible because she feels that she could not bear despise and rejection. However, as Njeri continues her writing she notices that there is no way how she can escape the stigma she already feels. She is already shattered by the thought of people treating HIV positive people like people suffering from leprosy were treated. Njeri thinks about loneliness that people suffering from AIDS experience. They lose their friends and nearly no one wants to have anything to do with them. This is the reality that Njeri cannot forget. She wonders, "why do I feel so neglected and dejected, even before I pronounce that I am an AIDS Victim?"[232] Njeri feels that her possibilities for ordinary life have been taken away from her for good and she states that she lives in "the cocoon of hopelessness and dejection that is now my house."[233]

Njeri's description of her state enforces the often highlighted point that an HIV positive person truly is a *persona non grata*. Before one's physical death an HIV positive person is already a stigmatized socially dead abject, as for example Judith Butler has written.[234] The life of an HIV positive person is socially neglected experience and thus there are no earlier lived experiences available for Njeri to relate her present state. There are only pathological categories and desperate positions that are socially available to Njeri. Thus, it is no wonder that in the course of her letter Njeri characterizes herself sometimes as a member of a risk group and sometimes as an already dead person. However, in the end Njeri is not completely satisfied to any of these categories or positions that are available to her. Many

[231] Ibid., 2–3.

[232] Ibid., 51.

[233] Ibid., 53.

[234] Butler 1997, 27.

times, Njeri also asks questions that challenge these categories and positions. For example, Njeri asks:

> Don't we still pass for human beings deserving love, attention and company for as long as we still live – or have we degenerated so much as to drop the human status? […] Will the time come when AIDS sufferers will be considered as any other patients with no dejection and desolation?[235]

These kinds of questions lead Njeri to reflect her life in a way that brings out the peculiarity of how Njeri is now treated differently than before, even though she does not feel that she has changed that much. Njeri feels that she is still the same person she was before she knew about her HIV infection but the many constraints she is now made to face tell a different story. Njeri's own view of herself has started to considerably differ from the way others see her. At times, Njeri reminisces her former life. Njeri reminisces how she has always done well with her studies, how she has loved, how she has been loved, how many unforgettable moments she has shared with her friends, how she tried to get somewhere abroad to continue her studies like many of her friends had done and how she even succeeded in this by winning a scholarship for an American university. All of a sudden, however, all this is disappearing from Njeri's life. Njeri is afraid that her friends will desert her and that she will not be loved anymore. She is grieving over her lost scholarship and the fact that she cannot continue her studies. For the worse, there is virus in her body that she cannot escape. Njeri's body has turned against her as it is now due to her body that she is one-sidedly condemned. Thus, there is no other option for Njeri than to adjust herself to her miserable condition. This causes a lot of anxiety for Njeri and she thinks that this adaptation process will not be easy. She writes,

> I know I will find it extremely difficult to go about life in the face of the new development. I therefore need plenty of time to reflect and get used to my new self, just as a prisoner who with time, becomes fond of a spider.[236]

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[235] Adalla 1993, 51–52.

[236] Ibid., 6.

When it comes to the resonances of these parts of Njeri's letter to the tradition of critical thought, Njeri's anxiety can be compared surprisingly well with the time of colonialism. Especially Frantz Fanon's depictions of an anxiety caused by a 'black man's' body are very similar to the anxiety Njeri is facing. According to Fanon, the consciousness of the body of a black man was solely a negating activity because the black skin only restricted and constrained life in a white world. Fanon gives an account of the situation in the first person: "I was expected to behave like a black man […]. I shouted my greeting to the world and the world slashed away my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged."[237] Fanon continues, "Look, a Negro!" "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!"[238] Fanon tries to only to laugh at these exclamations, but soon notices that he is not able to. He knows about the existence of legends, stories and history that are behind these exclamations. As a result, Fanon begins to see himself through the eyes of others. He notices his dark skin and ethnic characteristics. He is battered down by prejudices: cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishisms, racial defects… "The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly"[239]. Now Fanon writes, "I become aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is?"[240]

On the grounds of Fanon's writing, then, colonial racism caused similar alienation from one's body than Njeri's alienation from her newly HIV positive body. This is not, however, the only interface between Njeri's and Fanon's writing. In addition to corporeal anxiety, the rejection faced by Njeri is quite similar to the rejection faced by Fanon. According to Fanon, in a colonial society black man wanted to be white; in a colonial society all the norms were white and everyone was expected to live according to these norms regardless of their skin color. Even if one was black, and thus could never fully fulfill the expectations of these norms, one still tried one's

[237] Fanon 1986, 114–115.

[238] Ibid., 112.

[239] Ibid., 113.

[240] Ibid., 114.

best. And yet, in spite what the black man did, the colonial society was still based on racism and the black man was always eventually rejected.[241]

Njeri's narration highlights similar kind of rejection than the one described by Fanon, even though the context is different. In the Njeri's case, the rejection is not about the values of an occupant that the natives are also made to pursue, even though succeeding in this is impossible. In the Njeri's narrative, however, one can spot a same kind of promise that has been made to Njeri but which is then dubiously broken, as the promise made to the black man regarding the fulfillment of the expectations of white norms was always eventually broken in a colonial society. In order to understand this we must take into account the international dimension that is all the time lurking behind Njeri's story. By this international dimension, we mean that despite of the fact that Njeri's narration happens in Kenya, the geographical borders of Kenya do not define Njeri's narration. On the contrary, Njeri is constantly referring to people and things outside Kenya. On the course of her letter, for example, it becomes clear that Njeri's best friend Marilyn studies in the Netherlands, Njeri's ex-boyfriend Brian studies in the US and a certain lecturer Njeri is familiar with is about to leave to the UK in order to continue his studies. In addition, Njeri parents have in her home village already boasted to everyone how their daughter is traveling abroad to study. On the top of this, Njeri's narration naturally also touches her own ambitions of studying abroad. Hence, it is clear that awareness about possibilities outside Kenya has been present in Njeri's and her circle of acquaintances lives for a long time. The international dimension has presented to Njeri and her circle of acquaintances future possibilities which Njeri and many people she is familiar with have wanted to take advantage of.

We can link the fact that international dimension has for a long time presented imagined possibilities to Njeri and her circle of acquaintances to Arjun Appadurai's idea on the important role of imagination in the globalizing world. According to Appadurai, Benedict Anderson's idea of an imagined nation-state community has as result of globalization lost its monopoly. People's imaginations are not anymore bound by the image of the nation-state but it has been replaced by other images. For instance, at the moment, there are more people than ever who imagine themselves or their children living or working in a different place where they have been born. These images of migration result from the flows of images, scripts,

[241] Ibid., 11.

models and narratives that are not anymore restricted by national boundaries. It is all the time becoming easier at different parts of the world to see news and movies or to hear stories that mediate images of foreign places. There simply is not that many people anymore in our globe who do not know at least someone who is traveling to somewhere or returning home from somewhere at this very moment. This grown level of migration does not only have an effect on people who are traveling themselves but the stories of these people will also reach, and affect the imagination of, people who have stayed put so far.[242]

From this perspective, then, it becomes possible for us to interpret Njeri's experience of injustice over her one-sided rejection in a way that Njeri imagined herself already as a subject of the globalizing world. Njeri had already seen how many of her acquaintances had taken advantage of the possibilities brought to them by globalization and she thought she could herself also do the same. In a way the globalizing world had already given its promise to Njeri about the future study possibilities that she could reach if she could do as well as her acquaintances. Njeri worked hard for this possibility which eventually paid off as Njeri was granted a scholarship by an American university. It was supposed to be a done deal but then suddenly the globalizing world breaks its promise to Njeri. All of a sudden hard work done by Njeri is not enough. It is revealed that she is HIV positive which means that she has hit a dead end regarding her dreams. Njeri writes that because of HIV infection "[y]ou cannot carry on with your dreams. They are still shattered and death looms in the dark."[243]

As Njeri's letter progresses, however, the tone of her writing also begins to change. Even if stigma and constraints which HIV positive people have to face do not stop causing irresolvable confusion for Njeri throughout her whole letter, gradually Njeri begins to think that she nevertheless is not solely the passive victim of her story. Although Njeri cannot fully grasp why HIV positive people are treated with discrimination and why they have to face so many constraints, this does not imply that she would not take any responsibility for her own actions and thus see herself as any type of agent at all. On the contrary, due the course of her letter Njeri begins to blame herself too and at the end of her letter she writes that "I regret

[242] Appadurai 1998, 4–6.

[243] Adalla 1993, 82.

every single day I have lived a reckless life, regret every affair I ever indulged in."[244] Couple of pages later she adds that she knows that the shame and regret she now bears will never go away. She knows that she will have these feelings for the rest of her life. Thus, eventually Njeri accepts that she is responsible for her own destiny. And yet, at the same time that she accepts this, she does not accept that she is the sole villain of her story. Njeri has not been able take her circumstances fully into consideration. Njeri feels she has acted irresponsibly through her unthoughtfulness yet the circumstances have also played a part in her tragic destiny. She has made a human error that could have been avoidable but at the same time it might have also been that this error would have not been an error at all without the impact of her circumstances.

From Njeri's letter it is impossible to say what action taken by Njeri has actually led to her infection. Njeri tries to scratch her head over it but in the end she still is not sure. In the end, Njeri is left with five options as there are five different men whom each could have been the one who has infected her. These men consist of Njeri's latest boyfriend Alex and four other more short-term acquaintances. Njeri now reflects that all of these five men have probably had relationships to other women in addition to her as all of these men are relatively comfortable money-wise which makes them very eligible partners among the women in Njeri's society. Njeri doubts that these men did not take advantage of their position and sighs that "AIDS has come to exploit the low status of the woman in African society."[245]

Along these lines, Njeri begins to think that also she may have faced this unfortunate fate of many African women who are victims of men's behavior. Njeri writes that in retrospect she has found out that it is probable that even Alex also had other girlfriends besides her. Njeri is surprised how poorly she seems to have known Alex, even though they were together for three years. This terrifies Njeri and she ponders how trustworthy men as whole are. Njeri asks,

> how reliable are these men when it comes to not passing the infection on to their wives, when their blood warms at the sight of every beautiful lady in the office or

[244] Ibid., 80.

[245] Ibid., 77.

> the bar? […] How many men, on realising that they have contracted a venereal disease, will hesitate to pass the infection on to their wives?[246]

By asking these questions, Njeri begins gradually to shift some blame from her shoulders to men's. According to Njeri, in the Kenyan society women are victims of men's actions as a result of two trends. Firstly, women are passive recipients of the virus who "must die for the sins of their spouses"[247]. Secondly, as women are economically dependent on men who the economy favors, women can improve their situation in this sphere of life only "through love, fake or otherwise"[248]. Njeri writes how all this puts women in her society to a great danger. In spite of what kind of life one is living, just being a woman easily exposes one to HIV infection.

Here, of course, it is easy to see strong resemblance between Njeri's writing and the idea of the importance of gender in relation to HIV/AIDS. After all, already for a long while all the relevant actors, including the US, have emphasized that especially in the sub-Saharan Africa, where it is the women who are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS when compared to men, gender is unquestionably one of the key issues of HIV/AIDS. These actors have highlighted that, on the top of women being biologically more vulnerable to HIV infection, the sub-Saharan women are also susceptible to gendered abuses because they do not have access to financial resources. As a result of gendered poverty, the sub-Saharan women are especially susceptible to gendered violence and being pushed to sex work. In addition, sub-Saharan women also have to bear most of the social burden if they get infected or if someone in their family is suffering from the disease. Sub-Saharan women are more stigmatized than men and they also have the primary responsibility to take care of sick family members. This results that some girls are even taken out of schools to help in households which decreases their opportunities to raise from poverty. Thus, as it is commonly understood, and as it is put bluntly in a one central global document produced through the years: "[a]t its heart, this is a crisis of gender

[246] Ibid., 78.

[247] Ibid., 74.

[248] Ibid., 49.

inequality, with women less able than men to exercise control over their bodies and lives.''[249]

However, gender inequality is not the only aspect where Njeri's writing touches upon the currently generally accepted factors driving the sub-Saharan epidemic. Njeri attempts to avoid falling into a position of a powerless victim also by striving to become an advocate in relation to other harmful issues, customs and habits that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Through her own experiences Njeri illustrates a number of fundamental flaws present in her society, which she recognizes as spreading the infection, and thus she demands an abolition of these flaws. In her letter, Njeri advocates better education in general; she advocates informing people better about HIV/AIDS; she advocates bringing risky cultural practices, such as group circumcision and polygamy, to an end. Njeri perceives that "[t]he AIDS virus seems to be taking advantage of the moral weakness in our society and all other imbalances."[250] She cries out for responsibility and sends out a plea to Kenyans which emphasizes that "[t]he AIDS question remains in the hands of every individual to answer."[251] She sees this as an only way to liberate the Kenyan society from its current unsatisfactory situation where her society is "caught at a crossroads between Western behaviour and African morals."[252]

In this way, Njeri anchors her perspective strongly to the way of governing the HIV/AIDS crisis which challenged the traditional public health thinking already in 1980s. According to this liberal way of responding to the HIV/AIDS crisis, the effective response is premised on recognizing that every stakeholder in an affected community has a voice to be heard and an important role to play in the fight against HIV/AIDS. As a result, this response has brought together different actors such as governments, expert organizations, businesses, civil society agents and the community of international donors to work in a cooperation against the detrimental effect of the HIV/AIDS crisis. As a one distinctive feature, the response has especially emphasized the role of activists and their organizations in the local management of the crisis. These civil society activists and their organizations have been widely seen as specialists of the local conditions and thus as ideal executors of the global

[249] UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM 2004, 7.

[250] Adalla 1993, 74.

[251] Ibid., 79.

[252] Ibid., 74.

prevention work at the grassroots level. For instance, the 10th anniversary UNAIDS report on the global AIDS pandemic, from the year 2006, takes a look back at the history of the HIV/AIDS-related civil society groups. Beginning from the early years of the 1980s, the report pays homage to all these groups and concludes that

> [t]he role played by civil society is often underestimated, largely because it is not systematically measured. Yet it is clear that without the nongovernmental sector's participation – including the work of vast numbers of volunteers at community level – many of the strategies and targets set by countries and the international community for responding to HIV would be unattainable. The experience and knowledge of these front-line providers is of utmost importance to national policy-making and to the development of stronger public health sectors.[253]

Again when it comes to critical studies, this pronounced role of civil society activities, of course, has not been left without criticisms. It has been highlighted that the pronounced role of civil society activities tends to contribute to the moving of the responsibility for the disease solely to the individual level. This is because the investments on these activities often result the neglect of the social context of the disease by mainly promoting relatively simple activities typical to civil society actors such as education, awareness building and condom distribution. For example, Hakan Seckinelgin has comprehensively showed how it is seldom in practice considered that especially the Africans most at risk do not have many opportunities to affect their lives as they are at risk because of their social context. Thus, as Seckinelgin continues, to what the promoted civil society activities are based, and actually rely, on is the belief that sub-Saharan individuals are able to rise above the social context and take control of their lives, if only submitted sufficient information by civil society activists.[254]

In the case of Njeri, however, the previous type of criticism fells largely on deaf ears. Njeri seems to be an ideal member of civil society who sincerely believes that, through stressing the responsibility of individuals, a change can take place. She sees that change has to come from people themselves; it is the people who have to adapt

[253] UNAIDS 2006, 222.

[254] Seckinelgin 2008, 96–125.

their behavior to the realities of the world. It is Africans as individuals who have to change as currently their morality is not fit enough for living much longer in a world characterized by Western behavior, as in this world their outdated modes of being make them vulnerable to this deadly disease. In this way, Njeri wants to participate in the project of constructing individual subjects who have the qualities and prerequisites to live in the contemporary world – just as the liberal governmental industry around the sub-Saharan HIV/AIDS wants her to behave.

Even though Njeri does not realize it herself, the above strong resemblances between her writing and the liberal public health thinking means that in relation to the political aim of her writing she is largely cutting off her nose to spite her face. By relying on this thinking, which today has become the common sense of the global HIV/AIDS relief, Njeri's narration portraits her not only as a subordinate woman who should be empowered but also as an activist who is ready to plead causes which are largely believed to be good causes in relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, this does not change the fact that the most immediate setback in her life is not being infected as such but the US travel ban which prevents pursuing her dreams by making the continuation of her studies in an American university impossible. This ban after all does not only take her agency away in relation to the US but it affects her agency at the local level as well. Njeri's writing displays this continuum all along. Through her letter Njeri constantly ponders how she can explain to people that she will not travel to the US. Njeri knows that people are expecting her to leave soon and the fact that she cannot fulfill these expectations causes a lot of embarrassment as she will let many people down who are close to her. She is even scared of the reactions of her best friend, Marilyn, and finds it hard to deliver her the news. Njeri writes,

> What do I write and tell you? That I have changed my mind about going to Texas? That I have tested positive for HIV and cannot be allowed to travel? What would you think, Marilyn? How would you take it? You know the scorn with which people treat the AIDS victims – as though they were suffering from leprosy.[255]

[255] Adalla 1993, 51–52.

Read from the perspective of this internal tension, then, Njeri's letter as a political project seems to be heading towards a dead end. Although Njeri portraits herself as a person who from the perspective of fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic should be empowered, in the world of where Njeri lives this does not seem to matter that much. In this world, regardless of her identity, Njeri just seems to unescapably remain a prisoner of stigma and discrimination which play a significant role in her hopeless situation that is likely, sooner or later, to culminate in her death. Consequently, there is not much comfort to be gained or lessons to be learned from Njeri's letter. Instead, from the perspective of Njeri's harsh treatment by the US immigration officials, who have solely made their decision based on her physiological condition, the strongest message that the letter passes on is that no matter who you are or what you do pain and agony may always unjustly wait for you, due to reasons that are far from being completely under your control.

This means that instead of being unambiguously a subordinate woman or a civil society activist, Njeri's is much more clearly a paradigmatic case of the complete subtraction of identity to the negative dimension of sovereign exception in Agamben's sense.[256] By encountering a sovereign ban, her heroic attempt to overcome her abject role by re-joining, and even transforming, the public sphere, by proving her own liberal political correctness, runs up against its limits in a rather harsh manner. The most powerful actor of the Western political realm – a realm from where the causes plead by Njeri originate and which thus could be expected to unanimously support people like her – not only ends up denying her entry but contributes to her condemnation to this abject role. In this way, instead of being someone who can be fully counted as politically qualified life, we can maintain that Njeri's life starts to remind more of an Agambenian bare life: a form of life unilaterally excluded from the positive content of a political community; a form of life paradoxically remaining in contact with this community only as abandoned, as an included excluded. Concurrently, her living environment, in which she has tried to make a difference by preaching people about their individual responsibility, starts to look different too. This environment cannot be anymore unambiguously believed to be a site where a positive change can take place by solely stressing the responsibility of individuals. This site, when viewed from its outer limits, is a site where HIV positive people can never fully overcome their abandonment through politically correct measures as, if nothing else, they are forever abandoned at least

[256] Agamben 1998; Agamben 2005.

to this very site; a site which does not anymore remind that much of a neutral 'site' but has begun to acquire many characteristics of an Agambenian 'camp'; “a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exclusion and inclusion.”[257]

Njeri's neglect of her political abandonment despite its obviousness makes it hard to decide whether we should read *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* as an ignorant work or a brilliant book in its irony. And yet, when it comes to affirmative politicization of the global HIV/AIDS governance, the novel can be regardless treated as a useful book. As Njeri is a borderline figure divided by a liberal politically correct identity and sovereign abandonment, she is located at the ground zero of the global governance efforts to halt the pandemic. Her reduction to bare life through her contact with the borderlines of this governance makes plain that the recognition of her politically correct identity is conditioned by these borders and outside these borders this identity is stripped. Importantly, however, this does not mean that outside these borders Njeri would not exist at all. Rather, this means that Njeri is actually something more than she says she is. Her confessional identity simply cannot be all that she is. What is this something more, is nothing else than *free*. Njeri is free from her identity as it does not capture her whole existence and thus there is nothing necessary in her obedience to it.

From this perspective, Njeri’s life story critiques the governmental world of HIV/AIDS implicitly in a manner that goes further than any criticism Njeri’s narration directly offered. After all, in addition to the fact that Njeri’s story as such undoubtedly pointed to the senselessness and injustice of her abandonment, the realization that Njeri is free from her identity also takes steps toward emptying out the power of the liberal governmental frame that Njeri actually advocated and which currently enjoys hegemonic position within the global response to HIV/AIDS. As there is nothing necessary in Njeri's identity, there seems to be nothing necessary either in this form of governance which bases its functioning on the activities performed by the carriers of these types of identities. From the perspective of Njeri’s ambiguous borderline status, this is solely a particular mode of governance which has limitations already on its basis. Thereby, it logically holds potential to bring salvation only to a certain people, and not to everyone, who are struggling with the pandemic. In this way, we can say that from Njeri’s position the biopolitical content of this governance gets relativized and its form is reduced to a sovereign

[257] Agamben 1998, 102.

imposition of borders. Yet, to be precise, even sovereignty is not left unaffected. As the content has lost its quasi-immanence, sovereignty can anymore be "in force without significance."[258] This is politically relevant because this is a moment when, as Sergei Prozorov has emphasized, bare life can become a political subject as "bare life is what *remains* when biopolitical immanence is transcended."[259] Faced only with power which is in force without significance there is nothing to restrain this life from confronting this power and it is always possible that this life can even triumph over it.

Along these lines, then, Njeri's life story can be read in a way that affirmatively politicizes the world of global HIV/AIDS governance and emphasizes the non-liberal normative power this politicization carries within itself. Njeri's life story communicates how Njeri, on the basis of the unmasterability of her life, is essentially freer than she thinks she is or even explicitly pronounces that she wants to be on the basis of her liberal thought. Thus, on the basis of her life, Njeri is even free from the liberal public health thought with the help of which in particular, she herself politicized her own condition, and accordingly articulated her own plea for freedom. In this way, Njeri's life enables us perceive the difference that lies between liberal freedom and affirmative-biopolitical freedom in the context of the global HIV/AIDS relief. As Njeri's politicization of her condition exemplifies, the pursuance of liberal freedom in this context comes together with the demand to fit one's life inside liberal limitations that condition the liberal claims for freedom already at the outset. Affirmative-biopolitical freedom, on the other hand, does not demand anything from anyone but only from the ordering of life in general which must change according to the freedom that everyone on the basis of their lives' fundamental unconfinability already possess.

This is an important difference. Regarding the central dimension of the global HIV/AIDS crisis that Njeri's story explicitly wrestles with, the importance of this difference has today become even accentuated by the fact that the US administration, along the lines of the liberal global health recommendations, has removed its HIV/AIDS-related travel restrictions and begun to act more like the global leader in combating HIV/AIDS should, as was remarked by President Barack Obama in the White House Ceremony where he announced the finalization of this

[258] Ibid., 35.

[259] Prozorov 2007, 120. Emphasis in original.

legislation change that was already launched by the George W. Bush's administration.[260] After all, despite that it is possible to see this removal as an improvement of the US legislation, this removal has not fully resolved the paradoxical treatment of the marginal HIV positive people who should be empowered yet whose lives push them into a wrong place at a wrong time – far from it. As Alan Ingram has made plain in relation to the policies of the UK, in practice the absence of HIV/AIDS-related travel restrictions does not straightforwardly mean enhanced life changes for everyone. In his study on the preparation and the discussion surrounding the current HIV/AIDS-related border policies of the UK in the period of 1997 to 2007, Ingram has highlighted that, in spite of the refusal of the British policy makers to adopt direct HIV/AIDS-related travel restrictions, the British policy makers nevertheless redefined the boundaries of legitimate access to the National Health Service (NHS). This was done in such a manner that failed asylum seekers and other people in the country without proper authority today cannot receive free treatment for HIV through antiretroviral drugs. Thus, even though the free emergency treatment continues to be available for those who have life-threatening AIDS-related illness, if money or other legitimate way to cover their health expenses are lacking, failed asylum seekers and other people in the country without proper authority are not saved from the condition that causes these life-threatening illnesses; namely, from being HIV positive.[261]

When we then take even a cursory look at the preparation and the discussion surrounding the removal of the US travel ban from this perspective, it is striking how similar it feels. Also in the US discussion that preceded the removal of the travel ban it was assured that, "even if HIV-related health restrictions are removed as a barrier to admission for immigrants, all immigrants still must meet other admission requirements."[262] Moreover, in this discussion this statement was explicitly aimed towards those critics who argued that the possible removal would construct "an unacceptable, increased burden to the United States tax payers and to the United States health care system."[263] Thus, again here we seem to detect the cruel irony typical to liberal liberation: the establishment of limits within which life is liberated

[260] See Obama 2009.

[261] Ingram 2008, 885–888.

[262] HHS/CDC 2009, 56558.

[263] Ibid., 56553.

and the immune deficient form of violence which arises when the life liberated does not stay within these limits that secure the functioning of liberalism.

In this way, even if present-day Njeri might be one of those who benefits from the US removal of its travel ban, look at the prevalent HIV/AIDS-related border policies does not make us overly thrilled when it comes to the effects of these policies on the globally marginalized HIV positive people. Even if the prevalent US border policies, for instance, are less harmful than they were before in relation to the HIV positive people in general, this change has only brought these border policies more in line with the global HIV/AIDS policies that have the tendency to cement already existing hierarchies and establish new inequalities in the marginalized locations of our world – in spite of the liberal ethos that to a large extent drives these policies. Thus, although the prevalent US border policies in relation to HIV positive people are generally better than these policies recently were, these new policies nevertheless amplify the liberal thanatopolitical tendencies of the global HIV/AIDS policies. As a result, these new border policies just make the questioning of liberalism from the perspective of life even more acute in order that we can prevent the liberal quasi-immanence, with its lure of liberal freedom, from concealing our full possibilities to politically valorize the fundamental common-ness of life in relation to the global response to HIV/AIDS.

## 4.3 From Abjection to Precariousness

It is against the previous background that we will in this section continue to politicize the global response to HIV/AIDS. We will in this section again introduce the normative power of life into the center stage of the HIV/AIDS crisis but this time expand our politicization especially to the roll out of antiretroviral therapy among the globally marginalized. We will do this by focusing on a life that was even more marginalized than Njeri's life. More specifically, we will in this section concentrate on Jamaica Kincaid's memoir *My Brother*, in which Kincaid attempts to give meaning to the AIDS-related death of her youngest brother, an Antiguan man who was called Devon Drew. Accordingly, in *My Brother* Kincaid reminisces the time when Devon was dying in order to make sense out of her own confusion caused by Devon's short-lived life. Kincaid begins her memoir by recalling her astonishment that after hearing that Devon was dying, she had feelings towards him. Kincaid writes:

> When I heard that my brother was sick and dying, the usual deliberation I allow myself whenever my family's needs come up – should I let this affect me or not? – vanished. I felt I was falling into a deep hole, but I did not try to stop myself from falling. I felt myself being swallowed up in a large vapor of sadness, but I did not try to escape it. I became afraid that he would die before I saw him again; then I became obsessed with the fear that he would die before I saw him again. It surprised me that I loved him; I could see that was what I was feeling, love for him, and it surprised me because I did not know him at all.[264]

Kincaid thinks back that when she left Antigua to live in the US at sixteen years of age, Devon was three years old. Kincaid does not remember that she at the time really felt anything particular towards him. Later on, Kincaid had continued to live in the US and paid only occasional visits to Antigua – visits from which she remembered Devon as an irresponsible character who by becoming infected had got what Kincaid on an immediate note thought he already had for a long time coming.

Regarding Devon's irresponsibility, Kincaid early on in her memoir recalls an incident which emphasizes Kincaid's original disapproval of her brother's character and also resonates with Adalla's work that we concentrated on in the previous section. Kincaid remembers how she was suggested that because she lives in the US and her brother was suffering from a lack of proper treatment in Antigua, she should take Devon home with her. Kincaid writes how she got stunned by this, as she already was at the time through her acquaintance with a US doctor providing AIDS medications for Devon and also otherwise doing the best she could in order to relieve Devon's suffering. Kincaid remembers her indignation and she recalls her fumbling answer:

> I have a family, I'm not rich, everybody who comes in contact with this disease knows how costly it is to deal with properly […] how could she just say things without asking about my circumstances, without wondering what taking my brother into my life would mean to me. I said, Oh, I am sure they wouldn't let him in, and I didn't know if what I was saying was true, I was not familiar really with immigration policies and HIV, but what I really meant was, no, I can't do what you

[264] Kincaid 1998a, 20.

> are suggesting – take this strange, careless person into the hard-earned order of my life.[265]

Then, Kincaid writes how the woman who made this suggestion really got under Kincaid's skin by leading their discussion to racism and implied that racism must be the reason why Devon is denied the entry to the US. Kincaid recalls how she thought with bitterness that "how unlucky are people who cannot blame the wrong, disastrous turns life can sometimes take on racism […] it must be, in some way, very nice to have the all too real evil of racism to blame."[266] In this context, however, Kincaid was sure that this was not the case. She remembers thinking how it was "not racism that made my brother lie dying […] it was his own fault, his not caring about himself and his not being able to carefully weight and adjust to and accept the to-and-fro of life."[267]

And yet, despite Kincaid's emphasis on Devon's own responsibility, she writes how she could not for long completely ignore the living environment of Devon she knew all too well. She was after all familiar with the negative colonial heritage in this Caribbean island, the persistent inequality between the rich and the poor, the stigma attached to the disease, the unsatisfactory public health care and the macho attitudes, which according to Kincaid drive promiscuity and unprotected sex. Consequently, she writes in her memoir that in Antigua most people suffering from the disease are "definitions of vulnerability and powerlessness."[268] Moreover, in Kincaid's mind, Devon fitted to this picture all too well. Devon was not any type of authority, he did not have any money, he did not even have a job, but what he had was, as Kincaid puts it, a "compulsion to express himself through his penis."[269]

Kincaid writes how she felt that the fundamental problem in Devon's life was that he never really separated himself from his mother. Kincaid remembers thinking that Devon would have needed non-judgment and acceptance from his mother in

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[265] Ibid., 48–49.

[266] Ibid., 49.

[267] Ibid., 49.

[268] Ibid., 32.

[269] Ibid., 70.

order to find his own way, in order to take full responsibility for his own life, and not just live up to the standards set by others. However, in her memoir Kincaid writes how she was sure that these were things Devon never got because, as Kincaid recalls, “my brother's mother (my mother) was the exact opposite of all those things.”[270] Unlike Kincaid, Devon seemed to have never really fully understood the importance of the separation. Kincaid tells us how, even when Devon was dying and Kincaid began to pay visits to Antigua, she knew that she still had to keep her guard up regarding their mother and thus she refused to accept any food their mother offered for her, a distancing method Kincaid recalls she used already as a child. Devon, however, never behaved anything like this. To begin with, Devon never had a home of his own but he lived with his mother for his whole life – for thirty-three years. Furthermore, when Devon was released from the hospital for a while, as the AIDS medication Kincaid had arranged to him considerably improved his condition, he did not anymore have “even a bed of his own, and so he went to his mother's house and slept in her bed with her.”[271]

In these parts of Kincaid’s memoir, Kincaid’s writing bears a striking resemblance to Julia Kristeva's thought. According to Kristeva, rejection of food provided by the mother is an elementary form of abjection through which one “becomes separated from another body in order to be.”[272] Abjection is not, however, only relevant for the development of a child. As Kristeva continues, in order avoid decaying into an abject, it is necessary to continuously thrust aside not only the dependency to the mother but everything which disturbs the boundary of the self. In addition to the mother, Kristeva emphasizes how especially the abjection of body fluids and feces, which remind of the instability of the body by leaking out of it, is essential for the maintenance of 'I'. Life can only go on as long as these nauseous wastes are removed from the body. When this does not happen anymore body becomes a corpse which is, as Kristeva puts it, “the most sickening of wastes.”[273]

In addition to Kincaid’s comparison of hers and Devon’s relationship to their mother, the theme of failed abjection is also present later in Kincaid’s memoir. Later on, Kincaid complements her account of Devon's inability to properly separate

[270] Ibid., 147.

[271] Ibid., 54.

[272] Kristeva 1982, 10.

[273] Ibid., 3.

himself from his mother with an illustration of his gradual decaying into someone who cannot anymore clean oneself from one's own nauseating body fluids; decaying into something barely alive whose body has to be cleaned by others. Kincaid remembers that during the last hours of Devon

> his face was like a mask, and this was while he was still alive, or still amounted to something called being alive; I mean he breathed and he spoke and he took in nourishment, and fluids of different textures would pass out of his anus, and these fluids did not have a fragrance, they had a smell, and only someone trained to ignore it (a nurse, a doctor) or someone who knew him deeply (his mother) could tolerate it.[274]

After a while her brute portrayal continues. Kincaid recalls moment when she went to see the corpse of her brother which had turned into a something fearsome that did not resemble Devon anymore. This corpse of Devon, writes Kincaid, "was looking at something in the far distance, something horrifying coming toward him, and that he was screaming."[275]

Yet, as Kincaid is a writer who is famous for her sophisticated explorations of psychoanalytic themes, it is no surprise that she is able to maintain in her memoir a reflexive attitude towards her different emotions that Devon's dying stirred in her. As Butler has emphasized in a very Kristevian manner, the love felt for an abject is accompanied by aggression because this love is dragging the one who loves outside social reality, towards self-annihilation and abjection, to the realm where the object of love is placed. Thus, the aggression never arises only from the characteristics of an abject but also from narcissistic tendencies of the mourning subject, out of the need of this subject to vanquish the "object which, if loved, would spell destruction for the one who loves."[276] Accordingly, Kincaid is careful not at any point of her memoir to get completely carried away by her negative emotions towards Devon, although she brings these emotions to the fore in a very frank manner. Her writing rather goes back and forth between the confessions of love and denying the

[274] Kincaid 1998a, 55.

[275] Ibid., 179.

[276] Butler 1997, 27.

possibility of loving Devon altogether; however, in a way that points to the fact that it is not only the character of Devon here what is at stake but also the fragility of her own identity.

This pendulum motion only reaches its conclusion towards the end of the book through Kincaid's revelation of a secret which she found out after Devon had died. Kincaid writes how this secret was revealed to her through a surprising encounter which she experienced shortly after Devon's burial. This encounter happened in a book reading in Chicago where Kincaid ran into a woman whom she had met three years before in Antigua. Kincaid remembers how surprised she got as it turned out that this woman already knew about Devon's death. Kincaid was stunned because she had no idea that this woman even knew about the existence of her brother. Kincaid recalls that she then asked how this woman knew Devon and the woman begun to tell Kincaid things which Kincaid had not imagined. The woman told that she had been a lesbian woman living in Antigua where she became deeply sad about the scorn and derision heaped on homosexual men. Thus, she had opened up her house to these men and made it known that every Sunday men could come to her house to simply meet and be with each other without being afraid. Devon, said the woman, had been a frequent visitor to her house.

Kincaid writes how after this encounter she begun to reassess her image of Devon. Kincaid started to discover new sense in her memories and she begun to give new meaning to Devon's behavior. Particularly, Kincaid begun to understand Devon's behavior towards women, his constant attempts to have sex with them, even after he was diagnosed as HIV positive. What Kincaid previously thought to be nothing else but irresponsible behavior begun to unfold for Kincaid as Devon's desperate attempt to avoid losing his face for good. Kincaid remembered a girl in the hospital veranda who, when approached by Devon, distanced herself from him quickly, despite the fact that she had obviously known him well before. Kincaid thinks that this girl must have had surely heard the rumors. Kincaid also recalled Devon's unsuccessful flirting with the nurses who knew of his situation and which Devon also knew that they knew. Thus, thinks Kincaid, the scorn of these nurses must have been especially painful to him

> because in it his secret of not really wanting to seduce them, really wanting to seduce someone who was not at all like them, a man, became clear to him, was made plain to him, and so the doubleness of his life, which was something he could manage ordinarily, in a day-in, day-out situation, must have been erased in

> those moments, and perhaps he despaired that the walls separating the parts of his life had broken down, and that might have caused him much anxiety, and such a thing, the anxiety when it appeared on his face, would have seem to me, who knew nothing about his internal reality, as another kind of suffering, a suffering I might be able to relieve with medicine I had brought from the prosperous North; but I did not know then, I only know now.[277]

Kincaid then recalls how she understood the resemblance between her own and Devon's life. She realized how Devon was not that different from her after all. He was, similarly as Kincaid had been, someone who had to suppress his true self in the surroundings where he was born; a place called Antigua, where he could not express himself fully, as his life was overwhelmed by being scared of the scorn of the people he knew. Kincaid relates to this and writes that

> [h]is homosexuality is one thing, and my becoming a writer is another altogether, but this truth is not lost to me: I could not have become a writer while living among the people I knew best, I could not have become myself while living among the people I knew best.[278]

This is something that Kincaid knows for sure. In her memoir she tells us how when some time before she was sixteen her mother removed her from school, just before Kincaid was about to take a series of exams that probably would have led her to be educated at the university. Kincaid remembers this with bitterness as she thinks there was no real reason why she was removed. Her mother told her that her father was sick and Kincaid was needed at home to help. However, Kincaid is sure that had she remained in school "no one would have died […], no one would have eaten less."[279] Moreover, Kincaid sees that if her life had stayed on this path where her mother had set it, the path of no university education, Kincaid could not have helped her brother at all; she would not have had access to money to buy medicine which prolonged Devon's life. Actually, she thinks that she might have ended in the

[277] Kincaid 1998a, 164.

[278] Ibid., 162.

[279] Ibid., 74.

same position as Devon. Thus, Kincaid writes how she knows she will never forget Devon. She writes:

> I shall never forget him because his life is the one I did not have, the life that, for reasons I hope shall never be too clear to me, I avoided or escaped. Not his fate, for I too shall die, only his life, with its shadows dominating the brightness, its shadows eventually overtaking its brightness, so that in the end anyone wanting to know him would have to rely on that, shadows; and in the shadows of his life is a woman emerging from an audience in a bookstore in Chicago and telling me of secrets in his life as he lived it in the shadows.[280]

In addition to making the resemblance of her own life to Devon's clear, this comparison leads Kincaid also to see a seed for an alternative ending within Devon's story. As had happened to herself, for Devon this alternative ending might have become a reality if he would have lived his life in conditions were people like him were supported and protected. However, as this was not the case, Devon grew into a lifestyle of those who despised what he was deep inside and this led him to live his life in way that took him to an early grave. As Kincaid writes, "his life was like a bud that sets but, instead of opening into a flower, turns brown and falls off at your feet."[281]

This realization is painful. It is painful as it involves sadness that cannot be anymore downplayed. Kincaid recalls how she cried in Devon's funeral but why? She asks why, because, as she was thinking at the time, if "by some miracle Devon could be cured of his disease he would not change his ways; he would not become industrious; […] he would not become faithful to one man or woman."[282] Yet, there is no turning back anymore. Although nothing would have come out of Devon if he would have lived longer, his death is now felt by Kincaid as a loss that cannot be anymore forgotten as it points to the limits of Kincaid's own being; it points to the fate that could have easily also been Kincaid's fate if she would have not moved to

[280] Ibid., 176.

[281] Ibid., 163.

[282] Ibid., 195.

live in the US. Kincaid must go on by remembering this, as "the dead never die."[283] This statement, however, is not meant to be taken completely in a negative manner. On the contrary, as Kincaid writes in the end of her book by paying homage to her late father-in-law, she hopes that a remembrance of the dead can be also made to serve something. Through remembrance the past can come "alive again and again in different forms and other segments."[284] Notably, in Devon's case, the part to played is to act as a reminder of the fragility of our ability to live happily as ourselves; the uncertainty of finding the conditions where we can become ourselves. As Kincaid stated in an interview conducted shortly after the publication the book, this uncertainty is something that does not only bear relevance regarding hers or Devon's lives "but we all suffer that, or, I should say, we are all *vulnerable* to that."[285]

This choice of words emphasizes the connection between Kincaid's writing and Butler's thought even more. In fact, the role given to the remembrance of Devon by Kincaid is identical to the role which Butler has given to mourning for abjects in general: by pointing to the shared vulnerability of everyone, abject brings forward also subjects attachment to 'non-being', thus proclaiming an end for othering and consequently introducing a demand for equal distribution of conditions in which the shared precariousness can flourish.[286] As Sarah Brophy has noted, this is the political subtext of Kincaid's writing. In her analysis of *My Brother*, Brophy has maintained that by organizing the content of her story according to the conventions of melancholic writing Kincaid self-consciously guides the reader to shift attention from Devon's irresponsibility to the bigger picture; to "the social and economic conditions that have produced it."[287] As usual within melancholic literature in general, by gradually moving towards the loss of herself and her textual authority, Kincaid's text seduces the reader to move from a position of a simple addressee to that of an interpreter who is almost forced to join the effort to compensate for the failure of the narrator herself. In this way, as Ross Chambers has written, what is achieved is not that much this compensation but a shared condition with the narrator as the reader shifts away from a fixed identity of a simple addressee to that

[283] Ibid., 121.

[284] Ibid., 198.

[285] Kincaid 1998b. 14. Emphasis added.

[286] Butler 2004; Butler 2010.

[287] Brophy 2004, 174.

of an interpreter "whose identity is produced only as a function of *its* other, the text."[288] According to Chambers, this sharing of vulnerability is the source of the political value of melancholic literature. By making an appeal to the reader to understand the constructed and contingent nature of personal desires and social positions, the act of reading can make one reflect these positions within the prevailing system of power and within this system "shift desire from forms that enslave to forms that liberate."[289]

And yet, in the context of the global HIV/AIDS governance, the imposition of this type of political value over Devon's life is largely out of place. As we have already repeatedly pointed out, this has become particularly clear at present when even the well-meaning global recognitions of our shared precariousness have become inseparable from the creation of new inequalities and contributions to the already existing exclusions haunting the globally marginalized HIV positive people – life of whom the memory of Devon's short-lived life still in particular resonates with. There is no reason for us to fully reconstruct our earlier argument here but in relation to this political value attached to Devon's life by Kincaid it is fitting that we remind ourselves how, even when the focus has been solely on the access of the vulnerable populations of the Global South to the life-saving antiretroviral drug therapy (HAART), there has been something that has remained persistently beyond remedy. After all, as a result of the increased global attention and dissatisfaction over the unequal access to HAART in the past two decades, it is not that the globally marginalized people affected by HIV/AIDS have unambiguously become liberated but many marginalized individuals have only become actually even more excluded due to the indirect effects of the well-intentioned global HIV/AIDS policies. Moreover, this has not been the case only in some particular locations but even among the celebrated success stories of the Global South, in the countries such as Brazil, where the universal access to HAART has been operative already for a while yet those who have been the ones most in need of assistance from the start have also been the ones who have been reached most inadequately.[290]

Furthermore, we already noted earlier how Fassin has insightfully maintained that what is the aspect that has persistently remained beyond remedy is history. For

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[288] Chambers 1991, 17. Emphasis in original.

[289] Ibid., xvii.

[290] See especially Biehl 2007.

instance, with HAART it is impossible to remedy the series of historical injustices that many of those who have died had carried in their bodies, and many of those who still will die will carry in their bodies, as the pandemic has followed the fault lines of the past centuries of colonization and globalization. For the worse, although history is beyond remedy, it is not at all irrelevant for the effectiveness of the treatment but many times the decisive issue. This is due to the fact that in order to be effective HAART demands not only access to drugs but also adherence to treatments and attendance to regular check-ups where the side-effects are dealt with, patient's response to the drugs monitored and from time to time the drug cocktail altered as the virus in the course of time becomes resistant to certain drugs. All this is easier said than done. In the globally marginalized conditions, where the basic health infrastructure is lacking, what the successful attending to the therapy demands is what historically has been sought to take away from the people living in these conditions; namely, their ability to rise above them.[291]

Thus, as depressing as it might sound, in relation to HIV/AIDS pandemic it has recently become painstakingly clear that the emancipatory prospects of recognizing the shared but unequally distributed vulnerability are largely blocked. Particularly, when it comes to the roll out of HAART among the globally marginalized people, it has become clear that although we would now launch an even more massive campaign than the one we are witnessing today and aim to bring as fast as possible the global level of treatment into an equal level, before these equal conditions would have been created a great amount of globally marginalized people would have dubiously died in the process. Thus, the creation of these equal conditions would not be an act of liberation but a full realization of imprisonment in which those HIV positive people of the Global South who are not enjoying sufficient treatment would need to somehow find means to adapt to the demands of the contemporary pharmacological order or die. These people would be, as Biehl has poetically written,

> trapped between two possible destinies: dying of AIDS like the poor and marginalized do – that is, being animalized – and living pharmacologically into a

[291] Fassin 2007.

future, thereby letting the animal sleep and preventing it from consuming their flesh.[292]

From this it follows, then, that Devon cannot be unambiguously considered to be a catalyst for any unanimously positive HIV/AIDS-related project in Kincaid's sense. The figure of Devon that Kincaid has constructed rather points to the impossibility of us *even today* realizing a project that could fully bring everyone without injustice under the protection of the deployed pharmacological technologies. By being so excessively a victim of underprivileged conditions but by showing no potentiality or will for change, nor even an ability to recognize one's victimhood, Devon is someone who is more or less timelessly outside the scope of any such project that is conducted within the limits of any HIV/AIDS-related pharmacological technologies we have come to known so far. As a result, even if the treatment of HIV/AIDS has evolved since Devon's time, this figure nevertheless still today points to a form of being that can only be included to any such project as mostly excluded from the outset.

And yet, because of this extensive unsuitability of Devon to be a political figure in Kincaid's sense, we can use Kincaid's characterization of Devon to bring forward affirmative-biopolitical potentiality regarding the roll out of HAART among the globally marginalized people and also emphasize the existence of this potentiality more generally in relation to the current global response to HIV/AIDS. As Agamben has written, impotentiality and potentiality are not mutually exclusive. In order to not be simply actuality, potentiality must always retain its potential for also being impotential. In other words, as not to turn completely identical with actuality, potentiality must also be something that does not show its potential. In this way, as Agamben has emphasized, rather than being something because it is capable of being, potentiality is something because it has the capacity not to be: potentiality must save "itself in actuality."[293] Then, when this thought is taken to the level of individuals, Agamben maintains that one is potential not by solely having the power to do something or refuse something but more essentially by bearing a connection to one's own non-being which frees one from any definitive identity. According to

[292] Biehl 2007, 313–314.

[293] Agamben 1999a, 184.

Agamben, "[t]o be free is […] to be capable of one's own impotentiality, to be in relation to one's own privation."[294]

Consequently, we can maintain that Kincaid's narration of Devon actually does in the end underline political potentiality in relation to the social and economic conditions Devon was a victim of, yet in a completely different manner than Kincaid thought of. We can maintain that, by precisely being an unsuitable figure to be a political figure in Kincaid's sense, Devon actually emerges through Kincaid's writing as someone who retained his potentiality to transform his conditions as maximal. Hence, although on the basis of Kincaid's account it is hard to believe that Devon never even thought of behaving in a political manner in relation to his living conditions or the global governance efforts of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, on the basis of this same account Devon very well could have. From the perspective of the inability of Kincaid in the late modern era of HIV/AIDS to fully integrate Devon's life together with her plea for extending social opportunities and support to those who are lacking them, Devon emerges as someone who did not have his potentiality abducted by any development schemes or even the liberal-minded global response to HIV/AIDS that was beginning to intensify at the time when Devon died in 1996, a year when also UNAIDS was launched. Thus, he did not have his potentiality guided or captivated by these global schemes and responses but in this sense he was in principle *free* to decide over his own attitudes and actions in relation to the transformation of his living conditions.

Accordingly, Kincaid's recounting of Devon's life strengthens the argument we already made while studying Adalla's novel in the previous section. Kincaid's reminiscing of Devon's life amplifies the difference between the political pathways towards which liberal normativity and affirmative-biopolitical normativity push us regarding the liberation of the globally marginalized people hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Read from our perspective, Kincaid's recounting of Devon's life story emphasizes how it is, first of all, impossible to liberate all the globally marginalized people hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic even through the current way of globally addressing HIV/AIDS. For this, the liberal liberation that the current way of addressing the HIV/AIDS crisis advocates, simply continues to be too abstract in relation to the lives of the globally marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers – particularly the lives of those who are the most marginalized. From the perspective of Devon's

[294] Ibid., 183. Emphasis removed.

extensive vulnerability and powerlessness, we can maintain that when it comes to these most marginalized people, even the most intense form of liberation conducted within the limits set by liberalism is not liberation but rather an act of imprisonment that paradoxically only becomes more severe through the intensification of this liberation.

And yet, secondly, precisely because it is impossible to integrate Devon unambiguously together with Kincaid's plea for extending social opportunities and support to those who are lacking them, Devon's life story also alludes to an alternative political pathway. This alternative political pathways is the affirmative-biopolitical one which has as its starting point the exteriority where the failure of Kincaid to give Devon a positive political role in the end sends Devon. After all, as we in the above emphasized, by placing Devon to this position of exteriority Kincaid's writing eventually makes it possible for us to even connect Devon's life with the idea of political potentiality – despite Devon's almost overwhelming marginalization. In this way, Devon's life story ends up pointing to the fact that when we view the lives of the most marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers from the perspective of the relation these lives bear with their non-being, that is the fundamental unmasterability of their lives, the essential freedom of even these most marginalized sufferers can be affirmed here and now. As a result, the demand for transformation here, even more strongly than we were able to argue in the previous section only on the basis of Adalla's novel, moves from the lives of these marginalized individuals to the current governance of these lives. Insofar as we want to address the current HIV/AIDS crisis without leaving certain globally marginalized people behind, from our perspective here it becomes clear how this can only happen by us thoroughly attempting to transform the current global response to HIV/AIDS through the freedom that is already shared by these people. In this way, what gets emphasized is how even the most marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers are not doomed as abandonment or victims of the liberal immune deficient violence but how these individuals actually are, on the basis of their lives as such, already free from their abandonment or victimhood. What this means, then, is that it is this unconfinable potentiality of life, which the global response to HIV/AIDS should valorize whether within this response it is really considered important to affirm the fundamental freedom of *everyone*.

## 4.4 The Difference that Makes the Difference

In the context of his study of the politics of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, Fassin has written that critically studying the global politics of HIV/AIDS involves a risk of "giving in to either the pathos of denunciation or the exaltation of rebellion."[295] What Fassin means by this is that critical scholars of the global HIV/AIDS policies often either end up giving too much explanatory power to oppression or desperately try to romanticize this oppression by eventually turning into everyday forms of resistance and mundane tactics of the oppressed, after being left unsatisfied by the way how their analyses of the globally marginalized conditions point only to constraints rather than freedom. In a way that can be read as continuation of these Fassin's remarks, Claire Laurier Decoteau has well brought forward how going too far in either direction is equally problematical. On the first case, we are left with an impression that all hope has been bereft. On the second case, we do not acknowledge the fact that the currently hegemonic way of dealing with HIV/AIDS is premised on a form of government that bases its functioning on freedom. By leaning especially to the governmentality approach, Decoteau argues that it is by emphasizing the agency and freedom of individuals that the marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers eventually become one way or another blamed for their condition and their situation gets depoliticized. According to her, this emphasis makes it possible for the state and civil society "to relieve themselves of responsibility for these subjects, constituting a new form of exclusionary inclusion."[296]

Both Fassin and Decoteau are certainly right. In addition, they are both right when they maintain that instead of choosing either of these directions, we must attempt to stay somewhere in between of these extremes. For both, the correct way of doing critical analysis of the politics of HIV/AIDS is to account globally marginalized lives so that these lives can express some sort of agency, but in a way that does not work for making the people themselves responsible for their abandonment. According to both, the focus on marginalization must contribute to us perceiving a viable political way out of this marginalization and not just confirm the domination or the possibility for liberal self-expression. And yet, this correct diagnosis nevertheless does not lead either of these scholars out of trouble themselves. In the end, both Fassin and Decoteau conclude their works by leaving

[295] Fassin 2007, 224.

[296] Decoteau 2013, 148.

us half way between the promise that there could be a better tomorrow and the impossibility of us really spelling out how this better tomorrow could be realized without falling into the trap of advocating contemporary liberalism which brings salvation but only with a price that must be paid by the marginalized in particular. Fassin even ends his work by putting it plainly that since we do not currently know how to really proceed we are simply forced to live with the anxiety that results from this

> tension that exists between what is being protected and what is being abandoned, what is being fought for and what is given up for lost. In a world of inequality and violence, we can only be reassured on condition that we conceal from ourselves the price that must be paid for such reassurance.[297]

In the past two sections we have precisely attempted to get beyond this anxiety, without concealing the price that the HIV/AIDS-related liberation often comes with regarding the globally marginalized. On the one hand, along the lines of Fassin's and Decoteau's works, we have argued that there is no need to get overtly excited, although in general the situation of the people affected by HIV/AIDS has continuously improved in the recent years as the global response to HIV/AIDS has become more liberal. In these past two sections, we reasserted this particularly in relation to the US removal of HIV/AIDS-related travel restrictions, the role of gender, the increased involvement of civil society and the prospects of bringing everyone without injustice under the protection of the prevailing pharmacological technologies. In relation to these topics around which our readings of *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* and *My Brother* revolved, we emphasized that the formal liberation does not mean the abolition of questionable bordering, hierarchization and exclusion of the globally marginalized HIV positive people as such. On the contrary, insofar as this liberation is conducted along the limits set by liberal governance, dubious borders, hierarchies and exclusions continue to condition the general improvement of the situation of the people affected by HIV/AIDS. As a result, although the overall situation can improve, especially in relation to certain

[297] Fassin 2007, 272.

globally marginalized individuals detrimental borders, hierarchies and exclusions continue to remain as strong as ever.

On the other hand, however, we also brought forward how highlighting the persistent existence of these questionable borders, hierarchies and exclusions amidst the liberal response to HIV/AIDS does not have to be read tragically as the final truth of modern liberation – an impression that Decoteau, Fassin and many other critical scholars have in the end left us with. Instead, by investigating these liberal borders, hierarchies and exclusions from the perspective of life, we showed how it is actually possible to grasp even these sites of the HIV/AIDS-related liberal violence as sites which point to freedom that differs from liberal freedom. In fact, as we illustrated through our two aesthetic subjects, Njeri and Devon, who occupied central roles in *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* and *My Brother* respectively, it is possible to see these sites in particular as sites through which we can bring an idea of affirmative-biopolitical freedom into the context of the global HIV/AIDS relief. After all, as we elaborated through the failures of these two literary works to impose unambiguous liberal political identities on the lives of these two globally marginalized characters, even the globally marginalized lives that end up as targets/facilitators of the HIV/AIDS-related immune deficient form of violence as a result of their liberal liberation, do nevertheless allude to political potentiality which is not confinable within the abstractedness of liberal liberation that causes this violence.

Thus, when addressing the difficult situation of the globally marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers from the perspective of life, we importantly do not only end up here questioning liberalism as such but also begin to see politically affirmative freedom there where liberal thought does not recognize it. In this way, we are able here to not only theoretically or rather harmlessly criticize the contemporary global HIV/AIDS relief but also in practice advocate a viable political subjectivization and praxis that can oppose even the liberal immune deficient form of violence. After all, the liberal immunitary pathway and our affirmative-biopolitical pathway travel to different directions when it comes to normatively advocating the practical consequences that should follow from the two different ideas of freedom which lie at the beginning of these paths. As liberalism has a tendency to associate freedom exclusively with the liberal order that maintains and secures the freedom of individuals, insofar as these individuals are rational persons, the liberal HIV/AIDS response emphasizes empowerment and education of individual persons and the liberal transformation of their living conditions in order that these persons could be

made free – something that we in this chapter again run across in the contexts of Adalla's and Kincaid's works too. In short, then, the liberal response to HIV/AIDS precisely performs maneuvers that do bring salvation and liberation to some yet not without simultaneously unleashing the immune deficient form of violence against others.

From the affirmative-biopolitical perspective, however, this quasi-unavoidability of the violent course of the global HIV/AIDS governance is replaced by the viability to change this course. Because on the basis of life, freedom is revealed not to be a property of the liberal person who must be continuously produced, protected and maintained by the liberal order but an immanent condition of all living beings who dwell in the contingent human worlds, the political affirmation of this non-liberal freedom does not even indirectly advocate HIV/AIDS-related violence against anyone. This is due to the fact that on the basis of the political affirmation of this non-liberal freedom there does not arise any kind of need to bring abstractly conceptualized freedom to those who are currently detrimentally hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic because of their inability to affect their own lives. Instead, in contrast to forcing people within such contingent limits in the context of the global response to HIV/AIDS, the political affirmation of freedom which is understood on the basis of life categorically opposes this type of violent defending of contingent limits. As this freedom is nothing that we can manufacture or produce as such but precisely simply affirm or negate in the governmental world of HIV/AIDS, the basic rationale of the HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics that is based on this freedom does not consist from anything else than from our, or in fact *anyone's*, attempt to overcome and resist *all* contingent limitations that negate our possibilities within this world to valorize life's absolute unconfinable immanence.

And yet, it is not possible on the basis of life's immanent common-ness to express freedom in isolation from equality. As we already know, the norm of life that arises when life's fundamental common-ness makes a worldly appearance through our communication of life's unmasterability, simultaneously proclaims both freedom and equality. The norm of life points to the unnaturalness of all worldly imprisonments and hierarchies constructed in the name of fostering life and this makes it impossible for us to definitely separate freedom and equality from each other when we arrive at these ideas on the basis of life's common-ness. Thus, although we have in this chapter for the sake of analytical clarity focused on the question of freedom as separated from the one of equality, the idea of equality has actually been implicitly present within our analyses. In fact, if this would have not

been the case, and equality would have nothing to do with affirmative-biopolitical freedom, the idea of freedom that we have here brought forward would naturally only refer to freedom within hierarchy. Vice versa, when we will now move to our next chapter where we will concentrate on equality the situation will be the same. Although we will primarily focus on the difference that separates liberal equality of persons from the affirmative-biopolitical equality, freedom will nevertheless be implicitly present within our analyses. Similarly as freedom cannot be fully affirmed without equality, neither equality can be fully affirmed without freedom. Equality without freedom is simply equality within predetermined limits that are upheld by someone unequal who guards them.[298]

[298] Cf. Prozorov 2014a, 132–135.

# 5 THE EGALITARIAN ETHOS OF LIFE

## 5.1 The Equality of Persons

According to Paul Farmer, when we consider the highly unequal global patterns of suffering caused by infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, we realize that "[i]n a very real way, inequality itself constitutes our modern plague."[299] While the situation was still somewhat different over fifteen years ago when Farmer wrote the previous, at present the idea that inequality in all its different manifestations constitutes one of the most decisive terrains in which the global fight against HIV/AIDS will be won or lost has become a starting point of the global governance of HIV/AIDS. Especially since the dawn of the current millennium, the role which different inequalities play in determining who will be infected and who will be able to access treatment, care and support has become something that is constantly emphasized within this governance. What has been identified as necessary for the functionality of the global response to HIV/AIDS is that response is comprehensively sensitized to inequalities. Everyone within this response must be aware of inequalities in order that this response can work for the elimination of inequalities or at least maintain its proper functionality in the presence of inequalities. Without this sensitizing, it seen that the scope of intervention will remain severely limited and the intervention will unevenly expose especially the most marginalized communities and individuals to the unbearable disease burden. As it is stated in the latest UNAIDS strategy, still today it is essential that inequalities are taken into account when fighting against the pandemic, as "punitive laws, policies and practices continue to violate human rights, entrench gender inequality and maintain structural conditions that leave populations without access to HIV services."[300]

And yet, as we know, it has proven out to be extremely difficult to fully act against all different inequalities in this context. Despite that inequality has been globally recognized as one of the most significant factors that explains the uneven

[299] Farmer 1999, 15.

[300] UNAIDS 2015b, 37.

HIV/AIDS burden, in practice even the most egalitarian-minded HIV/AIDS policies, programs and projects have been frequently accompanied by paradoxical consequences, especially when it comes to the globally marginalized corners of our world. For example, in his study of the local level consequences of the global efforts to combat AIDS in the French West Africa, Vinh-Kim Nguyen conceptualizes the global response to HIV/AIDS as a triage technology of governance and illuminatingly writes how, in spite of the global attention given to inequalities, this triage

> produces physical exclusion, economic inequality, and even highly graduated biological differences within social groups. Differences in access to therapy have affected immune systems and viral resistance patterns. Subtle biological gradations have formed between individuals who have had access to more or better drugs and those who have had less. Bodies are infected by HIV that is now drug-resistant and are marked by toxic ARV drugs such as d4T that are shunned in wealthy countries. Triage is corrosive to social ties. It introduces mechanisms of selection that inadvertently pit people against one another.[301]

Among the critical analyses of the global HIV/AIDS governance, this is of course not an exceptional claim. Instead, among the critical studies that have been sensitive to the local level consequences of the global HIV/AIDS governance in the marginalized locations of our world, the demonstration of the unequal derivation of life changes in these locations has become a rule rather than an exception. In relation to virtually all dimensions of the current global response to HIV/AIDS, the critical studies have unveiled that in relation to the globally marginalized people this response has remained fundamentally inegalitarian, regardless of the current liberal-minded global public health ethos that emphasizes sensitivity towards different inequalities. As put plainly by Johanna Taylor Crane in her study of the interplay between HIV science, technology and global inequality, the current HIV/AIDS-related global health intervention persistently

[301] Nguyen 2010, 176–177.

> remains an arena shaped by power and inequality, in which the needs and voices of 'partner' institutions in the global South are often marginalized and opportunities remain stratified, despite the best intentions of all involved.[302]

However, taking the logical next step along the lines of this critique has proven out to be extremely difficult too. This logical next step is nicely articulated by Crane, when she concludes her work by stressing that the recognition of fundamentally unequal character of the current response

> should serve as a critique, but not a condemnation, of global health. It is only through confronting the ways in which global health values inequality that we can work towards building a more equal global health science.[303]

But how? How does the unveiling of the fundamentally inegalitarian nature of the response that emphasizes sensitivity towards different inequalities straightforwardly pave way to building equality? If the current inversion of the idea of equality into practical inequality really happens despite the best intentions of all involved, it seems that a simple call for more equality in this context is problematic. If there is no alternative idea of equality deployed alongside the critique of the current global response, than the one which this liberal-minded response has already promised but failed to deliver, the critique risks only contributing to the current perversion of equality.

We can accentuate this problem by again turning to Foucault's thought. As Foucault suggested, in relation to liberalism the principle of equality is never deployed in order to achieve equality as such but in order to manage inequality and thus secure the functioning of the rational economic interests of liberal individuals. According to Foucault, on the one hand, the liberal societies have a need for some kind of social policy in order to guarantee that everybody has a "relatively equal access to consumer goods."[304] On the other hand, within liberalism the constant

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[302] Crane 2013, 149.

[303] Ibid., 182.

[304] Foucault 2008, 142.

stimulation of individual economic interests increases friction between individuals and occasions of conflict will appear. This calls for evening out the "irregularities of behavior, nuisance caused by some to others, and so forth, calls for a judicial interventionism which has to operate as arbitration within the framework of the rules of the game."[305] Either way, equality operates as a governmental correlate in service for another correlate, freedom, and thus the liberal idea of equality primarily works for strengthening the desired functioning of liberal societies. Consequently, within liberalism equality comes to primarily mean two things. Firstly, the abstract equality of juridical persons. Secondly, the even enough distribution of practical inequality amongst these persons, who as a result of their practical inequality, combined with their hypothetical equal opportunity, have an interest to act according to liberal economic rationality. Thus, along these lines, Foucault writes that, regardless of the rhetoric used, in practice liberal government cannot have equality as its goal but this form of government "must let inequality function."[306]

Although the problem of equality has not received similar attention than the problem of freedom in the studies of liberal governance, certain Foucauldian scholars have built upon on the previous insights of Foucault when analyzing the welfare systems of the Western liberal democratic states.[307] In addition, recently these insights of Foucault have also provided inspiration for scholars analyzing global policies. For instance, in her excellent *The Biopolitics of Gender*, Jemima Repo has analyzed European Union's gender equality policy from the perspective opened by Foucault's thought. Repo has treated this policy as a prominent example of how gender equality has currently become a fundamental apparatus of liberal governance. Gender equality has become an apparatus for the measurement, regulation, and optimization of populations on a scale that can be termed 'global'. Repo has shown how this EU policy emerged as mean to reorganize women's work and personal lives in order to optimize their biological reproduction and productivity. Since the early 1990s, in the context of Europe's declining fertility and ageing, the expectation has been that through the expansion of gender equality women could increasingly replace the retiring male workforce by joining the labor market whilst at the same time reproducing the next generation of wage-earners.

[305] Ibid., 175.

[306] Ibid., 143.

[307] See e.g. Dean 1999; Miller & Rose 2008; Brown 2015.

In this sense, Repo maintains that gender has been deployed in a similar fashion than sexuality was in the nineteenth century and equality in this context has come to simply mean "the ability of both men and women to have the same degree of freedom of choice about decisions and taking risks with their lifestyles and livehoods according to their interests."[308]

The above well emphasizes how important it is that equality is detached from its current liberal abduction in order that equality really becomes thinkable in the contemporary global governance atmosphere that is impregnated by liberal thinking. Accordingly, in this chapter we shall attempt to do precisely this. As we did in the previous chapter, we will in this chapter again concentrate on a set of literary works and with the help of these works bring our model of affirmative biopolitics in contact with the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS. These literary works are again works, which on top of touching upon the topics of HIV/AIDS and the bodily finitude of the globally marginalized sufferers, also feature characters that desire freedom and equality more extensively than the socio-political orders of their literary worlds allow for. However, in contrast to the previous chapter, this time our focus will be more on equality than freedom. And yet, this difference does not alter the fact that the basic idea which again drives our study of literary works in this chapter is not the dismissing of any of the critical insights already made in relation to equality or the current global governance atmosphere but precisely the valorization of these insights while simultaneously adding something new on top of these insights. As a result, while analyzing our selected literary works in this chapter, we will be moving in a similar fashion than in the previous chapter on the interface between the marginalized lives found in these literary works, the governmental world of HIV/AIDS and the tradition of critical thought. We are interested in all kinds of ways how in relation to the governmental world of HIV/AIDS, the marginalized literary lives and the liberal and critical ideas over the general improvement of the situation of the marginalized HIV/AIDS suffers clash in a way that enables us to continue to valorize the critical insights, and the spirit of the critical research tradition in general, while nevertheless also making viable an alternative account of equality that helps us to grasp how the current unsatisfying situation can be transformed.

[308] Repo 2015, 154.

The similarity between the designs of the current and the preceding chapters, however, does not mean that the two literary works which we will concentrate on in this chapter would be identical with the ones analyzed in the previous chapter. Instead, although the two works which we will focus on in this chapter also revolve around the theme of death, the ultimate marker of our bodily finitude, this time the theme relates more to the collective dimension of life than was the case in the previous chapter. The two literary works which we will analyze in this chapter, *The Last Plague* by Meja Mwangi and *Dream of Ding Village* by Yan Lianke, both tell us a story about the prospects of living in a marginalized community that is exposed to the unbearable burden of HIV/AIDS due to the inequality prevalent within these communities. Both novels try to narratively provide living in these communities a possibility to continue, despite the fact that life in either case looks destined to disappear. In neither case, however, life completely withers away, leaving only destruction. Consequently, both of these works deploy a type of disaster or apocalyptic narrative which politics, as Mary Manjikian has stated, stems from the fact that the story eventually provides an emancipatory space "where the ground is cleared and life (and its institutions) can begin anew."[309]

And yet, as we will see, in neither case is the closure of the story thoroughly emancipatory. When the attention is paid to the relationship between the different lives depicted in these stories and the type of narrative deployed, it becomes clear that in these novels the deployed narrative does not in the end emancipate all life. In both cases, although a quasi-emancipating closure is provided, not all life is properly emancipated through the selected manner. In fact, in relation to both of these literary works, in order that the crisis situation can be solved in the selected manner, there remains something in the depicted lives that must be suppressed. In the case of *The Last Plague* and *Dream of Ding Village* both, this suppression concerns the inability of the deployed emancipatory narrative to fully master pain, death and the fear of the HIV/AIDS sufferers. In *The Last Plague*, although a salvific communal transformation eventually happens and the new regime more capable of responding to the threat of HIV/AIDS takes over with the help of the international donors, it is still the channeling of pain and death towards those who remain outside of the new communal organization that grounds the power of the new regime. Even though the new regime does not anymore use the infliction of pain and the fear of death explicitly, unlike the old regime did, the new regime still cannot translate the

[309] Manjikian 2012, 134.

HIV/AIDS-related pain and the fear of death unambiguously into particular interests that it could unproblematically respond to. In this way, the story can be read as thoroughly emancipatory only on the basis that this problem of translation is forgotten. Regarding *Dream of Ding Village*, the situation is largely the same. The new order eventually established in *Dream of Ding Village* also looks thoroughly emancipatory only on the condition that we view this order in abstract terms without taking into account pain and the fear of death arising from the unmasterable bodily dimension of the HIV/AIDS sufferers. Thus, also in the case of *Dream of Ding Village*, when we look at the deployed emancipatory narrative from the perspective of this suppression, the proposed solution to the crisis remains a violent attempt to impose hierarchical order over life which from the perspective of justly overcoming the HIV/AIDS crisis is destined to eventually fail.

Along these lines, similarly as in the previous chapter, what will lie at the center of our reading of these two literary works is those lives that point to something more than is eventually fully mastered by these works. Not all life that in these literary works revolves around the two depicted globally marginalized communities is brought properly inside the representational realm by the authors of these works as the salvific narratives deployed by the authors can be questioned. Although both of these communities are written anew during these literary works in order to provide an emancipatory space where the ground is cleared and life in these communities can flourish without HIV/AIDS-related inequality, it still remains possible for us to maintain that these new literary organizations of these communities do not unambiguously accomplish what they are meant to accomplish. On the basis of the new communal organizations, there does not unambiguously emerge increased potential for the continuation of all life within them. In both cases, not all the roles that these new organizations impose onto the people of these communities can be considered salvific. Not all life within these communities can be without difficulties considered to comply with the overall salvific idea imposed on them and thus certain characters of these novels are actually aesthetic subjects in relation to the deployed emancipatory narrative.

The unmasterability of the lives of these characters will again prove out to be useful regarding our politicization of the current global response to HIV/AIDS. After all, in addition to pointing out the possibility to internally critique their narratives, our reading of these two novels also emphasizes how in relation to the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS, the endeavor to abstractly emancipate or save lives in an equal manner through the current functioning of this

world is intertwined with problematic procedures. Similarly as in relation to the salvific narratives deployed by these novels, also in relation to the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS, the lives of our aesthetic subjects can only be made to match with the current ideas deployed within the global governance of HIV/AIDS by abstractly transfiguring these lives and problematically suppressing something concrete in them. Thus, the lives of our aesthetic subjects can only be made to match with the current ideas deployed within this governance by deploying liberal immune deficient form of violence. The lives of these subjects can only be considered unproblematically savable through a form of forgetting and exclusion that is conducted on the basis of a violent abstraction. And yet, as from the perspective of our aesthetic subjects there is nothing necessary in this kind of violent abstraction of these lives, there is nothing necessary either in this type of forgetting and exclusion of these lives. On the contrary, from the perspective of these lives, this is anything but necessary. On the basis of these lives, there exists nothing that makes it necessary that these lives must be emancipated or saved with the help of liberal abstractions.

As a result, by reading these works along the above lines, we do not have to settle for simply confirming how the global liberal governance of HIV/AIDS, despite its assurances to the contrary, frequently ends up perverting equality when it comes to the most marginalized people affected by HIV/AIDS. Instead, in contrast to solely showing how equality valorized by the global response to HIV/AIDS is not properly equality when it comes to truly transforming the unequal living conditions of the globally marginalized people, the unmasterability of life communicated by these literary works also enables us to open space for us to introduce into this context an idea of affirmative-biopolitical equality; namely, the realization of the fundamental senselessness of all destructive worldly hierarchies constructed on the basis of fostering life – a realization that is driven by life's radically immanent common-ness. In this way, our reading of these two literary works will not only amplify the questionability of the liberal treatment of the globally marginalized people but also help us to affirmatively politicize the current global response to HIV/AIDS even more intensively than we did in the previous chapter. Through our introduction of an idea of affirmative-biopolitical idea of equality into this context, we will be able to eventually fully confirm the possibility for HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics which on the basis of affirmative-biopolitical ideas of freedom *and* equality holds viable potential to respond even to the problem of the liberal immune deficient form of violence.

As was the case in the previous chapter, we will in a more detailed way return to the difference that emerges between our idea of affirmative biopolitics and the current liberal management of this disease in the last section of this chapter. However, before this we will present our analyses of *The Last Plague* and *Dream of Ding Village*. Firstly, we will concentrate on *The Last Plague* and read the narrative salvation of the novel's featured marginalized community by paying attention to the resonances that the storyline of the novel bears with the critical studies which have commented on similar scenarios. On the basis of these resonances, we will highlight how Mwangi's emancipatory narrative can be questioned in a way that enables us to highlight the difference of pursuing liberal equality and acting according to the idea of affirmative-biopolitical equality in the context of the global HIV/AIDS relief. Secondly, we will strengthen our argument by turning to *Dream of Ding Village*. We will similarly than in the case of *The Last Plague*, read the emancipatory narrative of *Dream of Ding Village* through the resonances that the storyline of the novel bears with the critical studies which have commented on similar scenarios. By paying attention to these resonances we will amplify the separation between the ideas of liberal equality and affirmative-biopolitical equality in the context of the global response to HIV/AIDS. With the help of *Dream of Ding Village* we will continue largely from where *The Last Plague* left us and emphasize how affirmative biopolitics is the only way through which equality in the current era of HIV/AIDS can be politically fully affirmed. We will show this by expanding our politicization of HIV/AIDS-related equality to cover those issues which revolve around the roll out of the antiretroviral therapy among the globally marginalized. Thus, our reading of *Dream of Ding Village* in this chapter, very much alike our reading of *My Brother* in the previous chapter, complements our argument by enabling us to cover an important dimension of the current HIV/AIDS crisis which our first analysis of the chapter did not really focus on.

## 5.2 How to Cut the King's Belly Open?

*The Last Plague*, a novel by an acclaimed Kenyan writer Meja Mwangi, is a story about the inhabitants of a fictional, yet suitably named, village: Crossroads. In the beginning of the novel, this marginalized village is on a verge of disappearance due to the ignorance and stubbornness of its population in the matters of sexual health. As a result, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is in the beginning of the story causing death rates in Crossroads to the extent that there is even an institutionalized 'funeral hour' run by the Church of Crossroads. The funeral hour gathers the funerals to be held in

a compact cluster and works in a way that "[a]s one casket was carried away for burial, another one was carried forward and the ritual repeated over and over; the whole process resembling a production line."[310]

As the story proceeds, we soon learn that the fundamental problem in Crossroads is the authority of its men. The life in Crossroads is regulated by men "with beer-bloated stomachs and overblown egos; and shivered testicles that were of no use to anyone."[311] This is at least what Janet, one of the main protagonists of the book, thinks when she persistently tries to talk sense to these men. Yet, especially the most powerful men of the village, Chief Chupa and the village herbalist, diviner, fortune-teller, witchdoctor and chief circumciser Kata Kataa, prove out to be exceptionally hardheaded and desperately hold on to their power. They persistently do this, despite that their power is precisely enabled by masculine attitudes and traditional practices which are actually the main reasons behind the decay of Crossroads in the face of AIDS – "the greatest confounder Crossroads had ever known."[312]

In this way, the picture that the novel paints is familiar from many framings of sub-Saharan HIV/AIDS epidemic. In Crossroads, as it is seen to be the case in many places in sub-Saharan Africa, it is the maintenance of the unequal distribution of power between men and women which primary drives HIV/AIDS. As a result, men are able to, and even socially and culturally demanded to, use women for their own pleasure with a little thought of consequences. The communities are victims of this inappropriate behavior as the virus claims lives, disintegrates communities, and as it is stated in the novel, causes "mayhem and anarchy in all abodes of hope."[313] When following this scenario, then, as it is done by Mwangi in this novel, there is no doubt that if something is to be done it is the gendered nature of the crisis that need to be addressed because, as put in a global level document which we have already quoted earlier, "at its heart, this is a crisis of gender inequality, with women less able than men to exercise control over their bodies and lives."[314]

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[310] Mwangi 2000, 100.

[311] Ibid., 43.

[312] Ibid., 58.

[313] Ibid., 58.

[314] UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM 2004, 7.

In Crossroads, however, the scenario is complicated by the fact that there is no one to do this addressing except Janet. It is Janet, as an officer of the Government's Family Life Education Programme, who has taken the seemingly hopeless task of fighting against tradition and male dominance. This is a task which for the most part of the novel looks doomed to failure as Janet is not even helped by any of the other female Crossroadians, who rather comply to the norms of this community than get themselves into trouble. Eventually, Janet is only able to drag into her businesses couple roguish characters: Frank, a wrongly diagnosed HIV positive young man who has returned to Crossroads to die; Janet's suddenly returning long lost runaway husband Broker, who now has AIDS; mysterious Uncle Mark; and the clever youngster Big Youth. Along with Janet herself, these characters seem to be caricatures of different virtues, such as courage, moral, business acumen, wisdom and youthful wit. Little by little, all these characters become more or less directly involved with Janet's job and in different ways they all try to help her to educate the people of Crossroads and persuade these people to use condoms which Janet freely distributes – all this more or less recalling the prevalent enthusiasm over the integration of different voices and perspectives into HIV/AIDS governance and the establishment comprehensive public-private partnerships.

And yet, the stubborn resistance of Crossroads holds. Although Janet and the bunch try all kinds of orthodox and unorthodox methods, Chief Chupa, Kata Kataa and their supporters stay strong. Not even the pleas made to the Church elders or to the teachers of the local school seem to make any difference. Rather than wanting to get involved, these parties are more concerned in maintaining their own prestige and in avoiding the risk of stepping onto someone's toes. The story really goes around in circles as it depicts the ways in which tradition, authority, religious fatalism and other reactionary positions clash with Janet's refusal to accept that the people of Crossroads "have chosen death over change."[315]

The situation only begins to change when the so-called 'North-South people' suddenly arrive to Crossroads without much notice. These are people who really are responsible for enabling Janet's work by being its main donors, and now they have come to have a look at Janet's 'achievements'. There is failure written all over this encounter as the situation in Crossroads at this point of the story still remains largely the same as at the beginning of the novel. Yet, in the end everything works out fine.

[315] Mwangi 2000, 119.

This is mainly due to Broker's ability to take control of the situation and tell these people what they want to hear by elegantly and confidently providing them a handful of "blatant lies."[316] Not everyone though is happy of Broker's knowledge of what can be termed as 'development speech'[317], a form of speech which is readily understood by the international donors and other people working in development because it is done by using their terms. Chief Chuba, who has come to watch the encounter with his henchmen in hope of alms and in order to oversee that his power is not threatened, gets worried that Broker might "usurp his throne."[318] After all, as Achille Mbembe, in his accurate depiction of African political reality, has written, although the rule of an African autocrat seems limitless on the basis of its capability to brutality and infinite kinds of punishments, there is that other brute force, the one that has made him lackey of a foreign power, to which "he has, in fact, to account."[319]

Nevertheless, despite that Chief Chuba is worried about the direction where things are heading, he cannot fully grasp the big picture. As the North-South people switch up a gear regarding their support for Janet's work and send out a team to carry out HIV tests in order to conduct a population survey, Chief is ready with his gang of crowd busters to arrest anyone found making political speeches. These men, however, hast away after being eventually convinced that all this only has "to do with Janet and her plague."[320] This underestimation proves out to be costly. Although the results of the tests are terrifying for many, they are a relief for some. Moreover, these result provide a sense of direction for Crossroads as people come to realize the present state of their community and also see some hope in the midst of it all. This is like a divine revelation and it makes even the simple tea house owner Mzee Musa "to wonder if it had anything at all to do with Armageddon and the prophecy that he and Uncle Mark talked endlessly about."[321]

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[316] Ibid., 375.

[317] See e.g. Tvedt 1998.

[318] Mwangi 2000, 380.

[319] Mbembe 2001, 163.

[320] Mwangi 2000, 390.

[321] Ibid., 421.

The consequences of the new buzz, however, quickly exceed the realm of the spiritual. As a result of the increased attention, there begin to be other women besides Janet who start to question and refuse their subordinate positions. Most notably, Janet's sister Julia Kataa, wife of the notorious Kata Kataa, founds inner strength to talk sense to this guardian of tradition and threatens to leave him if he does not consider protecting himself, her, and all his other wives from the risks posed by polygamy. In addition, despite of his constantly worsening health, Broker is also inspired by the positive signs in the community and is able to finish the building projects he has started. As a result, soon Crossroads has new orphanage and reconstructed petrol station ready for a reopening. At this point of the book the omniscient narrator of the story tells us that "the wheel that Janet had set in motion, with her grand ideas about change and community service, was running full steam ahead."[322]

In the end, even Broker's death does not interrupt this motion. Despite Broker's death, there is a sense of relief and community resurrection present at the end of the novel. In fact, Broker's funeral, which ends the book, can be read as symbolizing the right kind of communal spirit which is needed to effectively fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Everyone shows up to the funeral, including Chief Chupa who has come "to offer sympathy to Janet and her Grandmother and to confirm that his job was secure, now that the only threat to his unassailable authority as chief of Crossroads was, indeed, over."[323] And yet, regardless of this seeming self-certitude, it seems that Chief has actually lost something essential for the maintenance of his power; namely, his belly.

Earlier on in the novel, after all, Chief Chupa was always depicted through the ceremonial and symbolic dimensions of his power, such as his helmet, his clothes, and other status symbols, the herd of henchmen who seemed to entourage him everywhere, and most importantly his belly, which was in front of him in every movement and turn: "his beer stomach [which] preceded him."[324] As ridiculous as these things are, it has been repeatedly established that these are things that intimately go hand in hand with authority in African politics. African political authorities usually cannot conduct population surveys, arrange large-scale HIV

[322] Ibid., 420.

[323] Ibid., 446.

[324] Ibid., 80.

testing, provide systematized health counseling, etc. Their power does not lie in the subtle biopolitical fostering of lives. Instead, their power is upheld in much more obvious and brute fashion. As the presence of Chief Chuba still earlier in the novel proclaimed, their power is upheld by the constant reminding of their ability to inflict pain on their enemies and, if you obey them, in their allowance to let you eat and drink from their table, as surely they must be eating and drinking well because of their big bellies. In other words, it is the appearance which matters even to the extent that the most famous work of African politics is titled: *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, the recently re-published classic written by Jean-François Bayart.[325]

Thus, along these lines we can argue that without the presentation of any insignia, Chief Chuba can anymore be only an emperor without his clothes. Symptomatic to this, is the realization of Pastor Bat, one of the most reactionary Crossroadians, who in Broker's funeral becomes aware how the things would be conducted differently from now on, and not for the pastor's benefit:

> "Janet will take care of everything," Frank said to the worried pastor. "She knows what to do."
>
> The Pastor sighed and wiped sweat from his forehead, looking more bereaved than Janet herself.[326]

Through this portrayal of the gradual disappearance of Chief Chuba's authority and the transference of this authority to the knowledge which Janet possesses, the novel can, on the one hand, be read as a kind of text book example of the liberal salvational vision which is prevalent in the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS. Supporting and building partnerships with local alliances, networks and other type of civil society organizations is seen as the most effective way to supersede those local authorities who are seen to hinder the global response to the pandemic. These alliances, networks and organization are considered to be the front line of the global efforts to transform different localities into more sustainable ones in relation to the pandemic. They are the catalysts of the transformation and, when

[325] See Bayart 2009.

[326] Mwangi 2000, 448.

their needs are responded adequately through the global governance networks, the passion, persistence and insights of these actors can induce "even the most reluctant leaders to act and be accountable for their commitments on HIV."[327]

*The Last Plague*, however, can without any dissensus only *almost* be read as this kind of text book example of the liberal salvational vision. In fact, the last sentences of the book even imply that there is another possibility for a different kind of reading. In these last sentences Mzee Musa, while having a last glimpse of Broker's burial mound, recalls the legend which was also presented in the beginning of the novel:

> Where there was one today, there would be two tomorrow. Two would become four and four would become eight. They would mutate and multiply and turn into monsters. Monsters that craved human life; monsters that feasted on men's tormented souls and thrived and grew as they gnawed away till they had eaten up entire homesteads. Till the last of the homesteaders had died and been quickly buried by his neighbours. Only then did the ferocious mounds, their number complete, cease.[328]

The effect of these words is even amplified by the fact that, when Musa recalls these words, it is not only Musa who shudders but also the wise Uncle Mark, "he who had travelled too long and too far to believe in spirits and things."[329]

Accordingly, what the repetitious presentation of these words can be understood to imply is that, although much has changed in Crossroads, there might be something that has not. Despite the novel's depiction of a communal change, there may remain something unchanged which ends up haunting the story: something to which the people of Crossroads continue to be exposed, something that has not been fully settled by the novel, something that despite of its absence

[327] UNAIDS 2011, 5.

[328] Mwangi 2000, 449.

[329] Ibid., 449.

continues to be part of the current organization of Crossroads in its 'spectral' form, as Derrida would put it here.[330]

When the novel is re-read from this perspective, this sense of something that is consistently present in the story but which does not really bend according to its salvational vision indeed gets stronger. The sense of this something is especially felt, when the ending of the novel is contrasted to those pages where the plight of Crossroadian women is described and reflected: "women who, it seemed, were born to suffer and die having experienced no joy at all in their short lives."[331] On these early pages of the novel, most of these women behave as they would be under a lethal hypnosis. For instance, at one very illustrative point in the book, Julia Kataa speaks to Janet about the importance of respecting the custom, even though the custom is likely to make Julia suffer and even take her to an early grave. In this particular case, Kata Kataa is about to inherit the HIV positive wife of his brother who died from AIDS but Julia still insists on following the custom as she feels that Kata Kataa should now take care of his brother's widow and family. As Julia states, when she tries to convince Janet on the necessity of this polygamous arrangement, "we depend on our men. We are not prostitutes."[332]

In this way, regardless of all the pain and suffering that the Crossroadian women have to bear, there exists for the most parts of the story a strong disbelief that something could be really done otherwise. There does not seem to exist an alternative path which Crossroadian women could take, even if they would want to. This is even recognized by Janet who most strongly feels the current situation to be intolerable but who cannot either point any definitive way out of it. She can criticize the prevalent practices of her community, insofar as people are exposed to pain, suffering and death because of them, but she cannot really offer much in return if these practices were to be changed. When Janet is asked by Frank early on in the novel what does she really want, Janet is only able to answer in very abstract terms that she wants "some rationality, a sense of reality."[333] She wants another reality:

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[330] See especially Derrida 1994.

[331] Mwangi 2000, 76.

[332] Ibid., 57.

[333] Ibid., 95.

“she wanted to wake up from it; wake up among people who cared about life and cared for one another.”[334]

Later on in the story, this same question is repeated to Janet. This time it is the North-South people who ask the question in order to help Janet in her work after Broker has convinced them on her expertise. The answer to the question, however, does not come any easier this time. After a long ponder, Janet decides that she would like to know how many people in Crossroads are infected as she feels this would give her work “direction and purpose, give it a new lease of life.”[335] As we already know, this is something that ends up happening in the book. Yet, when the book is re-read from the perspective of its last sentences, it is noteworthy that from this moment on the descriptions of pain and suffering to which especially the Crossroads women are exposed also vanish from the story. After this moment, pain is replaced by hope; a replacement that is maybe conducted under the belief which Janet vocalizes earlier in the novel: “pain and sorrow diminish in significance where hope is in abundance.”[336]

However, although hope can naturally make pain easier to cope with, hope cannot diminish pain's significance. This is due to the fact that pain does not have any significance of its own, as we have already established earlier. After all, as we remember from earlier, according to Elaine Scarry's classic account, “pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.”[337] Thus, even though pain cannot have any significance of its own, this does not mean that there is a doubt that pain is very much real when encountered – it is so real that it transcends the world of words. In fact, from this break stems the usefulness of pain for various political authorities, such as the authority of Chief Chuba. This break makes it possible to use pain to give certainty to all kinds of fictional ideas. If pain increases and decreases according to the demands of an authority, this makes the otherwise fictional authority to feel

[334] Ibid., 96.

[335] Ibid., 313.

[336] Ibid., 97.

[337] Scarry 1985, 4.

very real. In this way, the material factualness of the human body can be borrowed to lend a fictional construct "the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty'."[338]

Thus, despite that the pain of Janet and other Crossroadian women characterizes *The Last Plague* to the extent that the story largely revolves around the intolerableness of this bodily experience, it is not that the novel fully textually masters this pain. Even though the novel eventually tries to bypass this problem by covering this pain with a hopeful vision, we can argue that this does not free Crossroadian women from pain but only hides the operative basis of this vision from the visible surface of the text. From this perspective, although not anymore acknowledged, it is still pain and suffering which continues ground the new communal organization of Crossroads. As this new communal organization does not simply wipe away the HIV/AIDS-related pain, suffering and dying once and for all, but is only able to more adequately address the HIV/AIDS crisis than the old regime, for those who do not immediately find the courage, who are somehow prevented or who otherwise just cannot keep up with this wheel of change, there is not that much new offered by this story except a demand to join this wheel of change. Accordingly, what this also means that the people who are not able to fully join the wheel of change will be systematically marked by pain, suffering and dying to a greater extent than those who immediately benefit from the new communal organization. In this way, the old and new regime turn out to be not completely different. Also, the new one acquires certainty and realness by carving itself to materiality with the help of pain, suffering and dying because attaching oneself to this new regime will mean less pain or suffering and reduced risk of dying than being left, or voluntarily leaving oneself, outside of it. In fact, from this perspective the thing that the new regime does differently is that it conceals its material basis better than the old regime. As Scarry would have it, the new regime under the guise of its motive "claims pain's attributes as its own and disclaims the pain itself."[339] The new regime outsources the pain on which it ultimately continues to base its operationality and seeming necessity.

And yet, in addition to internally critiquing itself, *The Last Plague*, when read along the above lines, also helps us to highlight the difference that lies between the liberal equality and affirmative-biopolitical equality in the context of the global

[338] Ibid., 14.

[339] Ibid., 56–57.

HIV/AIDS governance. We can bring this difference forward by making two points. Firstly, despite of the unsatisfactory ending of the novel, Janet's original fight against the Chief's regime can still be very well understood as genuine expression of universal equality which was driven by a contact made with the political dimension of one's body. After all, what was originally driving Janet's fight was simply the alienation brought by her own and other Crossroadian women's experiences of pain, suffering and dying that Chief's regime and the Crossroadian husbands were largely responsible for but could not anymore in the era of HIV/AIDS properly control. Thus, Janet's fight was driven by the realization of the fundamental wrongness of the old hierarchies of Crossroads which was foregrounded by the fact that the mechanisms that enabled the persistence of these hierarchies had turned into senseless pain inflection and killing mechanisms that were not anymore fully in service of anyone. In this way, Janet's alienation that Mwangi's writing brings forward in particular reminds us of a Lyotardian *differend*, something that cannot be set right or properly recognized within the prevalent order in its own terms.[340] As Rancière writes by largely politically continuing along these lines set by Lyotard's thought, the only way in this kind of situation to express one's alienation is to translate this alienation into a demand for transformation of the prevalent order. In this kind of situation, one's alienation can only be faithfully expressed by maintaining that the prevalent order is fundamentally wrong on the basis of its neglection of the equality of participation – on the basis of the order's groundless reduction of someone or something into a part that is clearly not a proper part.[341]

Secondly, however, it is noteworthy how from the depiction of the new communal organization of Crossroads this type of genuine expression of universal equality is lacking. As we already saw, what is only present at the end of the book is more capable but still a particular way of addressing the burden caused by HIV/AIDS, addressing which must indirectly rely on force. This is still a particular organization of this community which was first sketched through the 'blatant lies' of Broker, and then with the support of the North-South people carved into materiality. Furthermore, as these 'lies' where based on the already existing conceptualizations and perceptions of the North-South people, what really took place when Broker told these 'lies' was occupation of an already existing subject position and using the space provided by this position to convince the North-South people to mobilize

[340] See Lyotard 1988.

[341] Rancière 1999.

more of their resources for the benefit of Crossroads and not for the benefit of some other place. Thus, what was done was that, although the decisive blow to Chief's rule was given, Crossroads was also firmly integrated into a global power hierarchy. Crossroads was integrated into a structure of global liberal inequality that characterizes the contemporary world, in spite of the growing number of assurances given that all lives have the same value and everyone's voice should count. In other words, Crossroads was pushed towards what Alain Badiou calls 'democratic materialism': the currently hegemonic political position which paradoxically, by presupposing abstractly that everything is equal, actually perverts equality in practice. As Badiou explains:

> the contemporary consensus, in recognizing the plurality of languages, presupposes their juridical equality. Hence, the assimilation of humanity to animality culminates in the identification of the human animal with the diversity of its sub-species and the democratic rights that inhere in this diversity. […] Communities and cultures, colours and pigments, religions and clergies, uses and customs, disparate sexualities, public intimacies and the publicity of the intimate: everything and everyone deserves to be recognized and protected by the law.[342]

And yet, this 'liberal equality' is far from being truly universal. Badiou continues by noting that anything that does not share its premise, that there exists nothing else but directly perceptible quasi-immanent 'bodies and languages' of the same value, cannot benefit from this equality: "A language that aims to regulate all other languages and to govern all bodies will be called dictatorial and totalitarian."[343] Eventually, in a one way or another, as Badiou writes, "[b]odies will have to pay for their excesses of language."[344] And, as we already know, bodies will indeed have to pay, for example, of not complying with the blatant lies of Broker, the abstract conceptualizations and perceptions of the North-South people, the liberal juridical fictions that lie far away from the genuinely immanent materiality of the bodies of the globally marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers. These are bodies which in particular

[342] Badiou 2009, 2.

[343] Ibid., 2.

[344] Ibid., 3.

as a result of their excess of language do currently become targets of the liberal immune deficient form of violence.

## 5.3 From Autoimmunity to Immune Deficiency

In this section we will amplify the difference that lies between liberal equality and affirmative-biopolitical equality in the context of HIV/AIDS. We will do this in this section by expanding our politicization of the HIV/AIDS-related questions of equality to cover also the problematics that currently characterize the roll out of antiretroviral drugs among the globally marginalized. Through this expansion we will emphasize how affirmative biopolitics really is the only one way how the problem of the liberal immune deficient form of violence can be addressed when the aim is to push the current global response to HIV/AIDS towards equality. We will do this expansion in this section by concentrating on Yan Lianke's *Dream of Ding Village*. As we will soon find out, this novel tells us a very similar story than *The Last Plague*, yet only from a slightly different perspective. This different perspective of Yan's writing results from the fact that *Dream of Ding Village* roughly starts from the spot where *The Last Plague* ended. *Dream of Ding Village* takes place in China and the novel is a story about the deadly paradoxes and complexities attached to the new liberal life line given to a rural village, called Ding Village, which earlier was on the verge of disappearance because of its backwardness. This new life line, however, is a rather unconventional one. In order to join the progress of the rest of the country, the villagers are in the novel handed an opportunity to participate into the blood economy and sell their blood. In a way that recalls the Chinese government's currently increasing experiments of governing the Chinese population through liberal market-oriented means, the governmental rationale that in Yan's novel runs in the background is that through this new market opportunity the villagers can acquire a new level of income which otherwise would be out of their reach, and thus overcome their backwardness.[345]

In fact, if this sounds familiar, this is because the novel is based on what really happened in China, especially in the central province called Henan, at the verge of the current millennium. In Henan, in particular, a large-scale commodification of blood in 1990s caused high rates of HIV infections among the area's farmers and

[345] On the liberal biopolitical experiments of China in general, see especially Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005.

peasants. This was due to the uncontrolled reuse of needles and other blood collection equipment, as well as pooling the remaining blood back into donors after the desired elements had been filtered out of it – a questionable practice which demanded only one of the donors to be infected in order to pollute the whole pool of blood. The pooling was done in order to maximize the people's ability to donate blood and this practice well exemplifies the huge demand of the product as well as the extent in which people were willing to participate. This so-called 'blood boom' offered many inhabitants of the province an opportunity, for instance, to build new houses and acquire goods which they otherwise could have not have access to. The price of HIV infection was only revealed to them much later and the outbreak of infections was a target of a series of cover-up attempts by various governmental officials who were directly involved in the 'plasma economy'. It was not until the beginning of the new millennium when the full extent of the crisis started to reveal itself through the persistent work of activists and the story eventually even caught international media attention. In addition, recently the scandal has even started to interest biopolitical minded-scholars. For example, Ann Anagnost has analyzed the scandal from a biopolitical perspective and maintained that the outbreak of infections prove in a paradigmatic fashion how liberal biopolitical reforms frequently render the globally marginalized South as "the constitutive outside of capitalist economic relations by making it bear the hidden costs in the reproduction of labor for a global labor regime."[346]

In Yan's novel all this is re-told. The book, however, is disguised as fiction in attempt to guile the Chinese censorship system. As Yan has confessed in an interview, originally he had planned to write a non-fiction account of the events and educate the Chinese people about this hidden epidemic which many used to refer to only as the 'fever'. Yet, as the guile did not pay off and the novel was banned in mainland China, Yan has admitted that he feels "deep shame and regret."[347] The self-imposed censorship after all affected his fiction and, for example, cut out the ambitious storyline of an underground pipeline that carries blood from China to the US – a storyline that would have not been too far from the truth given the global flow of blood, human tissues and organs from the poor donors to the prosperous

[346] Anagnost 2011, 216.

[347] Yan 2011a.

consumers which characterizes the contemporary global commodification of them.[348]

And yet, despite this self-censorship and fictitious approach, *Dream of Ding Village* still manages to address relevant questions. The novel revolves around questions why the farmers and peasants were so easily fooled and willing to participate in the plasma economy? Considering this role that the farmers and peasants played in the crisis themselves, who is to be held responsible for this crisis? Who should have done something otherwise: the blood donors, the blood merchants or the government? What should have this something been? Would there have been another way available of making the poor count? These are the questions which Yan's writing touches upon when he takes us through the catastrophic events that unleashed in the Chinese countryside.

The novel starts with a page which features three short passages from the book of Genesis (40:9–41:4). These passages are the Cupbearer's, Baker's and Pharaoh's dreams which in the Bible are interpreted by Joseph who as result of his ability to explain these dreams eventually gets appointed by the Pharaoh as the vizier of Egypt, the highest 'governmental' official in the Ancient Egypt who was responsible for supervising the running of the country. In the case of *Dream of Ding Village*, these dreams in a quite obvious fashion bear an allegorical connection respectively to the blood merchants, blood donors and government – or to some form of sovereignty. The ambiguousness of the last one of these dreams is not irrelevant. Although it is not hard to see who the Cupbearer or Baker might represents in relation to the novel's characters, the Pharaoh's dream is in this sense trickier. After all, *Dream of Ding Village* is characterized by a lack of clear authority and confusion over who or what is really running the show. In the beginning of the novel we learn that just before the villagers begun to sell their blood the mayor of Ding Village, Li Sanren, was fired from his post by the county Director of Education. Afterwards the director started to seek support for his blood selling scheme elsewhere and approached Grandpa, a grandfather of the story's narrator: a dead young boy named Ding Qiang who was poisoned as a retaliation to his father. As a respected member of their community, and as someone who had taught almost every villager at the Ding Village School, Grandpa talks to the villagers about blood selling and ends up playing a big role in bringing the blood boom into Ding Village. As Grandpa

[348] See e.g. Waldby & Mitchell 2006.

explains it to the villagers, “the body's blood is like a natural spring: the more you take, the more it flows.”[349]

Yet, it does not take long before the things get out of Grandpa's hands. Soon, it is the blood merchants who are in control of Ding Village’s new blood economy. With all kind tricks and spoofs, the blood merchants lure the villagers to donate always a bit more blood, for which they then pay these villagers as little as possible. Even though everyone in the village who took part in the blood sales became wealthier, it was the blood merchants who really took off. The blood merchants became the wealthiest people in the village and soon they moved to live in the newly constructed New Street to where each of them built “a brand new two-storey house, which was as high as local building regulations allowed.”[350] In fact, there was only one exception to this trend in the New Street which was the three-storey house of the most successful and the most greedy blood merchant of them all: Ding Hui, the son of Grandpa and the father of the story's narrator.

When the full cost of the wealth of these blood merchants becomes evident, as people start to fell ill and the village begins to experience AIDS-related deaths in vast numbers, in the novel Grandpa tries to make his son to apologize to the people of Ding Village. As Grandpa learned what was killing people and how these people had contracted it, it became clear to him that he was going to ask Ding Hui to first “apologize to everyone and then to kill himself.”[351] However, Grandpa soon finds out that he has lost his authority over his son. Grandpa cannot do anything but to helplessly watch, as even after the blood boom is gone, his son shamelessly continues to do business with death – making profit out of the crisis he should be held responsible for. First, Grandpa comes to the conclusion that Ding Hui has been selling villagers the coffins which the government had meant to provide free of charge to anyone who had died as a result of the 'fever'. Secondly, Grandpa finds out about his son's matchmaking service which arranges marriages for people who had died prematurely. If the people are willing to pay for it, Ding Hui arranges for their dead relatives a spouse, someone who had also died as a result of the blood

[349] Yan 2011b, 28.

[350] Ibid., 19.

[351] Ibid., 13.

boom, in order that the people "would never again have to worry about their unmarried relatives being lonely in the afterworld."[352]

However, more Grandpa learns about his son's businesses more confusing everything starts to look. When the structure of the post-blood boom economy of Ding Village starts to reveal to Grandpa, he begins to run into the name of his son everywhere but it never gets clear how Ding Hui has got all his official posts and business opportunities in the first place. Suddenly, Ding Hui even appears to be the vice-chairman of the county task force on HIV and AIDS in a way that is beyond Grandpa as it is beyond everyone else in Ding Village. Yet, the fact is that it is Grandpa's son who now holds a small booklet identifying him as "Comrade Ding Hui, vice-chairman of the Wei county task force on HIV and AIDS."[353] Furthermore, it is not that Ding Hui has forced anyone to participate in his businesses. As a matter of fact, many people have been more than willing to buy services from him. While looking for his son, Grandpa even meets people who are in deep gratitude to Ding Hui for the coffins he has sold to them and his matchmaking service through which he has arranged spouses for their dead relatives. As one man tries to explain it to Grandpa, "oh, Ding Hui is a great man, a wonderful man!"[354]

Grandpa, of course, cannot believe his ears. This is not, however, the first time in the story that Grandpa finds himself stunned by people's behavior. *Dream of Ding Village* contains many episodes like this where Grandpa is shocked by people's post-blood boom behavior and thinking. One notable incident happens in the elementary school of Ding Village where Grandpa after the outbreak of HIV infections gathers almost everyone who had the 'fever' in the village. As there were no longer pupils in Ding Village, Grandpa's plan was that in school he could take care of them as long as they still lived and they would not infect their families. Grandpa tried to provide these people the best possible conditions he could, as he felt that he had let them down by originally talking them over to selling their blood. For some time everything worked out fine but "this paradise didn't last for long."[355] Before long the people in school were stealing each other's things and Grandpa could only mumble: "You are

[352] Ibid., 298. Emphasis removed.

[353] Ibid., 187.

[354] Ibid., 297. Emphasis removed.

[355] Ibid., 70.

here today, but could be gone tomorrow. Yet at a time like this, you're stealing... stealing from each other."[356]

As the story proceeds a bit further, Grandpa soon finds out that he cannot anymore really understand his fellow villagers at all. However, in the story this is a bigger problem for Grandpa than for others as before long in the post-blood boom era no one is even anymore looking for Grandpa's understanding. In the story, there happens a coup in the school and two young men, Diang Yuejin and Jia Genzhu, take the leadership away from Grandpa by blackmailing him with the information they have about the inappropriate relationship Grandpa's other son, Ding Liang (the uncle of the story's narrator), is having. As the transcendent child-narrator explains to us, at this point Grandpa could not even hide his astonishment anymore:

> He'd known both of these boys since the day they were born – he'd even taught them in school – but now they were strangers, textbook illustrations he couldn't make sense of, two mathematical problems that didn't compute.[357]

After being forced out of his leadership role, and after losing his faith for the post-blood boom people of Ding Village in general, Grandpa withdraws into the background of the story. Grandpa concentrates on mostly minding his own business and hardly shows any interest to the happenings of Ding Village. Mainly Grandpa just acknowledges how people continue to die and the village is drifting closer to its extinction. Not even the funeral of Ding Liang and his lover Xia Lingling, which were organized by Ding Hui in the most spectacular fashion, cause any big reaction from Grandpa's part. As it is told in the novel, funerals were all about keeping up appearances in Ding Village and more expensive the funerals were, more people attended. Grandpa did not care any of this. He was like watching a great play to which everyone else seemed to be take a part in and he could not understand any of it. Although Grandpa had been having dreams of Ding Village for a long time, now he saw even more of these dreams and he understood these dreams much better

[356] Ibid., 96.

[357] Ibid., 151.

than the reality which was prevalent. The idleness began to weight on Grandpa, he "felt as if he was living on the fringes of the world, rather than inside it."[358]

The situation continues along this course until one day Grandpa just cannot take it anymore. What makes Grandpa burst into action is the last one of Ding Hui's schemes. Ding Hui married off his son, and our story's narrator, to the dead daughter of the mayor of Kaifeng in order to strengthen his own relationship with this powerful man. This reorganization, however, demands that Ding Qiang's body is dug up from his grave in Ding Village and moved to another grave closer to Kaifeng. While looking at the just opened but already empty grave Grandpa is struck by an idea that he cannot shake off – an idea "draining the colour from his face and making his hands shake."[359] Grandpa smashes Ding Hui in the back of his skull and kills his son. Recalling the biblical dreams presented at the beginning of the book, maybe the Pharaoh has finally awaken from his dream?

What happens next in the novel supports this interpretation. Immediately after Grandpa had killed his son he ran around the village and spread the news in a celebratory fashion but received no proper reaction from the villagers. As our narrator tells us, "Grandpa *acted like* he had done the village a tremendous service."[360] Afterwards, Grandpa is arrested for the murder but after a while he is just released. Thus, it seems that at this point Grandpa's had started to exist in a different level than other people. In addition, when Grandpa returns to the village after being released he finds that the village is empty of people, a deserted place where Grandpa begins to dream:

> Grandpa dreamed of a woman, digging in the mud with the branch of a willow tree. With each flick of the branch, each stroke of the willow, she raised a small army of tiny mud people from the soil. Soon there were hundreds upon thousands of them, thousands upon millions, millions upon millions of tiny mud people leaping from the soil, dancing on the earth, blistering the plain like so many raindrops from the sky. […] A new world danced before his eyes.[361]

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[358] Ibid., 289.

[359] Ibid., 331. Emphasis removed.

[360] Ibid., 333. Emphasis added.

[361] Ibid., 341. Emphasis removed.

Continuing the list of novel's theological references, these last sentences of the novel are a retelling of the myth of the Chinese goddess Nüva, the creator of human beings. Accordingly, as Chien-hsin Tsai has written, these sentences turn the tables around and eventually make it possible to read *Dream of Ding Village* not only as dystopia but also as "a promising vision where total annihilation is but a preparation for a brand new world."[362]

From this perspective, then, it seems that Grandpa indeed ends up being some kind of pharaoh, a sovereign who is able through force to put a stop to the unleashed greed and hunger for power. From this perspective, Grandpa is rendered by Yan's writing to be someone who is able to lay the ground open for the better tomorrow and a more sensible governance of things. In fact, Grandpa turns out to be a very enlightened pharaoh: someone who eventually did not need anyone else to interpret his dreams which the transcendent child narrator had laid in front of him. Unlike the Pharaoh in the book of Genesis, by himself grasping the meaning of his dreams, Grandpa understood what had truly happened and what there was to be done, in contrast to the people who used to populate Ding Village, those who remained mesmerized by the status, money and glory, those who thus became slaves of those who were able to use this weakness of theirs in the most unscrupulous fashion. Even if it meant that he had to commit a filicide, it was Grandpa who had to break Ding Village free from this chaotic inequality, from the decay which had culminated in the uncontrolled spread of HIV/AIDS – a decay beyond which only Grandpa could see and take the village.

And yet, even though a more equal order based on enlightened sovereign rule can at first sound better than chaos driven by destructive hunger for power and greed, on a closer look there are limits what this order can achieve in relation to managing the HIV/AIDS crisis. As we have already emphasized, this is because HIV fundamentally calls into question the type of ordering of life that is based on abstract reasoning which legitimates the sovereign's maneuvers. In the beginning of our work we brought forward the fundamental problem which in the era of HIV/AIDS inseparably haunts all kinds of ordering of life that relies on sovereignty with the help of Esposito's thought and we can here again turn to Esposito's theory of biopolitics in order to emphasize the impossibility of overcoming this problem

[362] Tsai 2011a.

also in the context of the alleged emancipatory closure of *Dream of Ding Village*. After all, as we recall, Esposito by paraphrasing the Hobbesian narrative, which Yan's writing inevitably brings to mind, elaborated how this type of ordering of life rests on dividing life into two. It is the destructive ensemble of all kinds of selfish needs, impulses, and drives which are seen to create a demand for an institution – namely, sovereignty – that makes it possible to police these excesses by elevating an extracorporeal core over this chaotic dog-eat-dog world, and thus to pacify this world. Yet, this world is only pacified on the condition that the enlightened moral and rational part, which gives legitimacy to the institution and which the institution represents, is separated from the "life understood in its materiality, in its immediate physical intensity."[363] In this way, the whole institution and the protection of life its order creation ensures is based on the separation and protection of this rational and moral part, integrity of which is rendered as the most precious quality in a human being, from another part – from the body unleashed.

The fundamental problem lies in the fact that the direction to which HIV takes life is the opposite. If sovereignty bases its protection on the idea of establishing and guaranteeing the existence of moral and rational subjects over the bodily excesses of life which threaten the integrity of the former, HIV fundamentally fractures this whole idea. HIV ravages "the identity of the individual as the form and content of its subjectivity […] the disease destroys the very idea of an identity-making border: the difference between self and other, internal and external, inside and outside."[364] This refers to the fact that the immune system's CD4 T cells, where HIV resides, have under normal conditions the task of activating and directing the immune defenses, but in the case of HIV the activation of these cells paradoxically makes them more hospitable to the virus and actually helps the virus to replicate. It is therefore incorrect to say that the virus simply evades the immune system; rather, the virus uses the immune system's own mechanisms to harm it. In this way, what gets affected is not just health as the defense mechanism that is thought to guarantee individual's integrity in the face of other organisms reveals its deficiencies by itself assisting the progression of the virus which eventually will undermine the system completely, exposing the body to every germ, and causing the body to implode. Thus, functioning in a mode strictly opposed to any type of ordering which bases itself on guarding and protecting life in strictly bordered containers, borders of

[363] Esposito 2008, 58.

[364] Esposito 2011, 162.

which this ordering must be even ready to defend by force (i.e. by controlled internalization of that which it wants to keep outside of these containers), AIDS turns this whole scheme inside out by "externalization of the inside."[365]

As a result, we can maintain that the closure of Yan's narrative ends up prescribing an intervention which logic is the same than the limit that would need to be transgressed in order to really overcome the HIV/AIDS crisis. The foundational fracture experienced by the idea of a strictly bordered individual becomes remedied by trying to defend and strengthen that which foundational artificiality HIV/AIDS highlights. Furthermore, what further questions the salvific nature of Yan's narrative is that, as we know, the problematic consequences of this move have already become visible especially in the resource-poor settings of the Global South, in the settings such as the one which Yan's writing is describing. In these settings, due to poverty and the lack of sufficient health infrastructure, even if the HIV/AIDS-related prevention and treatment work are conducted along the 'enlightened' lines which attempt to ensure the equal enhancement of lives, the level of health that the marginalized people are able to attain in these settings still remains intertwined with their own ability to overcome their physical and social situation. In addition to their daily struggle, they must find somewhere the strength needed to take part in, or at least be responsive to, the prevention and treatment work and keep regularly attending things such as medical check-ups. As has been frequently reminded in the critical studies of the global HIV/AIDS relief, in particular regarding the treatment of HIV/AIDS, this overcoming is essential but at the same time the most difficult thing to do as the antiretroviral treatment of HIV infection has a long-term therapeutic character which requires that patients individually fully adhere to their treatment and that there is a medical apparatus in place that keeps documenting and monitoring patients' response to the drugs. Without this medical surveillance and the occasional altering of the drug cocktail one is having, the HIV in patient's body becomes resistant to certain drugs and the infection becomes even more difficultly treatable.[366]

Along these lines, at least as much as *Dream of Ding Village* can be read as an emancipatory narrative, it can be also read as a circular narrative which, through the salvation it provides, ends up sending a large proportion of Ding Village's

[365] Ibid., 162.

[366] See e.g. Biehl 2007; Fassin 2007; Nguyen 2010.

population more or less back into the beginning of the story. If in the beginning of the story people were taken over by the 'fever' that forced them to chase all kinds of earthly mammon through which they ended as being exploited and sick, the ending of the story does not offer most of these people much else. If we do not read the story as an eugenic dream which simply wipes away the sick from the created new world as somehow unfit to this 'perfect world', then, also in the new world at least the people who are sick are forced to chase health in a similar manner than people chased mammon in the old world. Thus, as in the old world, also in the new world the people do not unproblematically fit into Grandpa's schemes of providing these people 'the best possible conditions', even if this time Grandpa seems to be ready to ensure the permanence of these conditions by force – unlike in the old world when Grandpa just let himself to be displaced from the head of the school without a fight. After all, regardless of this Grandpa's readiness to use force, into the midst of marginalization there just is no way to miraculously create perfect conditions which can unproblematically match the challenge posed by HIV/AIDS. The attempted creation of such conditions has no means to fully settle the randomness which characterizes the individual bodily response to the antiretroviral treatment or the pure chance which often plays a large role in determining the people's ability to access prevention and treatment work in the marginalized settings – something that has been lately emphasized explicitly also in the context of China's health policies.[367] As a result, from this perspective we can argue that more Grandpa actually tries to push the sick people within the limits of 'the best possible conditions', the more he also ends up pushing at least certain of them into the mercy of randomness and chance. To continue the paraphrasing of Esposito's reading of the Hobbesian narrative, what we have here is a situation in which the 'glue' of the created order, Grandpa's force, loses its constructiveness as it loses its predictability. The fear of Grandpa's force, which should ensure the permanence of order, gives way to a fear of uncertainty, a state of insecurity in which suspicion prevails over one's ability to avoid pain and death even if one would fully submit oneself under Grandpa's rule. Thus, what we have here is a situation in which one can only try to fully ensure the preservation of one's life by attempting to accumulate power to oneself more than the intended functioning of the order allows for.[368]

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[367] See e.g. Hood 2013.

[368] Cf. Esposito 2010a, 20–40.

Accordingly, in the duel between the father and the son, the last word goes to the son; a son who is not the story's narrator but Grandpa's son, Ding Hui. Despite Grandpa's attempt to forcefully emancipate Ding Village from the grip of his son, it is nevertheless Ding Hui's world which emerges as largely triumphant. Furthermore, this does not happen because Grandpa would be unable to overcome Ding Hui but regardless of this overcoming. Thus, when we read the novel in this manner, *Dream of Ding Village* does not feature a move from the autoimmunitary biopolitical experiments of China into a new just order imposed by the restoration of the authority of Grandpa, as Tsai maintains.[369] Instead, *Dream of Ding Village* features a story that in the end takes steps towards imposing an immune deficient order, through the solution this novel offers to the autoimmunitary development which is caused by the liberalization experiment gone horribly wrong. And yet, this is not to say that there does not exists anything in *Dream of Ding Village* that goes against this immune deficient inversion of autoimmunity. As Tsai also notes, what in *Dream of Ding Village* from the beginning is at odds with the novel's brute postsocialist market economy liberalization is intimacy. It is the sense of intimacy of the old consanguineous society that is rendered as the relic of the past by the development depicted in the novel.[370] However, what Tsai fails to notice is that intimacy is also at odds with the novel's suggested solution to autoimmunity.

Symptomatic to this is the contrast which in *Dream of Ding Village* runs between the love story of Ding Liang and Xia Lingling and the novel's eventual immune deficient solution. Although Ding Liang's and Xia Lingling's love story takes up considerable amount of pages earlier in *Dream of Ding Village*, in the end this love story is almost like an individual episode separate from the overall plot. In fact, when viewed from the perspective of the novel's ending, the events that the inappropriate relationship of Ding Liang and Xia Lingling initiate are something that actually *must* be forgotten in order that the novel's ending can be treated as unambiguously emancipatory. When we want to treat the novel's ending as a happy ending, all the struggles earlier in the novel engaged in by Ding Liang, Xia Lingling and even Grandpa – when he tries to help these HIV positive lovers to overcome tradition, divorce their former spouses and live together – must be considered to be somehow in vain and not really a part and parcel of proper political life. In other words, from the perspective of the novel's alleged happy ending, what must be

[369] Tsai 2011b, 96.

[370] Ibid., 96–97.

considered as not belonging to good political life is political struggles that base themselves on the affective excesses of our finite lives. These kind of political struggles must be seen as redundant, even if Ding Liang's and Xia Liangling's struggle is actually a success story. After all, in spite of the resistance of tradition, Ding Liang and Xia Liangling eventually with the help of Grandpa do overcome the prevalent practices of Ding Village and get their divorces and are able to move in together. Even though this makes them reproached nonconformists in Ding Village, this also gives them deep satisfaction. Yan's writing beautifully brings this forward, when he bitter-sweetly writes about Lingling's death:

> When Uncle took Lingling in his arms, she did not stir. Her head remained slumped against his chest. She was like a girl who couldn't wake up. Although there was still a bit of pink in her cheeks, her lips were dry and cracked, a scaly as the wings of a dragonfly. He realized she must have been running a very high fever when she died, a fever brought on by dousing herself in freezing water so many times the night before.
>
> As one fever raged, another even worse fever had rushed in and claimed her, taken her from this world against her will. Taken her from Ding Village and from Uncle. Knowing she was going to die, but not wanting to disturb Uncle from his sleep, she'd gotten out of bed, put on her nicest clothes, lain down on the floor and let the fever claim her.
>
> The fever had burned her alive. Her parched lips looked as if they'd been charred. And yet they were frozen in a faint smile, one of satisfaction for what she'd done for Uncle, and for what she'd done in life. A smile with no regrets.[371]

In summary, then, the reason why the type of political struggles that base themselves on an affective excess of life cannot be present within Grandpa's new world is that the legitimacy and orderliness of this world rests on neglecting this kind of political combating. Firstly, in order that Grandpa's new world-creating act of filicide becomes absolutely necessary in the first place, the potential for achieving political transformations on the basis of a feeling of social wrongness brought about by such affective excesses that Ding Liang and Xia Liangling experience must be deemed as insufficient. Secondly, the kind of activity engaged by Ding Liang and Xia

[371] Yan 2011b, 256.

Liangling must be actually ruled as somehow unlawful in the Grandpa's new world as in the new world this kind of activity would just disturb Grandpa's ordered maintenance of the best possible conditions for his 'mud people'. Similarly as in the old world, in the new world engaging oneself with this kind of activity would just interrupt the smooth functioning of Grandpa's enlightened care.

And yet, if we do not consider Grandpa's new world to be particularly enlightened, the above also suggests how this world can be pushed towards equality beyond Grandpa's ideas. If we along our earlier elaborations maintain that the Grandpa's imposition of his quasi-perfect order would in reality head towards the hierarchical immune deficient form of violence, when it comes to managing the aftermath of the HIV/AIDS crisis, Ding Liang's and Xia Lingling's political struggle exemplifies how this is not inevitable. In a way that speaks to our reading of *The Last Plague* in the previous section, Ding Liang's and Xia Lingling's struggle against the tradition of Ding Village emphasizes how our political struggles against hierarchy do not have to happen along the limitations set by an idea of a perfectly just and equal order – which of course is a theological ideal. Instead, as Ding Liang's and Xia Lingling's struggle against the tradition highlights, an attempt to overcome hierarchy can also simply be based on an alienation brought about by the affective excesses of our lives.

In fact, this struggle emphasizes, together with Janet's struggle in the previous section, and the eventual perversion of both of these struggles in *Dream of Ding Village* and *The Last Plague* respectively, that equality in the era of HIV/AIDS simply *must* be approached in affirmative-biopolitical terms. In the current era of HIV/AIDS, any other kind of pursuance of equality is not able to completely prevent the production of undesirable inequality, as eventually at least the politics that characterizes the roll out of antiretroviral therapy into the marginalized corners of our world will conflict with any high ideals that rely on abstractions. Thus, instead of hanging ourselves into any abstractions, equality in the context of HIV/AIDS can be politically fully affirmed only by understanding how the worldly orders imposed on us and the radical immanence of life cannot ever be completely identical; by understanding how there fundamentally is, in spite of the fact that human worlds are always necessarily organized in some manner, a gulf that will remain between these two. This is something that we can bring forward, as we have again done in this section, by paying attention to the way how our lives as a whole, in their inescapably shared finitude, are from the perspective of their human ordering simply fundamentally unmasterable. On the basis of this unmasterable common-

ness of our lives, we can maintain that there is no essential foundation for any destructive hierarchical order within our worlds. Furthermore, on this same basis, we can demand and attempt to actualize in these worlds equality along the universal lines set by the norm of life.

## 5.4 Life and Abstraction

In this chapter we have brought forward the difficulty of thinking equality in the context of the global response to HIV/AIDS. Along the lines typically followed by the critical studies that have touched upon the topic of equality in relation to liberalism in general, or the current liberal management of HIV/AIDS in particular, we have in this chapter maintained how equality in the case of liberalism is politically affirmed in a paradoxical manner. As we did in agreement with these studies bring forward, despite that the presupposition within liberal ethos is that we are all fundamentally equal and that judicial equality and equal opportunity should thus be extended to everyone regarding all aspects of our lives, in practice this extension seems to be something that never fully happens. Sometimes this is, of course, understandable from the point of view that liberal declarations of universal equality are simply high-sounding phrases without being backed by concrete actions. Yet, what complicates such a cynic view is that sometimes the egalitarian ethos deployed within liberal lexicon fails to materialize: 'despite the best intentions of all involved' – as went the phrase we already quoted in the introductory section of this chapter, when we highlighted the conceptualization of this problem within the contemporary critical studies of the global HIV/AIDS relief.

In this way, through our reading of *The Last Plague* by Meja Mwangi and *Dream of Ding Village* by Yan Lianke, we have in this chapter validated the claim that there is a point after which liberal governance becomes unable to anymore affirm equality, even if this would be on an ideational level deemed as desirable. Although liberal governance can to a certain extent be a highly desirable way of conducting things in situations, such as the one originally depicted by *The Last Plague*, on the same breath, a careful scrutiny of the imposition of liberal HIV/AIDS governance in these situations highlights the limitations of liberalism. As we can maintain by continuing along the lines set by our reading of *The Last Plague*, even if the eventual liberal triumph over the traditional hierarchy of Crossroads was a better option for this village than the continuation of the chaotically destructive traditional inequality, the established liberal order nevertheless did not succeed to emancipate

the village completely from violent inequality. Instead, as we emphasized through our reading of this novel, the new liberal order established in this village, especially when it comes addressing HIV/AIDS, is still an order that must rely on hierarchical violence – be it that this new order is less violent and overall more capable of addressing the village's HIV/AIDS crisis than the old authoritarian organization of the village was. Accordingly, then, our reading of *The Last Plague* highlighted the limit point of liberal affirmation of equality in relation to the global governance of HIV/AIDS. Our reading highlighted the partial desirability of liberalism in this context; and yet, at the same time the eventual incommensurability that fundamentally runs between liberal governance and equality in relation to the matters of HIV/AIDS.

In addition, however, in this chapter we also emphasized how this incommensurability cannot be bypassed through any kind of revolutionary apocalypticism that derives its force from the indignation caused by the violence unleashed by liberal governance. As we made clear in particular through our reading of *Dream of Ding Village*, in relation to the contemporary HIV/AIDS crisis there simply does not exist any alternative world to which we could triumphantly escape, if we just would prefer so. Because currently the antiretroviral therapy is the inescapable backbone of the treatment of people suffering from HIV/AIDS, a straightforward rejection of the current liberal-minded governmental world of HIV/AIDS can in practice only lead to eugenics or back to liberal violence, as the problem of liberal immune deficient violence is currently an inseparable by-product of the antiretroviral treatment – particularly in the globally marginalized locations. Accordingly, as we argued, in relation to current HIV/AIDS crisis it is at present simply impossible to abstractly come up with any revolutionary scheme or plan which we could straightforwardly implement in these marginalized locations of our world without creating unjust inequality. At present, there is no perfect solution to this crisis at sight, especially insofar as this expression 'perfect solution' refers to some sort of theological ideal of otherworldly paradise which is totally devoid of HIV/AIDS-related inequality or unjust pain, suffering and dying. The contemporary HIV/AIDS crisis prevents this type of backward move which would lead us back to a stable order that some believe have existed in our past. In fact, by ravaging the identity-making border between self and other, internal and external, inside and outside, HIV pushes us to fundamentally question all such fantasies. HIV brings forward how the idea of our past orders being essentially more stable than our current world is more or less a fictional abstraction. Moreover, HIV actually forces us to face the fact that the more we refuse to believe in the above, the more we end

up producing indirect violence. The more in relation to HIV/AIDS we try to realize any kind of abstract order which is defined by complete equality, more we simultaneously must violently discipline life in order that life stays within the bounds set by our abstract thought.

And yet, our reading of *The Last Plague* and *Dream of Ding Village* also highlighted how this difficulty of thinking equality in the context of the global HIV/AIDS governance can be overcome. As we illustrated by paying attention to the aesthetic subjects of these two novels, in particular the Crossroadian women and the lovers Ding Liang and Xia Liangling, from the perspective of life equality in relation to the global response to HIV/AIDS becomes thinkable in affirmative-biopolitical terms which have very little to do with the abstractedness of liberalism or any other phantasmal idea of abstract order. This affirmative-biopolitical idea of equality simply arises out of our ability to realize the immanent fact that our lives on the basis of their common-ness are not hierarchized in any natural manner.

From this perspective, then, the quasi-unavoidability of the violent course of the current global HIV/AIDS governance gets replaced by the viability to change this course. Because on the basis of the normative power of life equality is not in practice associable with the imposition or maintenance of any abstractly defined order but with the transformations of all orders that are unnaturally organized along hierarchies, there does not emerge on the basis of the affirmative-biopolitical idea of equality any need to force anyone within abstract limits. Thus, in contrast to forcing people within such contingent limits in the context of the global response to HIV/AIDS, the political affirmation of equality which is understood on the basis of life's immanence travels to a different direction. Affirmative-biopolitical account of equality categorically opposes this type of violent defending of hierarchical limits, as this idea of equality stems from the realization of the fundamental senselessness of this sort of defending. Hence, the basic rationale of the HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics that stems from this account of equality consists simply from our, or *anyone's*, attempt to overcome and resist *all* worldly hierarchies that violently negate our possibilities within this world to valorize life's absolute non-hierarchical immanence. Accordingly, from this perspective there simply is no destructive worldly hierarchy that could not be transformed when it comes to the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS, nor does there exist anyone who would have to necessarily remain outside the scope of these transformations.

The similarity between the conclusions of this chapter and the previous chapter, of course, is not a coincidence. On the contrary, as we have already maintained, on

the basis of foregrounding the fundamental unmasterability of life *both* freedom and equality become simultaneously thinkable along the same affirmative-biopolitical lines. In fact, if this would not be the case, we could not speak about freedom and equality in affirmative-biopolitical terms at all. The full isolation of these ideas from each other would be a contradiction because freedom without equality would not be freedom in relation to hierarchy along which this freedom would be distributed, and equality without freedom would not be equality in relation to someone or something that is needed to guard the pre-established limits along which equality would be distributed. Thus, in neither case would we witness full affirmation of the common-ness of life but precisely a negation of this common-ness on the basis of a presupposed and selective idea. Furthermore, more intensively we actually would attempt to push these selective ideas over life, more we would simultaneously have to rely on force in order to discipline life to stay within the bounds set by these ideas. This would be nothing else than a desperate thing to do. In practice, life would continuously spill over these bounds due to border-ravishing agents such as HIV, which as we have again in this chapter maintained, has proven out to be extremely capable of transgressing all our pre-established borders.

As a result, the full-blown affirmative biopolitics simply is the only viable way through which we can address the current political limits of the contemporary global HIV/AIDS response. It is solely along the affirmative-biopolitical lines through which we can correctly understand the type of political subjectivization and the form of political action needed to overcome the immune deficient character of the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS. It is solely along these lines through which we are able to realize how it is still possible to continue to transform this world for the better; in other words, how it is still possible, even more intensively than already done at present, to push this world into the direction of freedom and equality. Going then beyond the numerous critiques of this response that we have gotten accustomed to seeing through the years, our affirmative-biopolitical reading of the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS is something that has already been long overdue.

And yet, although we have now laid the ground open for the political transformation of the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS, what does our work have to say when it comes to more specifically evaluating the current state of global HIV/AIDS relief? Has the appliance of our model of affirmative biopolitics to the problematics of the HIV/AIDS-related immune deficient form of violence only

made salient the ground on the basis of which these problematics can be viably addressed in the future, or can we from this perspective also look at the recent history of the politics of HIV/AIDS and judge what kind of acts have in the past been faithful to our account of affirmative biopolitics? Furthermore, what can we eventually expect to accomplish in this context through affirmative biopolitics? What are the limits of this kind of political activity, i.e. should this type of political activity struggle to establish some kind of different way of globally governing HIV/AIDS, or should the HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics just remain an endless process that in the final analysis is always somehow at odds with the governance of our lives? These are question that we will still reflect next on our concluding chapter, which in addition to this reflection, will also summarize the key findings of our study.

# 6 CONCLUSIONS

## 6.1 The Affirmative-Biopolitical Remedy

Biopolitics has in the recent years become a term that has been used, reused and sometimes even abused in such a myriad of different ways that it has become difficult to talk about any singular field of study anymore. Especially for the past two decades, different lines of thought and perspectives have so intensively struggled with each other under this umbrella term – which has become to cover all kinds of efforts to explicate and rethink the relationship between life and politics from the ancient times to our own era – that different scholars of biopolitics have occasionally appeared to be adversaries rather than allies. Even if this might seem like a new development from the perspective of the relatively 'peaceful' period of 1980s and 90s when this term was fairly widely and quite exclusively connected with Foucault's thought, from a deeper historical perspective there is nothing new in this conflictuality. After all, starting from Rudolf Kjellén's work and continuing to Nazi theories and all the way to the sophisticated Italian philosophy of the present, scholars who have deployed this term have hardly been a unified bunch. And yet, despite this lack of conformity, it is not that any of these scholars would have discussed a completely different phenomenon when compared to the other scholars deploying the term. Instead, all of these scholars have in the end been interested in the relationship that runs between life and our ideas of life. On a closer look, this has undoubtedly been the knot around which the scholarly use of the term has revolved. In fact, the only thing that has really altered has been the perspective and presuppositions through which this knot has been approached. For example, the Nazi theoreticians deploying the term approached this knot from the perspective of their bio-spiritual idea of 'race' which they wanted to make identical with life, Foucault approached this knot from the perspective of ideas which in modernity have increasingly been deployed over life and he was concerned about that life over which these ideas were deployed, and the contemporary Italian biopolitical philosophy has approached this knot from the perspective of the difference that eventually prevents the two sides of this knot from becoming identical with each other, and thus sought to open up an avenue for affirmative-biopolitical theorizing and practice.

Then, when taking into account this already rather long history of different biopolitical perspectives, and the immanently conflictual knot around which these perspectives revolve, the real question perhaps is not why the discussion about biopolitics has lately (re-)intensified but how come we recently witnessed an era when this discussion went through a slump? The answer for this question, of course, lies for a large part in the Second World War and the Nazi atrocities that made the biologization of politics lose its appeal and also sent the notion of 'biopolitics' into the margins of scholarly discussions – margins in which this term also remained until Foucault used this term again and thus begun the process through which this term gradually got the weight it now carries.

However, although we can praise Foucault for re-introducing this term into the center of late modern scholarly discussions, we cannot naturally fully explain the current renaissance of biopolitical studies through Foucault's choice of words alone. Instead, as we know, what also happened at the time, and after, when Foucault was discussing biopolitics, was that the actual phenomenon that is addressed under this term got suddenly foregrounded more strikingly than before. Especially the spectacular biotechnological innovations of the 1970s, such as the transfer of DNA and in-vitro fertilization, broadly raised concerns about the fragility of the boundary that many thought to steadily lie between nature and culture. Moreover, since the 1970s, the technological development has only intensified and the relationship that runs between life and our ideas of life has gradually become a rather mundane subject which we might today discuss, for instance, during breakfast or coffee breaks. In addition, the significance of this development for us has not been only ideational but also strikingly material. Due to the technological development, we have now become aware of all kinds previously unthought-of threats to our lives and also new ways to improve the quality and endurance of our lives. As a result, the norm today has become to be born, live, and gradually decay in a very technologically mediated manner. In fact, today positioning oneself voluntarily or being involuntarily left outside of this technological mediation is something that is rather suicidal or thanatopolitical.

The above is the case also in relation to the contemporary HIV/AIDS crisis. This crisis is actually one of the best indicators of the complexity of the politics that the above development has foregrounded. After all, it is the technological development through which we have become aware of the existence of HIV in the first place and the challenge this virus poses to our traditional dichotomies, such as self/other, inside/outside and internal/external. Furthermore, besides these ontological

concerns, the global political response to the pandemic caused by the virus has proven out to be extremely knotty. Although it is undoubtedly true that during the past three and a half decades progress has been made virtually on all fronts when it comes to our global response to this crisis, the fundamental political problematics at the heart of this crisis have still rarely been even properly recognized. Mostly, in the political discussion surrounding this crisis it has been emphasized, on the one hand, how the political will to eradicate HIV/AIDS once and for all continues to be vital when it comes to our common effort to globally combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in spite of the achievements already accomplished. On the other hand, it has become commonplace to highlight the existence of conflicting interest that jeopardize the current global march towards the AIDS-free world. Certain states, global interest groups and pharmaceutical companies after all do not always work in a way that is fully in consent with the global public health interest.

And yet, the political obstacles in front of the global march towards the AIDS-free world cannot at all be reduced to the lack of political will or the shortage of concrete support. Even if these are undoubtedly important issues among the global governance of HIV/AIDS, these are nevertheless issues which are in principle solvable through straightforward political negotiation and regulation. In short, we already know how to solve these issues, even though it is likely that complete victories regarding them will not come easy. However, as we have argued, the most difficult problems which haunt the contemporary global HIV/AIDS relief are those which we cannot address through the type of political demands and means we are accustomed to use. This is precisely due to the fact that these most difficult problems of the contemporary global HIV/AIDS relief are tied to the way how our late modern technological mediation of life strikingly calls into question the content of political categories we have typically turned to, when we have wanted to pursue political goals along the universal lines. In particular in the case of HIV/AIDS, the two political categories that are simultaneously constantly vocalized yet in practice persistently fail to materialize according to the intended way are ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’. Along the lines of the currently hegemonic liberal-minded public health ethos, the health of the people affected by HIV/AIDS is at present constantly emphasized as being dependent on the rights and liberties of these people. As HIV is primarily transmitted through acts that are considered private and as the treatment (and increasingly also the prevention) of HIV/AIDS relies on the individually tailored antiretroviral drug therapy, the primary focus of the HIV/AIDS-related global health intervention has centered on the removal of hierarchies that prevent people’s access to individualized prevention and treatment services and the

protection of the liberty of these people in order that they would want to access such services in the first place.

In spite the fact that on the abstract level this naturally sounds good, the reality has proven out to be different. Although it is hard to oppose the above diagnosis as the health of the people affected by HIV/AIDS is virtually according to all empirical evidence tied to their freedom and equality along the aforementioned lines, this correct diagnosis has nevertheless not lead us to implement policies that would be unambiguously right. Due to the culture/nature-blurring character of HIV/AIDS, a neat intervention planned and conducted along the above diagnosis has proven out to be impossible. Especially in the marginalized locations of our world, far away from the prosperous conditions where our lives can be more easily measured, monitored and controlled in 'laboratorisque' conditions, the global response to HIV/AIDS has run into an obstacle that has been undefeatable; namely, the body. Particularly due to the fact that people are physiologically and pharmaceutically different, the global response to HIV/AIDS has not had means in reality to affirm the freedom and equality of all affected. On the contrary, as the vast evidence shows, although the scale up and liberalization of the global HIVAIDS relief especially in the past fifteen years has overall improved the life changes of people virtually everywhere, in the marginalized locations these improvements have been frequently accompanied by cementing already existing hierarchies and the establishment of new inequalities. This has happened not because the global response would have been insensitive to globally marginalized conditions but paradoxically in spite of the attention paid to these conditions and the frequent emphasizing of the importance of affirming the freedom for all affected and tackling every structure which expose people to risk unevenly.

In this way, the above paradox has become the political limit of the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS. The above paradox has become an unsolvable political problem within this response as, while this paradox contradicts the liberal-minded public health ethos that inspires the response, the paradox itself is simultaneously driven by the response's application of its ethos into the real world. Thus, the situation has emerged in which the perceived correct political solution to the problem is an integral part of the problem itself – something that is not at all surprising from the perspective of the biopolitical theorizing of the past four decades as one of the most established and well-known claims in this interdisciplinary field is that political universalism recedes when life steps to the foreground. When the general aim is to save, improve, secure, modify or foster life,

the attention is eventually focused on particular biological differences, regardless of universal ideas that might inspire this governance. From this perspective, the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS is once again one empirical case which has confirmed the thesis that biopolitical scholars have widely agreed upon already for some time.

And yet, there is a way forward from this. Along the lines set especially by the Italian biopolitical thought, we have in our work asserted that it is possible to go beyond the above paradox by confronting it head on and investigating it from the perspective of biopolitical thought; a task which had not before our study been properly conducted, even if references to biopolitical theories had already been made in the critical studies of the global response to HIV/AIDS. Our main question that guided our quest to find a solution to the political paradox of the contemporary global HIV/AIDS governance was: what is the relation between liberalism and biopolitics in the context of the global response to HIV/AIDS? Our engagement with this question yielded the following results: Firstly, in Chapter 2, by comparing, synthetizing, clarifying and even pushing some biopolitical theories a bit further than the original developers of these theories had done, we showed how due to the excessive reliance on the abstract idea of the person, it really is impossible that the liberal ethos of the contemporary global HIV/AIDS response would fully materialize in the marginalized locations of our world. As we argued, in spite of its abstract universalism, when taken to the level of concrete materiality of life, the liberal ethos of the contemporary global HIV/AIDS response actually necessarily drives indirect yet a structural form of violence which can be best conceptualized with the help of the symptomatology of immune deficiency. Simultaneously, however, the highlighting of this foundational limit of the contemporary global HIV/AIDS response also enabled us to maintain that it is possible to go beyond this impasse. By assuming as our offset the manner how HIV/AIDS crystalizes the paradoxes of the contemporary liberal management of life, we were able to reflect the politics of HIV/AIDS in connection with the theorizing that revolves around the fundamental common-ness of our lives. This led us to argue, especially with the help of Esposito's, Henry's and Deleuze's ideas of the absolute or radical immanence of life, that we can perceive what freedom and equality mean as separated from the immune deficient limits of the contemporary liberal response to HIV/AIDS by addressing this response from the perspective of the bodily finitude of the globally marginalized people subjected to the immune deficient form of violence.

Secondly, in Chapter 3, by again revisiting a number of theories – ranging from theories that have dealt with the immanence and common-ness of life to those which have elaborated the relationship of our materiality and language – we highlighted that we can best foreground the bodily finitude of the globally marginalized people in relation to the global HIV/AIDS governance with the help of literature. Accordingly, in Chapters 4 and 5, we then empirically addressed the political limits of the current global HIV/AIDS response with the help of four literary works: Carolyne Adalla's *Confessions of an AIDS Victim*, Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*, Meja Mwangi's *The Last Plague* and Yan Lianke's *Dream of Ding Village*. By reading these literary works next to the current HIV/AIDS response's immune deficient character, we showed how even the most marginalized HIV/AIDS sufferers can be seen on the basis of their lives to be actually free and equal in a more extensive sense than on the basis of the currently hegemonic liberal public health ethos. Consequently, we brought forward the difference which in the context of the global governance of HIV/AIDS lies between the pursuance of the liberal ideas of freedom and equality and the affirmation of the ideas of freedom and equality, which we can arrive at on the basis of life's absolute immanence. Along these lines, we divided the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS into two according to a political relation that consists from the prevalent liberal policies and from the viable possibility of affirmative biopolitics that can go beyond the limitations of the current global response to HIV/AIDS, even regarding the globally marginalized individuals of our world. In this way, we eventually verified how, along the affirmative-biopolitical lines, it is indeed possible to move beyond the limit that the liberal HIV/AIDS policies cannot cross, and to which also the critical studies of the global HIV/AIDS governance have so far persistently stumbled on.

## 6.2 Practical Prospects and Faithful Expressions

But how are we to concretely transform the contemporary governmental world of HIV/AIDS along the affirmative-biopolitical lines? What kind of concrete acts we could see in this context as faithful expressions of the affirmative-biopolitical ideas of freedom and equality? Furthermore, what can we accomplish by the political affirmation of these ideas? In other words, what are the limits of this kind of political activity, i.e. should this type of political activity struggle to establish some kind of different way of globally governing HIV/AIDS than the current one, or should the HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics eventually remain just an endless process that in the final analysis is always somehow at odds with the governance of our

lives? These are questions that we must still briefly reflect as the manner we have in our work laid the ground open for the affirmative-biopolitical transformation leads directly to them.

First of all, in relation to the question concerning our prospects of actually transforming the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS along the affirmative-biopolitical lines, we must remind ourselves that the concrete outcomes of political processes are always contingent. What really happens on the basis of political struggles cannot be predetermined or foreseen. Thus, if we could here point out how we could absolutely certainly transform the contemporary global response to HIV/AIDS, we would not be talking here about politics but about something else. Consequently, as disappointing as it might be for some, when it comes to concrete politics of HIV/AIDS, there simply is no way for us to promise a victory. It is only possible for us, as we have done in our work, to point out the ground and the outlines on the basis of which the fundamental wrongness of the contemporary global governance of HIV/AIDS can be translated into a process which is essentially right, that is a political process which affirms freedom and equality of everyone affected along the universal lines set by the normative power of life, thus offering a viable alternative to the current liberal immune deficient way of addressing the unbalances of global health.

Furthermore, what actual form the HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics should take or what are the concrete political means, strategies and tactics that should be deployed when this kind of affirmative biopolitics is practiced, are also questions which we cannot on the basis of our work exhaustively answer. In addition to the fact that the affirmative-biopolitical subjectivization and praxis, which we have in our work sketched and pointed out to be concretely practicable, are based on the realization that all destructive worldly imprisonments and hierarchies are unnatural and thus something that should be transformed along the universal lines set by the norm of life, our work does not lay any other conditions over the HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics. The questions over the form, means, strategies and tactics can be only answered by actually practicing this form of politics. After all, when it comes to concrete politics, the situations often rapidly change, accidents play a role in the development of events and the future is generally indeterminable. Thus, in other words, similarly as it is impossible to promise a victory for affirmative biopolitics, it is also impossible in advance to determine the way affirmative biopolitics should be practiced, apart from outlining its basis and its target.

And yet, despite of this ambiguity, we can nevertheless point out some directions which clearly do conform with our idea of HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics. For instance, all the political struggles which have sought, and also to some extent succeeded, to re-examine and resist the intellectual property rights of pharmaceutical companies that prevent the manufacture and distribution of cheaper generic drugs in the marginalized areas of our world obviously match with our idea of affirmative biopolitics – these struggles which also Esposito has mentioned when contemplating what affirmative biopolitics could mean in practice, as we have already pointed out earlier. In addition, insofar as we do not exclusively view at the political struggles of the early AIDS activists from the Roachian excessively radical anti-institutionalist perspective, we can say that these struggles precisely on the basis of the fundamental common-ness of our lives did eventually accomplish transformations in way that we can term affirmative-biopolitical. Even though gradually the views of the early AIDS activist and the public health authorities of the time begun to sometimes even questionably merge, and despite the fact that today an obligation of some form of activism is built into liberal health infrastructures, the way how the AIDS activists questioned the truth-telling about HIV/AIDS early on and how they even transformed this truth-telling speaks so forcefully to our account of affirmative biopolitics that we cannot dismiss the early AIDS activism from our perspective, not that we would even want to do such a thing.

Moreover, continuing along the above lines, we can point out how some more recent activist practices have been even more in line with our idea of HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics. The most paradigmatic case in this sense is undoubtedly Zackie Achmat's famous decision to publicly refuse to take AIDS medications until all of those who needed them had access to them. Although the South African, after holding his pledge for years, finally started the treatment, along the same time as the government announced that it would make antiretrovirals available through the public sector, Achmat's case still provides us an example how politically stage and communicate the equal value of all life against the prevalent exclusionary biopolitical ordering of it in a way that very explicitly resonates with our idea of HIV/AIDS-related affirmative biopolitics. After all, as radical as Achmat's protest was, it was clearly based on the fact that life is *common*. For this reason, it managed to break completely *free* from the grip of existing immunitary mechanisms and it was able to communicate something to the public sphere; namely, *equality*. In this way, Achmat's decision to publicly refuse to take AIDS medications until all of those who needed them had access to them, probably better than anything else concretizes our claim that, through the affirmation of life as common, also freedom

and equality can be demanded, and indeed even actualized, in a much more progressive sense than it is possible within the limits set by liberalism.

The above examples also shed light on the question whether the political struggle we are here advocating should strive for the establishment of its own way of globally governing HIV/AIDS or just remain an endless process of revolt. Regarding this question after all, our discussion of the above cases seem to strengthen the general spirit of our work which advises us to stay somewhere in the middle. On the one hand, it is clear that there cannot be a perfect order that could be identical with the common-ness of life. As especially the last two of the above cases again exemplify, we gain access to this common-ness precisely through the blurring of any ideas of perfect order, by realizing through our finitude that our lives are, and always will remain, fundamentally unmasterable. Thus, the worldly affirmation of life simply becomes possible only on the condition that there is a gap between our worlds and the common-ness of life. On the other hand, however, it is not that this affirmation is completely affirmation if the communication of the common-ness of life is not translated into worldly principles of freedom and equality. Foregrounding death or befriending finitude solely for the sake of escaping the world is not complete affirmation of life but actually a negation of the worldly aspect of our lives. For instance, as we can again see by looking at the last two of the above examples, understanding either the early AIDS activism or Achmat's decision on the basis of a straightforward escapism from the world leads us to precisely lose sight of the affirmative-biopolitical component of these activities. Hence, against those views that absolutely see affirmative biopolitics as essentially anti-institutional, we can maintain that the idea of affirmative biopolitics actually demands that it is practiced in order to transform the institutions, structures or orders of our worlds. In this way, although affirmative biopolitics can be understood as an endless process of revolt on all fronts against any type of worldly hierarchy or imprisonment, it should also be understood as something that in principle does not want to completely negate the worldly governance of our lives as such. Even if there cannot strictly speaking be a world that we could call as completely affirmative-biopolitical (after all, there must be something *transformable* in the world in order that affirmative biopolitics becomes possible), it is also that in principle we can imagine worlds that we would constantly transform according to the affirmative-biopolitical principles. If there is then a one political challenge over others today when it comes to HIV/AIDS, it is ensuring that in the future we pursue to create a governmental world that corresponds to this ideal.

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