

## Corona and *communis*: immunity, community and the Covid-19

*Corona e “communis”: imunidade, comunidade e o Covid-19*

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**Abstract:** Faced with the New Coronavirus pandemic, many problems have been raised by the philosophy of the “immune” mode with which industrial civilization has dealt with the crisis, and much has been said about the need to rethink the notion of communities of support and resistance. Examples of this are not lacking; among the philosophers who have addressed the crisis are Giorgio Agamben to Paul B. Preciado, among others. In this article, we intend to start from the discussion on immunology and immune paradigm in Roberto Espósito to ask ourselves how we can think of this demand for “community” in the midst of an immunity crisis, in the biological and political sense of the term. We hypothesize that, rather than postulate the exclusive opposition of the terms, raising the question by their articulation opens us to two possible ways of relating to the abyssal otherness that we find in the virus.

**Keywords:** Anarchism; Biopolitics; Coronavirus; Political philosophy; Roberto Espósito; Social anthropology

**Resumo:** Diante da pandemia do Novo Coronavírus, muitos foram os problemas levantados pela filosofia a partir do modo “imunitário” com o qual a civilização industrial lidou com a crise, e muito tem sido aventado sobre a necessidade de se repensar o sentido da noção de comunidades de apoio e de resistência. Exemplos disso não faltam; dentre os filósofos que abordaram a crise, encontram-se desde Giorgio Agamben a Paul B. Preciado, entre outros. Neste artigo, pretendemos partir da discussão sobre imunologia e paradigma imunitário em Roberto Espósito para nos perguntar de que modo podemos pensar essa demanda por “comunidade” em meio a uma crise imunitária, no sentido biológico e político do termo. Temos por hipótese que, mais do que postular a oposição exclusiva dos termos, levantar a questão pela articulação deles nos abre dois modos possíveis de relação com a alteridade abissal que encontramos no vírus.

**Palavras-chave:** Anarquismo; Biopolítica; Coronavírus; Filosofia Política; Roberto Espósito; Antropologia social

*the empire of shared vulnerability is born  
this is the birth of the common if it all works out  
from my quarantine I break down  
walls between me and you  
walls between me and the world  
the time has come  
time of contagion  
Mariana Ciotta*

*Son, be silent. This is what Earth is saying to humanity.  
Ailton Krenak*

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## Introduction

To talk about COVID-19<sup>1</sup> and SARS-CoV-2<sup>2</sup> (New Coronavirus) in the midst of a pandemic, which promises to be the cause of the greatest capitalism crisis since 1927<sup>3</sup>, overcoming the 2008 real estate crisis, is a challenge, especially from a philosophical standpoint — since Hegel, one knows that the Minerva Owl always arrives too late. In this case, haste makes waste: Agamben<sup>4</sup>, in the midst of Italy's health crisis, published an essay that minimized the destructive potential of the pandemic and seemed only to corroborate his series of books. Theorists such as Žižek<sup>5</sup>, Nancy<sup>6</sup>, and Espósito<sup>7</sup> rushed to disagree with Agamben, and a plethora of philosophical articles, essays, and interviews followed them.

Although the question posed by Agamben about a permanent state of exception remains urgent, his essay does not seem to add anything exactly new on the matter. On the other hand, the question of how to deal with the crisis has been raised inside and outside philosophy, in a moment in which neither the market nor the State seems to guarantee the survival conditions of their populations. These two are manifestations of what Espósito called the “immunological paradigm”<sup>8</sup>, a biopolitical paradigm for the management of human life by the negation of invasive and infectious agents, where the political body operates in the same way as an organic immune system dealing with an infectious virus. Against this paradigm, a vague but almost ubiquitous rumour seems to rumble around the need to build communities of mutual support and resistance — to the constraints of the security State, to siege and exception states, to the failure of health systems, to the suffocation of minorities due to austerity measures after the 2008 crisis, among others.

However, how to think community without being by its mere reactive and immunological resistance to an invader? Therefore, how to form a community, if not through immunity? Or rather: what is the relationship between community and immunity, and why is the so-called “immunological paradigm” of biopolitics a *problem* when it comes to the current pandemic context? In what way does immunity bring us to the pandemic crisis, and why does communities become imperative in the face of contagion, something that configures communities themselves? Finally, how can one think this relationship?

In this paper, whose conclusions should be nothing but provisional given the state of affairs, one tries to retrace the immunity paradigm with the help of Espósito for whom the concept of immunology is fundamental. Next, one will seek the relationship between community and immunity, searching for its articulation with the notions of *munus* and otherness. At last, one will deal with the hypothesis that thinking on the *relationship* between these two terms allows one to open two possibilities of articulation between them and, thus, two ways of dealing with this abyssal Other that is the virus.

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<sup>1</sup> Coronavirus Infectious Disease 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrom Coronavirus 2.

<sup>3</sup> TOOZE, *The coronavirus is the biggest emerging markets crisis ever*.

<sup>4</sup> AGAMBEN, *Lo stato d'eccezione provocato da un'emergenza immotivata*.

<sup>5</sup> ŽIŽEK, *Monitor and punish? Yes, please!*

<sup>6</sup> NANCY, *Eccezione virale*.

<sup>7</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Curati a oltranza*.

<sup>8</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*.

## Immunological paradigm

When invoking the notion of immunology, the most obvious sense is the one from the biomedical-epidemiological field: a scientific field of studies on the immune system of living organisms, its relationship with pathogens and its homeostasis. As Virella explains, “the term immunity, derived from the Latin *‘immunis’* (exempt), was adopted to designate this naturally acquired protection against diseases such as measles and smallpox”<sup>9</sup>. Immunology, therefore, refers to the relationship between the normal and the pathological, the familiar and the strange, the self and the nonself. For Martin, “whereas boundaries within the body are fluid and control is dispersed, the boundary between the body (self) and the external world (nonself) is rigid and absolute”<sup>10</sup>. The organism-pathogen immunological model has also become a metaphor for the functioning of the modern political body. There’s plenty of examples in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, from Durkheim to Marx, from Scheler to Elias, from Freud to Sperber, from Luhmann to Sloterdijk<sup>11</sup>. “It was generally not until the 1970s,” however, “that departments of immunology existed in American or other universities. Popular depictions of immune system functions only began after this time and grew frequent only in the 1980s”<sup>12</sup>. “[...] the immune system,” says Haraway, “is an elaborate icon for principal systems of symbolic and material ‘difference’ in late capitalism”<sup>13</sup> — the difference self-other in the neo-colonial geopolitical context, but also the intersectional microdifferences within political relations. “Added to the conception of a clear boundary between self and nonself is the conception of the nonself world as foreign and hostile. [...] the body is depicted [...] as the scene of total war between ruthless invaders and determined defenders”<sup>14</sup>. By immunization, the interior of the political *socius* relates to the exterior as an immune system relates to an antigen: if the social interior cannot incorporate the stranger by phagocytosis in order to produce “an effective immune apparatus”<sup>15</sup>, a destructive immunological defence eliminates it.

This is Espósito’s “immunological paradigm”<sup>16</sup>, “by which, similar to the dynamics of an organism’s immune system, political immunization is a ‘negative protection of life’”<sup>17</sup>. The German Nazi-fascism is its model phenomenon and its limit — autoimmunity:

Why has Nazism - unlike all forms of power past and present - led the homicidal temptation of biopolitics to its most complete fulfilment? Why did it alone invert the ratio between life and death in favour of the latter, to the point of *predicting its own destruction*? I propose once again that the answer refers to the category of immunization. Because only the latter clearly lays the deadly bond that joins the protection of life with its potential denial. Furthermore, the figure of *autoimmune disease* represents the extreme condition in which the protective apparatus is made so aggressive that it turns against the very body it should protect, causing its explosion. That this is the interpretative key of Nazism is proved [...] by the particularity of the evil from which it intended to defend the German people. It was not just any disease, but *an infectious disease*. What we wanted at all costs to avoid was

<sup>9</sup> VIRELLA, *Introduction to medical immunology*, 1, emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> MARTIN, *Toward an Anthropology of Immunology*, 411.

<sup>11</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 62-71.

<sup>12</sup> MARTIN, *Toward an Anthropology of Immunology*, 417.

<sup>13</sup> HARAWAY, *Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature*, 204.

<sup>14</sup> MARTIN, *Toward an Anthropology of Immunology*, 411.

<sup>15</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Immunitas: Protección y negación de la vida*, 73.

<sup>16</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> NALLI, *A abordagem imunitária de Roberto Espósito: biopolítica e medicalização*, 42.

the *contagion* between inferior and superior beings. The regime propagated the death struggle against the Jews as that which opposed the originally healthy body and blood of the German nation to the invading germs, infiltrating it with the intention of undermining its unity and even its life. The epidemiological repertoire that the ideologists of the *Reich* employed to represent their supposed enemies and, above all, the Jews, is known: they were [...] “*bacilli*,” “*bacteria*,” “*parasites*,” “*viruses*,” “*microbes*”. [...] Therefore the just term for their massacre [...] is *extermination*: exactly what is used for insects, rats and fleas. *Soziale Desinfektion* [social disinfection]<sup>18</sup>.

As noted, the Espósitan notion of immunization is an answer to the very question for the inner immune reaction mechanism. This mechanism limits and, in the end, exterminates that which it intended to preserve, in order to protect the social interior. In this way, it engenders an extermination of the Other as a carrier of death, followed however by the subsequent extermination of itself, also a subject of the action of the immune power. Nazism explains the paradox of the immune body, a device that, in order to defend, acts as an unstoppable “death line”<sup>19</sup> — “against everything and everyone” —, destined to turn itself into this “healthy” body that, also and above all, carries with it a self-annihilation drive. This “*suicidal state*”<sup>20</sup> of autoimmunity “expresses in a pure state, so to speak, the logic of the immune system. If the latter opposes itself to *everything* it recognizes, it cannot but attack that ‘itself’ as well”<sup>21</sup>. This is the implicit paradox of the first stanza of the German anthem, abolished after Nazism: *Deutschland über alles*, “Germany above all” — including itself.

Espósito raises the question of immunology in response to Foucault’s discussion of biopolitics and biopower<sup>22</sup>. In it, “Foucault rehearses an analysis of the totalitarian phenomenon, particularly the Nazi one, in which politics and biology become equivalent in an extreme way”<sup>23</sup>. With this in mind, Espósito proposes what “he had called the ‘enigma of biopolitics’, that is, how biopolitics — which is characterized by a set of political actions and strategies aimed at the promotion and protection of life and subjectivity — can decay into a thanatopolitics”<sup>24</sup>, a kind of politics whose object of management is precisely death and not life. In other words, how can a life-oriented *nomos* engender its opposite? The immunological question therefore coincides with the question of the conservation of life, which “involves the suspension or alienation of what it must preserve”<sup>25</sup>. In other words, immunisation means the preservation of life through its removal from the “infectious” domain of common life. That is why the Third *Reich* saw the immune procedure as a social disinfection one, a biopolitical expedient of public health for the preservation of the “pure”, uninfected body of the German people.

Espósito points to the sovereign turn of modern political philosophy as the moment of the immune paradigm consummation. The Hobbesian Leviathan is, above all, its ground zero, since “in Hobbes, not only does *conservatio vitae* fully enters into the sphere of politics, but it constitutes by far its predominant object”<sup>26</sup>. Modernity itself is a result of this immune turn, since, for Espósito, “all civilizations [...] have placed and in some way resolved the demand for their own immunization, but [...] only the modern civilization has been

<sup>18</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 147, emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> DELEUZE & GUATTARI, *Mille Plateaux: capitalismo et schizophrénie* 2, 280.

<sup>20</sup> DELEUZE & GUATTARI, *Mille Plateaux: capitalismo et schizophrénie* 2, 281.

<sup>21</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Immunitas: Protección y negación de la vida*, 233.

<sup>22</sup> FOUCAULT, *Em defesa da sociedade: curso no Collège de France (1975-1976)*.

<sup>23</sup> NALLI, *A abordagem imunitária de Roberto Espósito: biopolítica e medicalização*, 40.

<sup>24</sup> NALLI, *A abordagem imunitária de Roberto Espósito: biopolítica e medicalização*, 41.

<sup>25</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 75.

<sup>26</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 74.

constituted by it in its innermost essence”<sup>27</sup>. Thus, modernity did not “raised the question of the self-preservation of life, but rather the latter gave birth to the former, that is, it ‘invented’ modernity as a ‘historical-categorical’ apparatus capable of resolving it”<sup>28</sup>. In this sense, Modernity is a condensation of immune forms, notions, and practices, a device constituted precisely to build the immune protection of the political body. One must then consider the sovereign, a figure who combines modern forms of political organization from the Hobbesian contractualism, as a category made “by the immune logic to guarantee life against the risks derived from its collective configuration and conflagration”<sup>29</sup>. Contract and the modern State, therefore, are nothing more than concretizations of the immune logic.

### *Communitas and immunitas*

This characterization of the immunological paradigm seems to imply that, at least since Modernity, every *community* is also an *immunity*. The current pandemic crisis, however, casts serious doubts on this close correlation: why are the immune communities (families, cities, States, offices etc.) having a hard time in dealing with the pandemic, even when they make it clear to themselves that the New Coronavirus is a threatening “enemy” one that must be fought at all costs? On the other hand, why, in spite of the immune struggle, does the pandemic seem, now more than ever, to raise the need for making *communities* in the strongest sense of the word? If immune communities are “groups [that] become communes, that is, units integrated by common *munera* [obligations]”<sup>30</sup>, obligations always guided by the *immune* motive of a “mobilization for a common fight *against the external enemy*”<sup>31</sup>, why does the virus, summarily ignoring the immune defences, seems to claim other senses of immunity and community? Therefore, it is urgent to investigate the question concerning the relationship between immunity and community, considering that they seem to have a common origin and that often are mixed up. To what extent is it possible to say that a community can also be an immunity, or to what extent both concepts cancel each other out? At what moment does a sphere cease to be an “intimate community of psychic space”<sup>32</sup> to become an “immunity” even when faced with the common?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to investigate the terms *communitas* and *immunitas*, as well as the common radical in both terms: *munus*. The Roman notion of *immunitas*, although appropriated by contemporary political science from the biomedical field, has a vast political genealogy, which, in a certain sense, can be traced back to Ancient Rome. It is in the Roman Republic that the notion of *immunitas* takes shape, and it is there where one can also understand the difference between “community” and “society”<sup>33</sup>. It is only possible to understand the specificities of the concept of *immunitas*, however, if one articulates the other two Latin legal-political concepts: *munus* and *communitas*. The first refers to a “commitment of reciprocal donation”<sup>34</sup>, meaning both “*onus*, *officium*, and *donum*”<sup>35</sup>. The last of them is the most problematic, especially when compared with the

<sup>27</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 71.

<sup>28</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 71.

<sup>29</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 71-72.

<sup>30</sup> SLOTERDIJK, *Sphären III (Plurale Sphärologie): Schäume*, 412.

<sup>31</sup> SLOTERDIJK, *Sphären III (Plurale Sphärologie): Schäume*, 412.

<sup>32</sup> SLOTERDIJK, *Sphären III (Plurale Sphärologie): Schäume*, 355.

<sup>33</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 65.

<sup>35</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 26. One can translate the Latin words as “onus” or “charge”, “duty”, “function” or “post”, and “gift”.

other two in the dynamic between public and private. After all, “if, for the first two, the meaning of ‘duty’ is immediately evident — from there, derives ‘obligation’, ‘function’, ‘position’, ‘employment’, ‘post’<sup>36</sup>, the meaning of ‘gift’ (*donum*) seems to clash with the previous ones: how to reconcile duty/obligation and gift/spontaneity? Espósito explains that, “in fact, *munus* is for *donum* what the ‘species is for the genus’ [...], since it means ‘gift’, but a gift of a particular type, ‘which is distinguished by its obligatory character, implicit in the root *mei-*”, denoting “exchange”<sup>37</sup>.

Although one can refer such a gift-interchange circular relationship “to the well-known investigations of Benveniste”<sup>38</sup>, this dynamics also resembles, according to Espósito, the one described in Mauss’ discussion on the exchange and correlation of debt and gift (*don*) in the Polynesian “*system of total services*”<sup>39</sup>. In it, the total service “does not imply only the obligation to return the received gifts, but also two other equally important ones: the obligation to give, on the one hand, and the obligation to receive, on the other”<sup>40</sup>. The obligation to give and the obligation to receive form together a set of practices or a system of total services that constitutes a community i.e. alliances based on a common *munus*. This system follows a different logic than that of the objectification of reality, present in the naturalist cosmology of the modern West and solidified by the capitalist logic of the market. Among the Polynesians, things and people interrelate among themselves; while things are people, the exchange also passes through the transference of the personhood among the persons-things themselves, constituting strong relations, which are very distinct from the relations between a person (consumer) and a thing (commodity)<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, the gift, although voluntary, presents an obligation that precedes the voluntary provision of the service itself, “under penalty of private or public war”<sup>42</sup>. In this sense, as Espósito states, the reciprocal act of giving (*munus*) has a preponderance over the gift and the expected “counter-gift”<sup>43</sup>:

[...] [in the] subtraction from the constriction of a duty resides the lesser intensity of the *donum* regarding the inexorable obligation of the *munus*. This, in short, is the gift that is given because *it must* be given, and because *cannot not be given*. [...] [*Munus*] projects itself completely into the transitive act of giving<sup>44</sup>.

Thus, anchored in the obligatory mutuality of the act of giving, the *munus* that forms the *communitas* emerges as a direct counterpoint to the notion of *proper*, typically attributed to the term “community” when thought as a “public thing,” a *res publica*: “what ‘thing’ do the members of a community have in common? Is it, in fact, ‘something’ positive? An asset, a substance, an interest? [...] Therefore, *communitas* is the group of people united not by a property, but by a duty or a debt”<sup>45</sup>. Community, therefore, is very distant from the modern political concept of “society”, at least if society is thought in contractual terms as a group of individuals associated around similar interests, agglutinated by a tacit legal pact transcendent to its members and bound by a relationship of identification with that which is

<sup>36</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 26.

<sup>37</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> MAUSS, *Sociologia e antropologia*, 191.

<sup>40</sup> MAUSS, *Sociologia e antropologia*, 201-203.

<sup>41</sup> MAUSS, *Sociologia e antropologia*, 188.

<sup>42</sup> MAUSS, *Sociologia e antropologia*, 191.

<sup>43</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 27.

<sup>44</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 29.

“proper” to the collective. One must conceive the very Maussian exchange, which sustains a fundamental part of the definition of *munus*<sup>46</sup>, “less as a transcendent norm than as an internal division of the subject, as its dependence upon an *immanent otherness*”<sup>47</sup>. In the words of Espósito, “[...] *it is not the proper, but the improper* — or, more drastically, the *other* — that characterizes the *common*. A partial or integral emptying of property in its opposite. An expropriation which invests and decentre the subject who owns it, forcing him to leave himself, to *alter* himself”<sup>48</sup>. Community, therefore, relates itself to the expropriation “of its very own property, that is, of its very own subjectivity”<sup>49</sup>. Furthermore and in a more fundamental sense, *communitas* is expropriation as the founding event of subjectivity itself, *starting from* reciprocal donation and, therefore, from the Other, from the “intruder” who, by *contagion*<sup>50</sup>, “extrudes me, exports me, expropriates me”<sup>51</sup>, giving the necessary fracture inside the subject in order to make them assemble together<sup>52</sup>.

If the common is the sharing of the same compulsory bond of reciprocal self-giving, founding the subject from the bond of exchange with this Other, the “immune is the ‘non-being’ or the ‘non-having’ nothing in common”<sup>53</sup>. In a more general and superficial level, the immune is, at first, that which is free of *munus*, that is, the immune is “whoever results *muneribus vacuus* [free of *munus*], *sine muneribus* [without *munus*], free of charges, exonerated, ‘discharged’ from the *pensum* [task] of paying taxes or giving benefits to another”<sup>54</sup>. Therefore, the immune person is the one who is exempted from civil, military, fiscal charges, in the sense that he is, at the same time, exempted and privileged: “immunity is perceived as such if it is an exception to a rule which, however, all others must follow: *immunis est qui vacat a muneribus, quae alli praestare debent*’. The accent should be placed on the second part of the sentence”<sup>55</sup>.

In a deeper sense, it is not the mere dispensation of a charge that configures immunity, *but the character of exception in general*, the character of differentiation, in the sense of exclusivity, *before the whole of the community*. Thus, “the true antonym of *immunitas* is not the absent *munus*, but the *communitas* of those who, otherwise, become its bearers”<sup>56</sup>. In other words, “what is immunized is the community itself, in a form that both preserves and denies it — or rather, preserves it through the negation of its original horizon of meaning”<sup>57</sup>. Immunization, thus, functions as a *denial* of community as a whole. It is parallel to Val Plumwood’s logical device of “backgrounding”, as the exclusion and dualistic hierarchy: the immune “attempts both to make use of the other, to organise, rely on and benefit from the other’s services, and to deny the dependency which creates”<sup>58</sup>. It functions, therefore, in a kind of dialectic of the master and the slave. The “master” here is the immune who structurally depends on the “slave” community, because it is from the community that he can constitute his own borders, his differential identity, and his centre

<sup>46</sup> Cf. WEIR, *Roberto Espósito’s political philosophy of the gift*, 159.

<sup>47</sup> VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, *Metafísicas canibais: elementos para uma antropologia pós-estrutural*, 136, emphasis added.

<sup>48</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 31, emphasis added.

<sup>49</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 31.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 133-134.

<sup>51</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Immunitas: Protección y negación de la vida*, 215.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. ESPÓSITO, *Communitas: Origen y destino de la comunidad*, 33-34.

<sup>53</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 67.

<sup>54</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Immunitas: Protección y negación de la vida*, 14.

<sup>55</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Immunitas: Protección y negación de la vida*, 15. The Latin phrase says: “Immune is the one who is relieved of charges that others must carry on them”.

<sup>56</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Immunitas: Protección y negación de la vida*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 67.

<sup>58</sup> PLUMWOOD, *Politics of Reason: Towards a feminist logic*, 447.

against the *munus*' periphery. It is from the community that the immune master withdraws all its materiality and support, while constantly denying it by immunizing himself against it in an act of capture. In other words, acting as a "homeopathic practice of protection"<sup>59</sup>, in which the antigen that is intended to be denied is, at the same time, inoculated and neutralized as a condition of the immunization itself, "the concept of immunization presupposes that which it denies"<sup>60</sup>.

If, in the end, it is the Other, the infectious intruder, who constitutes the community bond from the outset, then immunisation is a double denial: the denial of the *munus* as a veiled dependence on the community bond, and, by extension, the denial of the Other as the cause of the fracture that the *munus* intends to suture. Immunity, therefore, is the complete opposite of community, constituting itself precisely in the point of immunization of the absolute Other, prior to the very difference between the self and the Other, life and non-life.

One could here consider the virus as a manifestation of this absolute otherness. By not belonging to the domain of the living, but also not being exactly inorganic, by being invisible to the naked eye, an intruder at the cellular level, and extruder of the subjects' deepest fragility, the virus, as the Other, is a foundational agent which is always denied by the immunological paradigm. This immunity underestimates the virus and thus ignores its gravity, disqualifying it as a mere enemy, as well as making oblique its community-building power. If, in the centre of every community, the horizon of otherness is in force, the nucleus of every community to come from the present pandemic now seems to be constituted by no other than a viral horizon.

### **Corona and *communis*: two ways of relating to the virus**

The question that finally arises does not seem exactly to be which of the terms best solves the pandemic, community or immunity. It is not in terms of immune efficiency that the problem should arise. The question here is another one, a question concerning the same tension between community and immunity, in which they affect each other, but in *equivocal* ways. Immunity and community are therefore always *in relation*. As Preciado soberly stated in an article on the pandemic published by *El País* on 28 March 2020:

If we think back to the history of some of the world epidemics of the last five centuries [...], it is possible to work out a hypothesis that could take the form of an equation: *tell me how your community builds up its political sovereignty and I will tell you what forms your epidemics will take and how you will confront them*<sup>61</sup>.

One could also propose otherwise: *tell me how your immunity deals with the absolute otherness and I will tell you what forms your epidemics will take and how, from them, you will constitute relationships*. It is interesting how the very name of the family of viruses of SARS-CoV-2 involuntarily reflects the basic recipe of the immunological paradigm, for whom the Other is always a matter of a community reduced to sovereignty, *communis* (the common) reduced to *corona* (the crown)<sup>62</sup>. If we consider that the immunological paradigm puts "the

<sup>59</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Immunitas: Protección y negación de la vida*, 18.

<sup>60</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofía*, 67.

<sup>61</sup> PRECIADO, *Aprendiendo del virus*, emphasis added.

<sup>62</sup> The name of the *Coronaviridae* virus family is actually due to the morphology of the virus, whose casing appears to carry a protein crown of thorns (cf. ALMEIDA, BERRY et al. *Virology: Coronaviruses*, 650).



foreigner as a virus for some, the virus as a foreigner for others”, and all of us as “hostages to our own metaphors or to our translations”<sup>63</sup>, the COVID-19 pandemic is showing nothing less than the *modus operandi* by which late liberalism, working by immunological premises, has been dealing with the pandemic and all phenomena involving otherness. It also clarifies the way in which, rather than the harsh division between *communitas* and *immunitas*, this liberalism reflects a specific “model of community/immunity”<sup>64</sup> relationship, anchored “in an *immune definition of the community*, according to which it will give itself the authority to sacrifice other lives for the sake of an idea of its own sovereignty”<sup>65</sup>.

One also can see how the discourse of immunity, apparently symmetrical from an immunological point of view, changes when one deals, for instance, with the indigenous point of view. While the Indigenous Action collective claims that the “deadly politics of capitalism” is itself “pandemic”<sup>66</sup>, Kopenawa exposes how the Whites (*napë*) themselves are vectors of epidemics. In Yanomami, “epidemic” translates as *xawara*<sup>67</sup>, a phenomenon that occurs by the action of “epidemic spirits” (*xawararipë*), spirits who follow the commodities (*matihi*) of the Whites and therefore manifest themselves when, for example, the mining companies, “outsider giant armadillo spirits” (*napë wakari pë*)<sup>68</sup>, madly dig the earth in search for gold and precious ores. One should also pay attention to how the equivocation of the binomial health/disease, immunity/epidemic has a clear parallel with the equivocation of the *anthropophagy* itself, as a possible alternative to the immunological phagocytosis i.e. the immunological paradigm’s form of relationship with the Other. While the Yanomami people practice inner cannibalism (funerary ash being one of the primary senses of *matihi*, dedicated to White’s commodities only in a derived form<sup>69</sup>), the *napë* and the *xawararipë* are considered “cannibals”, similar Oswald de Andrade’s “low anthropophagy” notion<sup>70</sup>. “In the eyes of the shamans”, according to Albert, “[*xawara* epidemic] appears as a court of evil cannibalistic spirits (*xawarari*, pl. *pë*) similar to Whites who cook and devour their victims”<sup>71</sup>. On the other hand, the West has always looked at indigenous anthropophagy as an act of bestiality, a “descent into savagery”, from the horror of Anchieta before the Tupinambá’s anthropophagic rituals (“What a spectacle of filth, what a vision of mischief!”<sup>72</sup>) to Hobbes’ axiom of political philosophy, “*Homo homini lupus*,” where the wolf, a man “before” the State, is itself lupinophagic.

Our question, therefore, seems to point to two diametrically opposed ways of relating to radical otherness, an otherness made explicit by the virus: the immune phagocytosis and the communal “anthropophagy”. The indigenous “anthropophagic” example shows that, instead of a low intensity *communal immunity*, that is, a contingent and provisional effect derived from a political community — such as the Yanomami’s immunity from a communal resistance to *xawara* epidemics, or the anarchist groups of mutual support, whose immunity

<sup>63</sup> ROSELLO, *Contamination et pureté: pour une protocole de cohabitation*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> PRECIADO, *Aprendiendo del virus*.

<sup>65</sup> PRECIADO, *Aprendiendo del virus*, emphasis added.

<sup>66</sup> INDIGENOUS ACTION, *Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto*. “Colonialism is a plague, capitalism is pandemic. These systems are anti-life, they will not be compelled to cure themselves. We will not allow these corrupted sickened systems to recuperate. We will spread. *We are the antibodies*” (ibid.).

<sup>67</sup> KOPENAWA & ALBERT, *A queda do céu: palavras de um xamã yanomami*, 363, 663.

<sup>68</sup> KOPENAWA & ALBERT, *A queda do céu: palavras de um xamã yanomami*, 368, 663.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. KOPENAWA & ALBERT, *A queda do céu: palavras de um xamã yanomami*, 671.

<sup>70</sup> “The low anthropophagy clustered in the sins of catechism — envy, usury, slander, murder. The plague of the so-called cultured and Christianized peoples, it is against it that we are acting. Anthropophagi” (ANDRADE, *Manifesto Antropófago*, 19).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. KOPENAWA & ALBERT, *A queda do céu: palavras de um xamã yanomami*, 627.

<sup>72</sup> ANCHIETA apud BORTOLANZA, *A alteridade indígena no poema épico de Anchieta*, 253.

takes the virus seriously<sup>73</sup> —, the immunological phagocytosis constitutes an accidental and fragile *immune community* as an *effect* of a political immunity, a community totally oriented to the annihilation of an external enemy *devoid of any agency*, except that of causing death — even when this enemy, invisible to the naked eye, as is the case of viruses, manages to penetrate the most molecular strata of bodies, making itself as inner as the “soul” itself. As the stock market speculators and several executives of large trade chains have demonstrated, the maintenance of capital is more important than the maintenance of life, even to the point of its human speculators self-annihilation. In the current pandemic, immunology shows itself, as it did with Nazism, in its autoimmune drift, exhibiting more than ever its clear parallels with the climate crisis<sup>74</sup>, as “the health crisis prepares, induces, incites us to prepare for climate change”<sup>75</sup>.

The colonization that consolidates capitalism in its primary stages and that serves as the motor of Modernity as “immunity technology” is also the moment when the “transcendental order of theological matrix”<sup>76</sup>, as the metaphysical totality that served as an “immunological” habitat before the immunological devices of Modernity<sup>77</sup>, collapses “*under the aporetic tension between community and immunity*”<sup>78</sup>. In this sense, the tipping point of the immunological tension with the community is also the necessary end of all immunological spheres in their desire to consume the limitless otherness. Since the autoimmune implosion of the theological sphere, it is not possible to reconcile community and immunity in its “aporetic tension” anymore.

This state of affairs tends to constitute a new type of chronic autoimmune deficiency in the form of a generalized infection — fascism, this “suicidal regime”. According to Valentim, fascism it is the “official policy” of Anthropocene, a policy that “establishes and accelerates the ‘human’ world, closing it onto itself by its frenetic expansion (exported destruction) and thus impelling it to its own destruction”<sup>79</sup>. Fascism is, therefore, the last drift by which those peoples in debt with modern immunology now observe, astonished, death doubled over themselves in an ironic autoimmunity syndrome. One can consider that the European fascism in the 20th century’s first half was just a “sneeze” or a localized, also autoimmune, symptom, but of limited pathological potential, a symptom of a crisis that, today, in the post-war global society, announces itself. It is the crisis of the contemporary fascism as *the globalized policy of cosmopolitical and socio-environmental extermination*, unleashed at a time when capitalism reached a point of no return for the outbreak of a generalized autoimmune deficiency — of which the New Coronavirus pandemic serves as warning and preparation, neither as a vector of global fascism, nor of death.

Despite this somewhat “fatalistic” diagnosis, the differentiation between immunology and anthropophagy seems to allow another type of solution and brings an opportunity to think of a more radical sense of community up, in assemble with other beings, such as the virus. The only way, therefore, to curb the autoimmune potential of generalized fascism

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<sup>73</sup> According to the indigenous leadership Ailton Krenak, the New Coronavirus, instead of being an enemy, is a manifestation of the very agency of the Earth's biosphere and a lesson of deceleration to the humanity of industrial capitalism (cf. KRENAK & MAAKAROUN, “*O modo de funcionamento da humanidade entrou em crise*”, *opina Ailton Krenak*). In addition, cf. the anarchist guide to survival to the New Coronavirus produced by CrimethInc. (*Surviving the Virus – An Anarchist Guide*), where the issue of forming supporting communities comes to the fore, and cf. LUNDI MATIN, *What the virus said*.

<sup>74</sup> WYNS, *How climate change and the coronavirus are linked*.

<sup>75</sup> LATOUR, *Is this a dress rehearsal?*.

<sup>76</sup> ESPÓSITO, *Bios: biopolítica e filosofia*, 71.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. SLOTERDIJK, *Sphären II (Makrosphärologie): Globen*.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. WAMBACQ & TUINEN, *Interiority in Sloterdijk and Deleuze*, 3, emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> VALENTIM, *Extramundandade e sobrenatureza: ensaios de ontologia infundamental*, 290.

seems to be to start from another way of relating with otherness, where there is no tension between immunity and community *because immunity does not become a problem, since its preponderance is denied from the outset*. One can think of “anthropophagy” as this kind of counterimmune or immunosuppressive mode of relation with the Other<sup>80</sup>, following the lead left by Clastres when he argues that Amerindian cosmologies are oriented in such a way as to constitute a community whose motor is, instead of “class struggle”, the “struggle against the State”<sup>81</sup>, against the crown, but towards the “communovirus”<sup>82</sup>. The present pandemic, at last, invites us to the opportunity of another world to come, together with another way of relating to this possible world. If one will take advantage of it, only time will tell, since, as Brum alludes, “the post-coronavirus future is already in dispute”<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> We already essayed something similar to this “anthropophagic paradigm” in another paper (cf. PITTA, *Um ensaio de um “Anti-Orfeu”: perspectivismo cosmológico como contraponto à esferologia de Sloterdijk*).

<sup>81</sup> CLASTRES, *A sociedade contra o Estado*, 190

<sup>82</sup> NANCY, *Communovirus*.

<sup>83</sup> BRUM, *O futuro pós-coronavírus já está em disputa*.

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