

The werewolf in the immunization paradigm

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I. Introduction

The biopolitical perspective initiated by Michel Foucault highlights the limitations of traditional categories of Political philosophy to explicate power relations. As Foucault notes power “produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourses. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” [end of quote] (Foucault, 1980: 119). Thus power is exercised throughout society; it can produce subjects and subjectivities.

Based on this point, I consider that monstrosity is a political category that allows us to conceive the way in which biopower produces subjectivities. Monstrosity can be understood in two ways: in the negative sense it can be taken as subjectivities that are the negative converse of the “useful and docile” bodies (cf., Foucault, 1977). Consequently, monstrosity becomes an objective of biopower that aims to neutralize and eliminate it. Monstrosity, however, can also be taken in a positive sense as subjectivities that resist appropriation by biopower, and create life in common.

Thus, the monstrosity category reveals a semantic ambiguity; it is composed by an inherent tension between the negative and the positive meaning. These are related by the exercise of power in a specific direction. For the former orientation, the negative one, we can use the expression “Politics *over* monstrosity” –stressing *over*- and “Politics *of* monstrosity” –highlighting *of*- for the positive direction.

In this presentation I am going to focus on politics *over* monstrosity, that is, on some subjectivities that are constituted by the power as dangerous or as monsters. Although these subjectivities can be seen as a way of life, a negative way of life, which can be recognized for example in the expressions “life without value” outlined by Giorgio Agamben or the “non-grievable life” according to Judith Butler, I would like to recall here an old metaphor which enables us to understand the inherent relation between State and monstrosity, when monstrosity is introduced in the State.

I am referring to the *werewolf* metaphor, which summarizes the meaning of “*homo homini lupus*”: man is a wolf to man, a sentence used by Thomas Hobbes.

Whereby, I will focus on the monstrosity that the human being represents, and not on the Leviathan, which is usually recognized as a political monster.

Hobbes' thoughts are relevant from a biopolitical perspective due to the fact that he was the first philosopher to point out the direct relation between life and politics. Politics is perceived as a protection against a violent death, which is the cause of fear among men. It is from the fear of being murdered, which can be interpreted as political existentialism, that men create the civil State.

I do not intend to analyze Hobbes' political theory, but rather look at the werewolf figure, which allows us to understand monstrosity from a biopolitical paradigm. This figure has traditionally been understood as a mix of species, a combination of human and beast, and in this sense, as Jeffrey Cohen indicates, the werewolf can express the radical difference between men and beast or a hesitation during which, what is supposed to be contrastive remains coexistent, indifferent (cf., Cohen, 2012). In this presentation I will consider the werewolf as a challenge to the human being norm in so far as a transgression of civil law. According to Foucault, we can characterize the werewolf monstrosity as a political monster rather than a juridical-biological monster (cf., Foucault, 2003a).

I think that the werewolf can show us, on the one hand, how the wolf becomes man (citizen) with the creation of the State; and on the other hand, how the man becomes wolf, the constant threat of lupification of man. It is this latter direction of becoming that is fundamental to understanding monstrosity in a negative way, and also enables us to answer the fundamental question, “the enigma of biopolitics”: “how is it possible that a power of life is exercised against life itself?” (Esposito, 2008: 39)

If we can observe the possibility that man becomes wolf within the political order, we can recognize that Hobbes' discourse of sovereignty aims to neutralize this transformation of the werewolf. For Roberto Esposito this neutralization can be seen as *immunity*: “the refractoriness of an organism to the danger of contracting a contagious disease” (Esposito, 2011: 7).¹ In this sense, I would like to demonstrate that the werewolf operates both as poison and antidote –that is, as *phármakon*- within the State.

The immunization sheds light on the biopolitical paradigm, which articulates biopower and sovereign power, i.e., a power destined to increase, to intensify, to multiply and to defend life, in summary that “makes live”. However it can also deny

¹ The “immunitary paradigm” has circulated amongst the sharpest thinkers of the final quarter of the twentieth century. Esposito's specific thesis is that immunity is a reaction to community.

life, it “makes death” –which must be understood not only as direct killing but also as indirect death: the act of exposing someone to death or of neutralization (cf., Foucault, 2003b). Esposito’s contribution in this perspective is the discovery that the nexus between life and politics is immunological.

In light of the aforementioned, it could be said that modern rationality exhibits a composition between a repressive regime, represented by the juridical discourse as well as a productive regime, represented by the biopower discourse (cf., Marcenó, 2011: 11). Although modern political subjectivity and the government of the population are aligned with different paradigms, it is possible to recognize their complementarity, an articulation between subject of law and productive body, in other words, between people and population.

The political monster emerges from the articulation of both regimes of power, that is to say, there is no succession from one regime to another –as Foucault’s writings were interpreted- but rather there is a complementary relation between them, according to the principle: to make live is also to exercise the right to kill.

It is true that we have to wait until the 18th century for the emergence of technologies of power, orientated towards the individual body -the disciplines- and towards the body-specie -the biopolitics-, in order to consider monstrosity as a way of subjectivity, as a configuration of the body and life. Despite this, Hobbes’ discourse about sovereignty is relevant as it allows us to show monstrosity in a metaphorical sense. The werewolf analysis from a biopolitical point of view enables us to understand that monstrosity does not have a position of exteriority in relation to power; on the contrary, it is included in the political order.

II. The werewolf

Hobbes writes in *De Cive* (1642) -book that anticipates some themes of the *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (1651)- the famous sentence: “That Man to Man is a kind of God; and that Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe”; according to the author the first is true, if we compare Citizens amongst themselves; and the second, if we compare Cities (Hobbes, 1987: 24).²

² First attested in Plautus' *Asinaria* (195 BC, "*lupus est homo homini*"), the phrase is sometimes translated as "man is man's wolf", which can be interpreted to mean that man preys upon man. As a counterpoint, Seneca the Younger wrote that "man is something sacred for man".

As observes Carl Schmitt, this expression was formulated by Bacon Verulamio, and it means that in the civil State, man is to man a God: “*homo homini deus*”. Whereas, in the state of nature, man is to man a wolf: “*homo homini lupus*” (Schmitt, 2004: 25). Thereby Hobbes indicates the transformation that is produced in man with the social contract, that is, the transition from man-beast to man-god. In other words, in the state of nature man is an animal, a wolf, and when man creates the civil State he becomes more than a simple man, he becomes a citizen.

As we can see, Hobbes uses the expression “*homo homini lupus*” to refer to the state of nature, but if we understand this sentence as per the *werewolf* metaphor it is possible to recognize its function in the civil State. In accordance with the old popular mythology of the lycanthropy “the change of man or woman into the form of a wolf, either through magical means, (...) or through judgment of the gods in punishment for some great offence” (Baing-Gould, 2004: 5). This transformation can be permanent or temporary, but in any case, the werewolf figure reveals a threshold and, at the same time, a transition between man and beast.

I want to highlight with the werewolf metaphor the metamorphosis and the reversibility that it exposes. Although the werewolf is located in an undifferentiated area between man and beast; it is all the same possible to distinguish two movements diametrically opposed in the werewolf’s metamorphosis. On the one hand, the transition from wolf to man, i.e., from the man in the state of nature to a citizen in the civil State, that we can denominate “wolf-becoming-*man*”. Then, on the other hand, the transformation from man to wolf, that is to say, the man (in the civil State) that becomes wolf, that we can designate “man-becoming-*wolf*” (cf., Torrano, 2013). Yet in neither case is it a complete transition. On the contrary, the werewolf represents a tension between these two directions.

As we know, Hobbes’ philosophical-juridical discourse indicates an excision between the pre-political moment and the political moment, between the state of nature and civil State. Even though the state of nature is a description of a purely hypothetical situation, this stage allows Hobbes to conceive the cause of the origin and foundation of the State. The state of nature is composed of men that are like wolves to other men, but when the civil State is established the men abandon their wolf condition, and become citizens. In others words, with the creation of the State men do not only leave their state of nature, but they also leave their wolf character.

The werewolf metaphor suggests the transition from beast to man but, contrary to Hobbes' radical distinction between wolves in the state of nature and citizens in the civil State; the werewolf's metamorphosis is never complete. Hence, the reversibility of this mutation is always possible. In this sense, the wolf-becoming-*man*, which characterizes man's condition in the civil State, can be converted into man-becoming-*wolf*, which indicates the return of man to the state of nature.

At this point, I would like to emphasize that the werewolf metaphor highlights a threshold between *physis* and *nomos*, between state of nature and civil State. For this reason, the man that becomes wolf is not completely separated from the community of men, he remains within the community, because with the establishment of the civil State the state of nature is not abandoned, on the contrary, the state of nature is preserved within the community.

In this sense, the hostility that exists in the state of nature does not end with the formation of the State, but is maintained as a founding link of the relation among men. The hostility remains in the civil State, as a consequence, man is like a wolf to other men. In this way, the Hobbesian expression "*homo homini lupus*" can be extrapolated towards the interior of the political community. It is on the basis of the man-becoming-*wolf* metamorphosis that the Leviathan is legitimized, in relation to the notion of security: the great monster that must subjugate the little monsters, that is, the werewolves.

We should understand this transformation from man to wolf not only as someone who *effectively* breaks the law, but also as someone who *can* transgress it. It is this possibility, the capacity of transgressing the law, that permanently puts the political order's stability at risk, and at the same time, threatens to spread throughout the political body. This means that each man, simply by being a werewolf, can turn into a wolf. It is for this reason that the Leviathan not only reacts against an effective transgression, but also in opposition to a possible transgression. In this way, all men are dangerous to the State, or in a more specific sense, they are *potentially* dangerous.

The Leviathan must limit this explicit enmity, it must prevent the hostility from transforming into an excessive violence, i.e., that men become *actual* wolves. The way to mitigate the violence among men is opposing a greater violence from which the Leviathan is the legitimate bearer. The Leviathan calms the werewolf's violence with its right to punish and, in an extreme case, its right to kill. It is only through the constant

threat of punishment that the State can contain the violence caused by the hostility among men.

Paradoxically, the werewolves' violence can only be contained through their inclusion within the juridical system. In this way, the Leviathan *anticipates* and *predicts* the violence that can be caused by the werewolf. As this metamorphosis is possible, the man-becoming-*wolf* is included in the political-juridical discourse, the werewolf is included to prevent its actual transformation.

This does not mean that Hobbes' intention of neutralizing the conflict does not persist. On the contrary, the possibility of neutralizing the conflict does not mean its complete elimination, but instead its incorporation in the political order in a specific way. The neutralization occurs when the conflict is included but in small doses (cf., Esposito, 2008: 61-62).

This leads us to the paradigm of immunization, which involves the idea, as Esposito says, “that an attenuated form of infection could protect against a more virulent form of the same type. From here came the deduction, (...) that the inoculation of non-lethal quantities of a virus stimulates the formation of antibodies that are able to neutralize pathogenic effects at an early stage” [end of quote] (Esposito, 2011: 7). In this sense, the acquired immunity “reproduces in a controlled form exactly what it is meant to protect us from” (Ibid.: 8), in other words, protects life not in a frontal way, but rather through outflanking and neutralization.

According to the immunitary logic I consider that the werewolf figure can be understood as *phármakon*. As Jacques Derrida notes, for the Greeks “this *phármakon*, this «medicine», this philtre, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination can be –alternative or simultaneously-beneficent or maleficent” [end of quote] (Derrida, 1998: 429). Thus, the werewolf operates both as poison and as antidote within the State.

As we have seen, the logic behind the Hobbesian discourse is immunization from the werewolf. Because of the potential threat that man becomes wolf the political-juridical order must include the werewolf as a “juridical immunization”³, as Esposito expresses “[t]he same claim of the law to provide for all acts that may contradict life, by

³ This conception is taken from Niklas Luhmann, and he refers that starting in the eighteenth century, the semantics of immunity have progressively extended to all sectors of modern society, this means that the law is a function of the immune mechanism (cf., Esposito, 2011: 9).

penalizing them, places it in an anticipatory position, with the result that life is both protected and prejudged” [end of quote] (Esposito, 2011: 10). In this sense, the Leviathan aims to prevent and contain the man-becoming-*wolf* assuming the exclusive right of punishment. In this way the werewolf produces an inoculation with a therapeutical function: it is a dose of the same poison from which the State seeks to protect itself.

Despite this, the Leviathan cannot stop this metamorphosis in all werewolves; and this puts the State at risk because it is a “mortal god” (Hobbes, 1998, Chap. 17, Part. II: 114), and therefore can be killed. However, the Leviathan can tolerate it in small doses and in these cases it can exercise its right to punish: the violence unleashed by the werewolf is repressed with greater violence. The Leviathan tries in this way to avoid the propagation, the spread of the man-becoming-*wolf*, because the Leviathan is not threatened by the werewolf, as an isolated individual, but by the werewolves, the multiplicity.

In this sense, I would like to point out that if the Leviathan was traditionally understood as “the coldest of cold monsters”, as Friedrich Nietzsche said, then a cold monster that stands up in front of us, can for this reason be understood as a metaphor of transcendent power. On the contrary, the werewolf metaphor indicates that monstrosity is immanent to the power. The latter metaphor reveals that the monster is not external to the political order, but included within it. In agreement with Antonio Negri, it is the immanence of the monster that makes the power fragile and fearful (Negri, 2001: 187).

At this point we can note the paradoxical nature of the relation between the Leviathan and the werewolf: the Leviathan must include the werewolf within the political-judicial order. In this way, the werewolf is an antigen, a non-lethal dose of death. This inclusion enables the State to punish and to prevent the man-becoming-wolf but, at the same time, this is the thing that also jeopardizes the continuity of the State, because the Leviathan cannot stop this metamorphosis in all werewolves. If the mutation from man to wolf expands, that is, if the spread of men becoming wolves increases, then the Leviathan could be killed by the same antigen that it has inoculated itself against.

III. Conclusion

The immunization concept –as Esposito shows- indicates an “indivisible unity”, an intrinsic relation between *bíos* and *nomos*, between life and politics. The

immunization paradigm allows us to understand the relation between protection and denial of life, and its relation with the power orientation, i.e., with the production of life and the production of death. These two effects of power are articulated in an internal relation: “immunization is a negative [form] of the protections of life” (Esposito, 2008: 46).

Hobbes’ philosophical-juridical discourse thereby enables us to analyze the werewolf metaphor as *phármakon*, poison and antidote for the civil State. This metaphor involves two metamorphoses. On the one hand, the wolf that becomes man with the creation of the Leviathan, and on the other hand, the man that becomes wolf, the permanent threat of lupification that involves men. The werewolf metaphor not only indicates the mutation, but also a threshold between beast and man. For this reason, in the civil State man does not completely abandon his wolf condition. This situation allowed us to extrapolate towards the interior of the political community the Hobbesian expression “*homo homini lupus*”.

The mere possibility that man becomes wolf in the civil State is a threat to the Leviathan, as a consequence the Leviathan assumes the right of life *and* death. However, this exercise of sovereign power, with reference to the right to kill, can only be applied to a limited number of werewolves, on the contrary, the Leviathan would suppress itself. It is the spread of the man-becoming-wolf, which endangers the continuity of the State. For this reason the Leviathan is forced to incorporate the werewolf in the political-juridical order, as a way of prevention, to the effect of “juridical immunization”. Thus, the werewolf operates as a *phármakon*, it is an antigen that in small doses can be tolerated by the Leviathan, and in this way it is immunized against it, and it is even in this way that the Leviathan is legitimized. But, if the number of men that become wolves increases to a large extent, the dose can be lethal for the Leviathan. This in two ways: on the one hand, because the werewolf can kill the Leviathan, and on the other hand, because this immunity strategy can become autoimmunity.

The importance of Hobbes’ thoughts is that it enables us to observe in Modernity how the self-preservation of life is the basis for other political categories, such as sovereignty, liberty, property. From a biopolitical point of view, as Esposito notes, these categories are in relation to the idea of order. Therefore, power is understood as transcendental. It is in the Nazi regime when the immediate relation between life and

politics is produced, that it is possible to perceive an inherent relation between biology and politics (cf., Esposito, 2008: 55-56).

As a consequence, when the relation between life and power is mediated the monstrosity appears as a metaphor but when this an immediate relation the monstrosity becomes a form of subjectivity. This can be seen in the Nazi regime with the construction of Jews as monsters (cf., Neocleous, 2005). It can also be seen more recently, for example with the undesired immigrant population and its correlative criminalization and, with some local groups that are criminalized because of their skin color, the way they look, and their culture. These are some of the new monsters, the monsters that the State can tolerate but at the same they can put the State at risk. Maybe the power to prove the weakness of the Leviathan's power lies with these new monsters.

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