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Interregnum as a Legal and Political Concept: A Brief Contextual Survey

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Interregnum as a Legal and Political Concept: A Brief Contextual Survey

Philippe Theophanidis

Abstract

I propose to trace the dialogical path of Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'interregnum' briefly mentioned in one of his prison notebooks which was rediscovered in recent years and used in various political writings. I will first examine the meaning of the concept of interregnum in the context of Roman law, where it originates. Second, I'll show how the Italian writer used it in a two-page note included in his *Quaderni del carcere* to describe the political crisis of our times. I will also briefly sketch the renewal of the idea of interregnum from the 1980s onward, when a specific quote from Gramsci's note was used to frame various political crises, from South African apartheid to the civil war in Syria, all the way to the rise of a new far right ideology. In the third and main section, I'll explore in more detail how, in the past five years, Keith Tester, Zygmunt Bauman, and Étienne Balibar all explicitly engage with the idea of interregnum in an open dialogue. While referencing one another, they used Gramsci's interpretation of the concept in an effort to understand and address the contemporary problem of political synthesis. In the fourth part, and in the spirit of keeping discussion open, I will raise some issues regarding the various paths proposed by Bauman and Balibar to find our way 'out of the interregnum.'

Introduction

The interregnum is a legal concept which originates, in its institutionalised form, from Roman law (Cicero 40, 160; Dionysius 191; Livy 281-83; see also Koptev). It marked a period under the Republic when the senate found itself without a sovereign king. Since the king possessed the actual power to command the Republic (*imperium*), his absence, however brief, created a dangerous political imbalance which threatened the harmony of life: "Roman legal views and religious considerations held that there must be no break in the supreme authority of the state, as this is responsible for the *pax deorum*" (Friezer 301; see also Mommsen 116). Under such exceptional circumstances,

the senate alone had the authority to reactivate a legitimate power over the Republic. “The interregnum, enabled [the senate] to take over in an emergency, such as when both consuls died or were to be absent for a lengthy time. The interregnum lasted until the end of the emergency and order was restored to normality.” On such occasions, the senate elected an interrex for a period limited to five days, until a new king was found “and normal constitutional order was restored” (Morolli 28; see also Smith 644-45). Should the senate fail to designate a king during this brief period, the *interrex* was to name a successor for the next five days, and so on (Berger 514). In his monumental study *Jus Imperium Auctoritas: Études de droit romain*, André Magdelain highlighted the significance of this legal principle, stating, “the interregnum is devoid of republican association and is not obligated by a tribute to the people; it depends solely on sacred right, as a self-sufficient auspicious investiture. It is the most archaic element of political life during the Republican era, in which it shines like a royal ornament” (359; my trans.).¹

The unique political quality of the interregnum can be described as the exemplary expression of the complicated relationship between the Roman senate’s authority (*auctoritas*) and the magistrates’ power (*potestas*). One could argue that while the senate provided legitimacy to government, the magistrates alone had the power to use it: the former was legislative power, while the latter was executive. Modern Western nations still use this structure in the doctrine of separation of powers. However, the interregnum arises precisely when the executive power of the sovereign vanishes. Under those exceptional circumstances, the separation is suspended: the senate can both act to elect an interrex and grant him legitimacy. Thus later, during the sixteenth century in Europe, the term interregnum acquired a broader meaning, designating a breach of continuity in the normal executive reign of a sovereign power: the paradigm of the empty throne. It is commonly used, for example, to designate the period between the reigns of Charles I and Charles II in England.

If we agree, in the present context, that power derives its legitimacy from authority, and authority is operative through the deployment of this legitimate power, then what happens when an entity grants itself the authority to act, and at the same time to declare these actions legitimate? Giorgio Agamben has brought attention to the crucial importance of this problem for our contemporary political predicament. More specifically, he sees in the problem of sovereignty the paradigmatic site of an exceptional confusion between the legitimacy of authority and the operative power of

applied law: this is what he calls “the paradox of sovereignty” (*Homo Sacer*). Since World War I, the exception of the interregnum has, in a way, become the norm, most notably through fascism and National Socialism where *auctoritas* and *potestas* coincided in the charismatic figure of a single political leader. It is not my intention here to offer a rigorous comparative analysis of Agamben’s work. However, it will suffice for the moment to keep in mind that this blurring —the “times of interregnum” as we will come to understand it— is related to the various problems modern democracies are facing. It is, ultimately, the problem of political sovereignty.

Gramsci’s Interregnum

When Antonio Gramsci briefly mentions interregnum in a note consigned to one of his prison notebooks, he does not specifically refer to Roman law. He does, however, provide a relatively detailed explanation of just what he has in mind. The note is dated from 1930 and appears in Gramsci’s third Prison notebook, under section 34 titled “Between past and present” (*Selections* 272-76). It is clear from the very beginning that for Gramsci the interregnum had nothing to do with a normal period of transition; he describes it quite emphatically as a “crisis.” In contrast to the interregnum of Roman law, where authority persists despite the suspension of executive power, Gramsci evokes an interregnum where the dynamic is inverted: for him, the crisis is characterised first and foremost by an interruption in authority, while the ruling persists. In other words, *auctoritas* has vanished while *potestas* is still issuing commands. The situation, therefore, is one where a sovereign power exerts itself without the support of legitimacy: “If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e., no longer ‘leading’ [‘dirigente’] but only ‘dominant,’ exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc.” (*Selections* 275-76; for the original, see *Quaderni* 311-12)

According to Gramsci, this dynamic is what explains the “modern crisis” in general, which in turn is characterised most notably by a “wave of materialism.” The resurgence of this materialism seems to be filling a hole left by the withdrawal of legitimate ideologies: the popular masses “no longer believe what they used to believe previously” (*Selections* 276). This separation is summarised by Gramsci in the very formula that has been rediscovered in recent times, which is at the centre of my argument here: “The crisis consists precisely of the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in

this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (*Selections* 276).² Gramsci further suggests how the morbid symptoms manifest themselves in a variety of ways: physically (depression), epistemologically (skepticism with regard to all theories), economically (poverty), and politically (cynicism). In this intermediate period, in the absence of a trusted Rex (or a trusted form of sovereign government), the political bond suffers sickness and threatens to decompose. The crisis thus represents a peculiar problem: in Gramsci’s view, there is no easy solution for it. It does not seem possible to return to a former state that is not trusted anymore, nor it is possible to come up with new and promising alternatives. In other words, general disbelief makes it impossible to reactivate the old ideologies, while cynicism and skepticism makes it all the harder to believe in any new propositions.

Through Gramsci’s quote about “the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born,” several scholars have developed a renewed interest in the concept of interregnum in recent decades. While I don’t propose to explore their respective arguments in depth, a few references can provide a sample of the contexts in which the concept was used. In 1982, Nadine Gordimer —who received the Nobel Prize in Literature a decade later— quoted Gramsci in an essay she wrote about the apartheid that still existed in South Africa (Gordimer; Swilling). Others have used the concept of interregnum, sometimes without an explicit reference to Gramsci, as a means for understanding the resurgence of far right political movements (Griffin “Between Metapolitics”; “Interregnum or Endgame?”). Still other scholars used the interregnum in various attempts to frame the post-cold war, post-communist political context (Cox et al.; Dove). In that sense, it is undoubtedly related to other significant attempts to understand the specific crisis of modernity, whether it is identified as being “post-historical,” (Fukuyama) “post-ideological,” or “postmodern” (Lyotard).

In 2011, Slavoj Žižek used a different translation of the same quote from Gramsci in the “Afterword” he wrote for the paperback edition of his book *Living in The End Times*. Instead of “morbid symptoms,” this translation makes use of monsters: “The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters” (479). Since then, this version of the quote has gained popularity, especially in the context of the recent protest movements and the apparent resurgence of far right ideologies. For example, Antonis Vradis and Dimitris Dalakoglou used it in their introduction to the edited collection *Revolt and Crisis in Greece* (25).

From Tester to Bauman to Balibar: A dialogue about the interregnum

In recent years, however, it is Zygmunt Bauman who has engaged the most closely and frequently with Gramsci's concept of interregnum, or at least with the quote in which it is defined. In March 2010, the website Truthout published a short excerpt from Zygmunt Bauman's then-upcoming book, *44 Letters From the Liquid Modern World* (2010). In it, he makes use of Gramsci's quote in the chapter "Letter no. 30: Interregnum." Adding to this in 2012, Bauman published a significantly augmented version of the original short essay titled "Times of Interregnum." At the time of writing, it represents the most developed iteration of his argument. During that same year and the one that followed, he also presented his ideas in two public lectures ("Liquid"; "Crisis"). Finally, after the European Parliamentary elections in May 2014, Bauman commented on the results by once more referring to Gramsci's interregnum in a short editorial published on *openDemocracy* ("Quo vadis?").

Bauman may have been prompted to consider the concept of interregnum as a valid conceptual tool to understand modernity following a suggestion made in an essay by long-time collaborator Keith Tester. Titled "Pleasure, Reality, the Novel and Pathology" (2009), Tester identifies the psychopathology of the modern era in the emergence of the novel as the emancipation of the pleasure principle. While combining Milan Kundera's *The Art of the Novel* with Sigmund Freud's theory, he argues that economic globalisation is an expression of the demise of the reality principle. He proposes to define the ongoing crisis using Gramsci's terminology: "the present moment can be identified as one of an interregnum." He does not comment on the entire note from the *Prison Notebooks*, but only refers to the quote, pointing out that "the old is dying and the new cannot be born" (Tester 25). It is worth noting that all the authors I have mentioned emphasise the same element: Gramsci's understanding of the interregnum is mostly reduced to this single quote. Tester finds an echo of this crisis in a previous paper by Bauman ("*Fate of Humanity*" 2002). In it, the Polish sociologist analyses the fragmentation of what he calls the "Trinitarian world": the functional integration of the modern forms of political synthesis that are the territory, nation, and state. This is the historical moment that Tester chooses to identify with Gramsci's interregnum. Of special interest to him is the identification of five "clusters" of morbid symptoms associated with the uncontrolled nature of the pleasure principle: extreme sport and unprotected sex, a pandemic of clinical depression, obsessive behaviour, a pathological compulsion to collect, and the infantilisation of the consumer.

Zygmunt Bauman and Étienne Balibar further developed the examination of the current interregnum where Tester left off. They transported his frame of analysis from the cultural form of the modern novel to the current European political theatre. Both found Gramsci's concept of interregnum relevant enough to use it as the name of the general political crisis currently underway. In doing so, they ended up providing it with a renewed relevance, while also raising some problems along the way. I will briefly present how the two make use of the concept, before providing a few provisional remarks concerning three issues I believe should be explored further.

In his essay "Times of Interregnum," Bauman compares the crisis to a "revolutionary situation" as it was defined by Lenin, a historical condition "in which the rulers no longer can rule while the ruled no longer wish to be ruled" (49; those are Bauman's words; for Lenin's original definition, see *The Collapse* 212-15). Furthermore, Bauman understands Gramsci's interregnum as a moment when the "extant legal frame of social order" loses its effectiveness, while at the same time a replacement frame capable of encompassing the modified conditions in the distribution of power has yet to emerge (49). This is close to Gramsci's own definition. In a short, seven-minute video he recorded in 2011 for the Ten Years of Terror project, Bauman created an allegory to illustrate the depth of the current crisis and the peculiar dynamic of the interregnum. In his allegory, we are all passengers on an airplane. In the middle of the flight, an automatic announcement reveals that the cockpit is empty: no one is flying the plane. Worse, the plane appears to be heading to an airport that has not been built yet, and in fact, is still on the drawing board. Not only are we not in control, nobody is, and there seems to be nothing we can do about it ("Ten Years of Terror"). For Bauman, the essential reason for this feeling of powerlessness lies in the divorce of power from politics, a split between the ability to have things done and the ability to decide which things should be done. Up until half a century ago, power and politics were united in the nation state. In recent times, however, Bauman explains that power has escaped from local forms of government and 'evaporated' into growing global networks of various interests. The disappearance of the 'triune principle' means, in turn, that the forces of economy are left without an appropriate regulatory frame. In Bauman's analysis, the two phenomena feed themselves in a process that is out of control. The less effective the legal frame, the more power transfers from local forms of government to global markets. Conversely, the more economical sovereignties acquire power, the less legitimacy nation states seem to have for maintaining the social order. We have

already seen how this analysis echoes Gramsci's remark: the "crisis of authority" which characterised the interregnum is intimately linked to a "wave of materialism." This is not only evident in the ever-rising power of economic entities, but also in the noticeable emergence of violence within the civilian sphere. The militarisation of police forces we are witnessing all over the world can be interpreted as an effect of this crisis: an attempt by governments to cope with both the breakdown of traditional sovereign power and the loss of authority.

As a result of the inherent uncertainty of this state of affairs, Bauman identifies three issues that he feels need our urgent attention: institutional disparity, immigration, and environmental sustainability. It is not possible to review all the details of Bauman's argument, but a few points are worth noting. Overall, Bauman clearly believes the interregnum is an unsustainable condition that we need to change. The exit strategy for him goes as follows: the lack of equality between increasingly powerful global institutions and powerless local political bodies should be counterbalanced by "global law-making, executive, and juridical institutions" ("Times" 52). That is what Bauman regards as "positive" globalisation. Next, if Europe is to survive, it needs immigrants. Yet Bauman does acknowledge that the mixing of cultural identities, however enriching it is, nonetheless represents a risk. He argues this risk should be mitigated by a reconsideration of the "principle underlying the European social contract" ("Times" 53). Bauman asks whether Europe will learn to welcome immigration or if "xenophobic sentiments" will be increasingly recycled into "electoral capital" ("Times" 53; in this regard, the results of the last European Parliament elections offer a rather bleak answer to his views). Finally, Bauman suggests that the way to address the unsustainable consumption of energy and resources we are all currently engaged in is to turn to a more sustainable way of living together "inside relationships, families, neighborhoods, communities" ("Times" 55). Inspired by Elinor Ostrom's theories, he calls for an "honest and sincere intra-community communication." For him, those forms of life-in-common which traditionally belong to ethnographic reports and "bygone 'outdated and backward' times" may very well represent the privileged alternative way out of the interregnum ("Times" 55). Bauman's call for communal harmony should not come as a surprise after the positive treatment he gave to the concept of community in a previous book, where he suggested that community "is nowadays another name for paradise lost—but one to which we dearly

hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there” (*Community* 3).

Joining the conversation, Étienne Balibar contributed to the recent dialogue on the interregnum with his own essay, titled “Out of the Interregnum,” which is also centred around Gramsci’s concept. Balibar borrowed from Zygmunt Bauman’s essay “Times of Interregnum” for a panel discussion at the conference presented by the Transatlantic Academy in Washington in May of 2013 called “The European Project: Beyond Eurocentrism.” His text was published on the *openDemocracy* website a couple of days later under the title “Out of the Interregnum.” The crisis of the European Union is not a new topic for Balibar, who has been deeply involved in thinking about new forms of citizenship after the fragmentation of the nation state for more than twenty years. It has been the central issue of many of his recent books, from *We, The People of Europe* (2004) to *Equaliberty: Political Essays* (2014), all the way through the yet-untranslated *Europe Constitution Frontière* (2005), *Violence et civilité* (2010), and *Citoyen Sujet* (2011). Also worth mentioning is his article “The Nation Form: History and Ideology” (1990).

Inspired by Gramsci’s quote —“the Gramscian model” as he puts it— Balibar, like Bauman, identified the “pathological effects” (Gramsci’s *fenomeni morbosi*) in the rise of nationalism and social inequalities. For Balibar, there could be no European union at a national level. The old political paradigm (state, nation) is clearly not working: “the situation in Europe is one of suspended decomposition of the post-national project without the possibility of returning to a ‘traditional’ system of isolated nation-states.” It may be the very interaction of Europeans that “is destroying the very possibility of developing feelings of a common European membership and destiny.” He further argues, in line with Bauman, that the construction of a European union based solely on economic terms is destructive, since it has indeed “unleashed in Europe a quasi-Hobbesian ‘war of all against all.’” (“Out”) He also agrees with Bauman when he insists on the fact that inequalities are what undermines the authority of national and supra-national institutions. He brings new insights to the problem of interregnum by proposing a distinction between old active nationalism and the current “reactionary” nationalism that has been gaining traction all over Europe. He also argues for greater precision regarding the labelling and defining of social inequalities: it is his opinion that “inequalities are themselves unequally distributed.” (“Out”) In analysing the crisis,

one should therefore acknowledge “a second degree of inequality” or “inequality within inequality.”

When the time comes to propose alternatives to the current situation —a way “out of the interregnum”—Balibar also shares some of Bauman’s ideas. He identifies “two crucial dilemmas” which must be overcome for a new foundation of Europe to emerge. The first dilemma is related to protections and regulations. Balibar calls for a “restoration” of social securities and the creation of a transnational equivalent of the welfare state. The “hyper power of the global financial system” must be reined in with counteracting measures in the form of coercive regulations adopted at the international level (“Out”). The second dilemma is related to the way we think of the causal relation between the democratisation of Europe and political leadership. Balibar isn’t convinced that one should wait for the proper leadership: the rise of a “European demos” could very well be a bottom-up process fuelled by the “proliferation of democratic movements” in the various forms of popular protest and, again echoing Bauman’s own argument, “what Elinor Ostrom, Negri and others call ‘the commons.’” That is what is needed, in Balibar’s view, to get “out of the interregnum.”

Community without law: Between ourselves

Both Bauman and Balibar certainly offered detailed and pragmatic approaches to think our way out of the current political crisis afflicting Western democracy. Even so, I want to briefly bring forth three observations corresponding to three issues I see in their proposed exit strategies. These final comments should be understood as a modest contribution to the ongoing dialogue about the interregnum. First, both authors argue for new regulations, a frame or set of new transnational laws. Second, they both rely on the idea of community in general, and ‘the commons’ in particular as a valid paradigm to face the current political crisis. Third, in both views, Gramsci’s interregnum is presented as a situation we need to exit: the idea is not simply to face the crisis, but to move through and out of it to attain a new, better political order. I’ll address these three points one by one in that order.

The call for transnational regulations seems to ignore, to a certain extent, one crucial aspect of the crisis. In a way, it appears as a *petitio principii*, where what is proposed as a solution is what is causing the problem in the first place. When it is acknowledged that the problem is a crisis of authority, the concern should be less about the deployment of more laws, national or transnational, than it should be about the

missing legitimacy of the executive power handling those laws. Legality without legitimacy is precisely where the problem with the current interregnum lies. It is first and foremost the problem of the political paradigm of sovereignty. What would global lawmaking achieve if its authority is ignored by sovereign states that are themselves facing a crisis of legitimacy, both internal and external, operating in an increasing state of juridical and political exception? “[I]t is not possible to return to the state of law [*stato di diritto*],” argues Giorgio Agamben in his text *State of Exception*, “for at issue now are the very concepts of ‘state’ and ‘law’” (146). In an interview he gave in 2012, Agamben was even more categorical in his attitude towards lawmaking: “This proliferation of law is dangerous: in our democratic societies, there is nothing that is not regulated” (“Thought”; my trans.). Žižek recently shared similar concerns in an essay he wrote about “the post-superpower capitalist world order.” While acknowledging the need for some “rules of international behavior,” he was adamant about the fact that the current crisis lies precisely in “the impossibility of creating a global political order that would correspond to the global capitalist economy” (“*Who Can Control?*”).

Next, the idea that the traditional category of community as a mode of coexistence could offer a viable alternative in the political void created by the crisis of authority is equally problematic. Surely, the ideal of the harmonious, if not unanimous, *communio* has enjoyed a long and strong tradition. It was already present in Paul’s writing, while Augustine made it one of the very first of his rules regarding life in common (*King James*, Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 12:12; Rule §2-3). The folkloric belief about the word ‘community’ being rooted in the etymology of *cum* and *unus* likely comes from Augustine’s work. The Christian tradition may have been inspired, in turn, by the ancient principles of the Pythagorean *κοινωνία*. Yet the totalitarian catastrophes of the twentieth century have shown how the harmonious coexistence of human beings, far from being a given—in the form an essential and necessary human destiny—is still lacking an adequate form. More importantly, as Jean-Luc Nancy has repeatedly argued in the past three decades, it may very well be that the belief in community as the privileged mode of human togetherness is itself the principal cause of these deadly catastrophes: “Humanity...” he once wrote, “has shown an unsuspected talent for self-destruction, in the name of community” (“Conloquium” 102). From this perspective, the ideal of community, or the ‘commons’ for that matter—appears to be less a viable path towards a political renewal than the very aporia of the current crisis.³ It would be

very interesting to see those ideas further developed alongside the ongoing discussion about the interregnum. In other words, to comply with the Gramsci's idea that old categories are dying, the very idea of community must be revisited and reconstituted from the ground up.

Finally, the belief that we need an exit strategy from the interregnum should also be examined. Although in the tradition of Roman law the interregnum clearly designates a transitory state leading to a new regnum, in Gramsci's designation it is radically determined by the fact that "the new cannot be born." Instead of ignoring this impasse by seeking a new order beyond it, what would it mean to assume it for what it is? Could it be possible to conceive of an inter—that is a 'between' or an 'among'—as a coexistent milieu without a *regnum*? The shattering of the paradigm of sovereignty as the privileged form of modern political synthesis offers a unique possibility to expose the usual categories with which we have organised this coexistence in a different light. Instead of looking for a new constituent power, the interregnum could itself become the name of an alternative form of political synthesis. Giorgio Agamben made such an argument during a public lecture he delivered in Athens in 2013, when he invited the audience to experiment with a "destituent power" (*potenza destituente*). The general idea is to render inoperative the dialectical coupling of power and counter-power (or transgression) which has always been the foundation of all "lawmaking violence" ("Destituent"; see also Theophanidis "Notes"). To prevent such propositions from being reduced to what has recently and provocatively been qualified as "left-wing theology" (Robbins, "Balibarism!"), it is necessary to bridge the perceived gap that separates them from the kind of specific solutions brought forward both by Bauman and Balibar. Then again, this problem likely relates to the very challenge we are facing, together and against one another.

¹ "l'interregnum est pur de tout alliage républicain et ne s'impose aucun hommage au peuple; il ne dépend que du seul droit sacré, dans les termes d'une investiture auspiciatoire qui se suffit à elle-même. Il est la pièce la plus archaïque de la vie politique à l'ère républicaine, dans laquelle il est une incrustation royale" (359).

² Gramsci's observation that "in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" gave birth to a variety of commentaries over the years, as I will show. Those commentaries are based on two different translations of the quote. Indeed, some of them refer to "monsters" instead of "morbid symptoms." In Italian, the sentence of the excerpt reads as follows: "La crisi

consiste appunto nel fatto che il vecchio muore e il nuovo non può nascere: in questo interregno si verificano i fenomeni morbosi più svariati" (*Opere*, 38) There is no mention of "monsters" (*mostri*) in the original version, only of "morbid symptoms" (or phenomena, *fenomeni morbosi*), as it was translated by Hoare and Nowell Smith in the 1971 edition of *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*. However, there is indeed another English translation that replaces the whole phrase "*in questo interregno si verificano i fenomeni morbosi più svariati*" with a more compact and dramatic statement, although it is a less literal formulation: "now is the time of monsters." Despite my best efforts, I could not pinpoint the origin of this translation. It is used in the "Introduction" of *Monsters and Philosophy* written by Charles T. Wolfe, which was published in 2005 (xi). But it seemed to become more popular after 2011, when Slavoj Žižek used it in the "Afterword" he wrote for the paperback edition of his book *Living in The End Times* (479). While Žižek made use of the modified translation without producing a direct reference, mentioning only that the "well-known phrase [is] attributed to Gramsci," Wolfe suggests in a footnote that the "quotation is often found in French versions of Gramsci" (*Monsters* xi). He also acknowledges that the original Italian version of the quote makes no mention of monsters. A French translation is indeed quoted in various sources: "Le vieux monde se meurt, le nouveau monde tarde à apparaître et dans ce clair-obscur surgissent les monstres." However, it seems to always be mentioned without references to a specific source. Even though many of Gramsci's works in French translations are available online, including various editions of *Notes de prison*, I could not find any instance where the *fenomeni morbosi* phrase has been translated in this form. There are no monsters to be found in the French translation published by Gallimard in 1996 either, where the quote appears in the first volume titled *Cahiers de prison* 1, 2, 3, 4 et 5 under paragraph §34: "La crise consiste justement dans le fait que l'ancien meurt et que le nouveau ne peut pas naître : pendant cet interrègne on observe les phénomènes morbides les plus variés" (283).

³ I have recently analysed this issue in the context of the Greek debt crisis: see "We Have Gone Bankrupt." Balibar is perfectly aware of this problem. He is familiar with both the work of Nancy (they participated together in public lectures and quote each other's works on occasion) and that of another collaborator, Roberto Esposito, who has also analysed the category of community (he commented on Esposito's ideas in *La proposition de l'égaliberté : Essais politiques 1989-2009*, and discussed them with him during a recent workshop on Esposito's political thought held at Université de Caen Basse-Normandie).

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