
Francis, a Criollo Pope

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■ **ABSTRACT:** This article explores the tension between Pope Francis as a ‘trickster’ and as a much-needed reformer of the Catholic Church at large. He is an exemplar of the *longue durée* of an embodied ‘Atlantic Return’ from the Americas to the ‘heart’ of Catholicism (Rome and the Vatican), with its ambivalent, racialized history. Through the mobilization of material religion, sensuous mediations, and the case of the Lampedusa crosses in particular, I engage with an anthropological analysis of Francis as a Criollo and the first-ever Jesuit pope. Examining Francis’s papacy overlapping racial and ethico-political dimensions, I identify coordinates around which the rhetorical, affective, and charismatic force of Francis as a Criollo has been actualized—between, most crucially, proximity and distance, as well as pastoral versus theological impulses. This article advances an understanding of Francis that emerges from a study of the conjuncture of affective fields, political theology, racialized aesthetics, and mediatic interface.

■ **KEYWORDS:** affective charisma, Atlantic Return, creolization, Criollo, Lampedusa crosses, mediatic events, Pope Francis, race

To consider Pope Francis as a Criollo—a term I use here with its specifically Latin American connotation that contains both emancipatory and repressive histories—is to offer a new anthropological perspective on a current transformative moment within the Catholic Church. As with previous anthropological studies of papacies, my account takes the form of a palimpsest, assembled not of ethnographic intimacies, but rather of moments in the life of the Pope, crafted and transmitted as mediatic events (Beatty 2006: 325; Norget 2017). I focus here on Francis not so much as an exemplar in the sense of ‘representing’ the larger whole of the Church, a sociological index of a group (Mittermaier 2015: 131); rather, his exemplarity takes the form of making Christ present in his life “through sensorially mediated, historically contingent and emplaced forms” (Brown 1983: 8). I argue that his exemplarity of *imitatio Christi* stems from an affective, spatialized, and racialized charisma, based on a suffering and vulnerable Christ, but also a Christ of mercy. To understand this charisma we need to dwell on ethnographic, affective moments in the life of the Pope that mediatically mobilize both intimacy and distance, and that in turn are read back onto Francis as a pastorally—rather than a theologically—oriented Pope.

By calling on anthropological studies of race, Criollismo, and their affective histories in the Americas, this article interrogates the threat to the perceived unity of the Catholic *Mater Ecclesia*



(Mother Church) that this tension between the Pope as pastor and the Pope as theologian unfolds. A specific value of Francis is not of the ‘civilized’ theological center, but of the periphery. Nor is he exemplary of a conservative Catholic formation that is currently emerging in Europe—a formation increasingly defined by its disturbing defense of a *ius sanguinis et soli* (citizenship by blood and birth) and genealogical blood descent from Christ the Savior/Christ the King.

The discourse that has emerged around Francis is above all conflicted, riven with tensions between center and periphery, dogma and heresy, abstract theology and theology of practice, the West and the ‘racialized Rest.’ The first elected Pope from the Americas and the first Jesuit Pope, Francis has been embraced by one segment of the Catholic flock as a charismatic and ethical leader for global renewal. Within another segment, Francis is considered a traitor/disrupter of theological tradition. Without simply ignoring these competing positions—each of which makes its own claims on the history of the Church and the role of the Pope—the view I focus on here engages with an affective and racial framing of analysis. While replacing motivated origin stories of the Church’s ‘redemption’ or ‘betrayal’ with a quite distinct, although I would argue more concretely relevant, set of genealogies that might ground an anthropological account of Francis, my argument explores how a racialized political subjectivity of Criollismo is theologically infused.

At stake is less the grand question of how political theology can contribute to a better grasp of race and race relations, but rather how a particular embodied and affectively embedded standpoint of race, which Pope Francis exemplifies, can help to illuminate contrasting theopolitical forces within the Catholic Church—especially in relation to matters of undocumented migration, the sacramental life of divorcees, and same-sex couples. I argue that by placing affective histories of race in tension with a theological domain, we can better grasp fundamental transformations of the Church that have concrete diplomatic effects with truly global implications (Lloyd 2012: 7).

Two points of departure are important for understanding Pope Francis as a Criollo Pope. The first is that Criollismo in the Americas names a long history of subject formation and as such rests on a tension between being other and identifying as the same. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Criollo emerged as a ‘color’ category, connected to a history of slavery and part of a lived taxonomical imagination in which space, race, and politics intersected. The term is indeed polymorphic. In places like Mexico, creolization is connected to the idea of *mestizaje* (process of mixing) and the mythical mixed-blood beginnings of the nation. In the Southern Cone, Criollo instead names an oscillating object of attraction and repulsion generated out of a tension between the trope and the body of ‘the Indian.’ Furthermore, in borderland areas like the northeastern El Chaco, where the presence of the Indian is purged from a hegemonic national rhetoric, this oscillation of attraction and repulsion of the body of the Indian is ever-present in Criollo imagination, assuming a trace-like, phantom quality. Hence, an Argentinian Criollo’s hegemonic identity can be ghostly in nature (Gordillo 2014: 35).

A second point of departure lies in the way in which ‘the Criollo’ at the heart of the Francis papacy is not only a subject position (born Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Argentina as a child of Italian-born parents, Francis is technically a Criollo). It is an affective charisma that lends legitimacy to Francis’s project of re-engaging the peripheries and elevating ‘marginal’ subjects (such as the poor) as new blood for the metropolis. For a long time, a separation between the metropolis and the colonial peripheries has been charted through tropes that link modern and pre-modern to European and colonial subjects respectively (Povinelli 2006: 215). Hence, a turn to the peripheries as a source of rejuvenation for the metropolis—in this case, the metropolitan Church—resonates with a familiar political valence of Criollismo and repeats a ‘federalist’ impulse articulated by multiple Criollo leaders in the Americas, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Francis’s project, this recognizably federalist impulse—manifest in

a vision of a more decentralized and representative Church, and a reformation of the Roman Curia—is embraced but also contested from within the Catholic Church.

On the Criollismo of Francis

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born in 1936, the first of five children of a Piedmont-Italian couple who had migrated to Buenos Aires in 1929. His maternal family was much involved in the nascent movement of *Azione Cattolica* (Catholic Action), a lay Catholic organization founded in Italy in 1905 with the aim of bringing faith, the Gospel, and the call to sanctity to social and vernacular practices. Bergoglio's parents' association with this movement, which was not well received by the Italian Fascist regime, adds a political dimension to their subsequent migration to the Americas beyond the typical aspirational narrative of Italian emigration at this time (Alazraki 2015).

Of middle-class origin, trained at a Salesian school in Buenos Aires, Bergoglio is revealed by his biographies to love both of the national cultures he was born into. We learn of his fondness for Italian cinema and Argentine tango; his support of the San Lorenzo soccer team; his special affection for the 1872 José Hernández poem "El Gaucho Martín Fierro" and the romance of the gaucho's life in the pampas that the poem immortalizes (Ivereigh 2014: 7). In 1958, Bergoglio joined the Jesuit order and rose through its ranks during the populist anti-clerical Peronist period in Argentina (1943–1955), acting as provincial superior of the Jesuit order between 1972 and 1979. But it was Bergoglio's relation with the military dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla in the 1970s that remains the most controversial episode in his personal history in Argentina. Whether he protected fellow Jesuits abducted by the regime in 1976, and whether he helped the families of *desaparecidos* (people who have disappeared) at the hands of Videla's fascist regime, the underlying question is whether he was actually a collaborator with or a partisan against the military regime. Both the ambiguous history of his relation with the military dictatorship in 1970s Argentina and his subsequent pastoral focus on the life of the underprivileged in Buenos Aires's peripheries ground his current theological inclination for the poor.

In the Catholicism that Francis promotes, the classical Christian virtues of personal salvation, remittance, and sacrifice are given form through an understanding of sin and evil generated by social and ecological forces, including forms of evil that require political and structural responses in order to be eradicated (Napolitano 2017: 275; Schall 2015). Unlike the papacy of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI—who remained consistently focused on the theological integrity of the Church—it is not so much the veracity or doctrinal consistency of beliefs and moral positions but rather a transmission of affects that drives Francis's Catholicism as an ethical, pastoral, and political project.

A transmission of affective charisma is central to the politics of the historical Criollo in the Americas. Scholarly accounts of Criollo/Criollismo have limited analytical purchase if removed from the historical and political location of their production; creolization always needs to be historicized (C. Stewart 2007b: 16–17). The term 'Criollo' generally describes the broader condition of people raised in the Americas, of 'ordinary' and local modes of living, food, and habits. My own use of the term refers more specifically to New World anxieties about *pureza de sangre*, literally, the purity of blood, or purity of descent. This sense of Criollo is continuous with the twentieth-century meaning of creolization as hybridity and mixture, and is rooted in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century anxiety about descent, territory, soil, blood, and ultimately sovereignty.

Pureza de sangre was a distinctively Atlantic affair of rumors, bribery, and extensive administrative processes (Martínez 2008: 198). Lengthy procedures for establishing proof of European descent and for ruling out Jewish or Muslim (later African and Native American) heredity

among applicants for administrative posts in the New World are recorded from the mid-sixteenth century. It was exactly these anxieties, bureaucratic processes, and the strong sense of belonging to the ‘Spanish community of blood’ that gave rise to a Criollo consciousness. A reaction to these European discourses of racial purity, Criollo consciousness in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was characterized by the affirmation of a new ‘militant’ national history and a concept of freedom identified with political autonomy from the European monarchies that nevertheless preserved Christian faith and cultural identity. In fact, by the early seventeenth century, the community of blood and its claim to sovereignty had shifted away from the Crown of Castile toward a new nativism rooted in the soil of the New World (ibid.: 174).

This early modern history of Criollos, then, tracks a realignment between territory, heredity, and faith. In other words, the historical Criollo was a complex figure who shaped new understandings of sovereignty and belonging between the metropolis and peripheries rooted in an unstable purity of status. Criollos, neither indigenous nor peninsular, promoted novel ideas and practices as well as the reproduction of traditional understanding. Indeed, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Criollo leaders were championing nationalist and revolutionary movements for independence in the Americas, while their Criollismo was also a rhetorical formation that partially charted a post-colonial imagination (Palmié 2007). Criollos of European descent who were born in the Americas could become fathers of the nation while appealing to the true worth of land rather than to a community of descent. But counter to Benedict Anderson’s thesis, Criollo nationalism in the Americas (and Mexico in particular) was also sacralized, rather than secularized, through its belief that all people, regardless of place of birth, were children of the same blood of Christ (Lomnitz-Adler 2001: 17–18).

However, Criollos were also constantly plagued by the duplicity of being living hybrids—at once en fleshed beings and figures of hereditary status—while also being part of a conceptual hybridity, part of ideological, national discourses of sameness and difference (Cadena 2000). The term ‘Criollo Pope’, then, gestures to this complex history of nationalism, mixed-blood, race relations, and the Catholic Church in Latin America. Pope Francis, as an Argentinian Criollo, mobilizes some aspects of the affective *longue durée* of these trajectories, actualizing the potentialities accumulated in the history of Criollismo, diffusing and distributing them in the form of a social environment (Mazzarella 2017: 156). When this trajectory stands between ‘native’ and ‘civilized’ images of authority, Francis’s actualization of an affective archive has a potential for decolonization, as it did for some Criollo leaders in the Americas. But this is clearly not the full story.

Since the nineteenth century, Criollo and creolization in Argentina have existed in a productive tension between the cultivation of local habits and mores and the creative assimilation of cultures and practices rooted in an elsewhere. Criollos have been those who, as an “alternative to speaking the imposed language of the metropolis,” could utter the words and ideas unsayable within “European expressive standards” (Cara 2003: 38, 40). In present-day Argentina, the word ‘Criollo’ acquires further complexity in its denotation of the ‘trickster’ and the uncanny. In local expressions, *hablar criollo* (to speak Creole) means to have a double mind, to have a double agenda. To grasp the meaning of Francis as a Criollo pope requires all these contrasting senses of the term. To move beyond an analytical prism of secular versus religious leadership is to understand Pope Francis, instead, through a long affective Atlantic history mobilized by Criollo leaders as being potentially and ambiguously ‘revolutionary’ as well as ‘tricksters’, or some would say potentially ‘heretical’.

But why a trickster? Francis stands at a point of layered contradiction and contestation. Considered a traitor by part of the Roman Curia and perceived more as a pastor than a theologian by others, he jolts the passionate machine of the Catholic Church by decentering and rescaling its locations of power. First, Pope Francis stresses that he is primarily the Bishop of

Rome. This exerts a particular spin against the nineteenth- and twentieth-century turn in the Catholic Church that had emphasized the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope and solidified the cleavage of Rome from the Oriental Christian Churches. Marking a turn away from this tradition, Francis's emphasis on his position as Bishop of Rome implies a Roman Catholic Church on more equal footing with the parallel centers of old Christianity: Alexandria, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. In this way, Francis's Criollismo reshapes a nodal scale of the Catholic Church from within.

Francis's insistence on his role as Bishop of Rome also implies an opening toward a federation model for the Church that I have identified with the early modern emergence of Criollismo as a political project in the Americas. This federalist impulse can be seen in the example of the *motu proprio* "Magnum Principium" (an amendment to canonical law named "Great Principle"), which Francis published in September 2017. This text addresses the adaptations and translations into contemporary languages of the liturgical texts of the Latin Church. In it, Francis clearly distinguishes between *recognitio* (rectifying a verification) and *confirmatio* (granting a confirmation), but he does not clearly define the domain of the national Episcopal Conferences or what should be submitted for the approval of the Holy See.¹ Robert Sarah, a prominent Guinean cardinal and head of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, took a particular position in response to this *motu proprio*, stressing that recognition and confirmation are in reality synonymous, or in any case are "interchangeable with respect to the responsibility of the Holy See," whose task of reviewing translations before approving them remains intact (Harris 2017). Two weeks later, the Pope rebuked Sarah's take with a strong letter, pointing again to a new federative form within the governmentality of the Church. In this public letter, Francis explicitly assigned national Episcopal Conferences the liberty and authority to decide on translations themselves, on the sole condition of final 'confirmation' from the Vatican congregation.

Francis's Criollismo also needs to be understood in relation to key previous theological orientations. His exhortation even beyond the Catholic flock is to attend to the commons with a Franciscan radicalism of refusal "to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled," and by rejecting capitalist formations when they produce a "culture of waste" (Pope Francis 2015). One of the overarching aims of Francis's papacy to date has been to reintroduce the Augustinian political theodicy of *privatio boni* (absence of good) to the social, pastoral teaching of the Church and to bring this to bear as a critique of late capitalism. By mobilizing a perspective of *privatio boni*, Francis draws attention to theodicy not as a tangible presence, but as a limit to what human, political, and economic action can reach on this earth, while stressing that life should always be informed by love, rather than a logic of scarcity (Rowlands 2015: 418–419).

Francis's affective charisma draws strength from a medieval archive of monastic life, even beyond the obvious reference of his papal name (Napolitano 2017: 278). His "*Laudato Si*, On Care for Our Common Home" Encyclical (Pope Francis 2015) is an unprecedented pastoral exhortation to care for the climate as a part of the commons, to abandon the capitalist myth of never-ending growth. In so doing, *Laudato Si* has reignited a long debate about the nature of dominion possession and property, while positioning lack of care for the earth as a sin of humanity because of its effects on social inequality, the poor, and the "sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life" (*ibid.*; see also Agamben 2013: 124–125). Yet the provocation of such interventions rests more fundamentally upon an extension of the scale of the object (and the political-economic subject) that the Pope can be expected to address: from an implicit recognition of the importance of the nation-state and its citizens, to the ancient-seeming but also deeply contemporary address to the denizens of the earth and a transnational subject that is at once social, biological, earthly, and cosmic. While rescaling 'home,' Francis calls

for new forms of politics of dwelling and emplacement—both pivotal queries in the historical formation of a Criollo consciousness in the Americas.

I have argued elsewhere, in my research on Latin American migration to Italy, for a study of the Catholic Church as a “passionate machine” (Napolitano 2016: 3), a form of religious imagination and a form of governing through the ethical and material management of the soul (Rutherford 2009: 7). Because of this affective governance, it has been difficult to discern the exclusionary dimensions of Catholic everyday life practices, such as, for instance, at the intersection of pious Catholic ritual mimetic performance and transnational, racialized labor (Bautista 2015: 427). In the case of Pope Francis, this affective governance hinges on a Latin American Catholic subjectivity (of the poor) that is theologically positioned at the heart of a global reanimation of the Roman Catholic Church from within and without.

The tension between the center and the periphery is also one that describes the theological impulse of the Jesuit order in important ways. Moved in the early sixteenth century to embrace missionizing rather than an enclosed monastic life, and equipped with the *Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola* as a portable, modern tool of self-fashioning, the Jesuits have been key in the globalization of Christianity (Molina 2013). The *Imitatio Christi*, or imitation of Christ’s suffering and sacrifice for humanity, which combines a focus on ‘depth of the soul’ with an action *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* (For the Greater Glory of God), is at the core of Jesuit missionary practices and *raison d’être*. Jesuit apostolic force has indeed been a globalized affair. Yet in the New World this order’s capacity to raise and control taxes, as well as its key role in the education of local elites, made it an enemy of the interests of the Spanish Crown, which led to its much-contested suppression in 1767. Jesuit history is strongly intertwined with both support for the papacy and an impulse to maintain independence from it, in some instances also rebuffing, first, imperial interests and, later, those of the modern ‘secular’ state.

In 1924, Gramsci warned that the Vatican is a perniciously dangerous “enemy of the proletariat” because it matches the apparatus of state institutions and cultural elitism with an assemblage of grassroots political and affective formations. Gramsci moreover warned that Jesuit influence in public life was very similar in scope to the Fascist movement, insofar as both were moved by a desire to “conquer the state” (see Gramsci [1924] 1978: 220–224). Gramsci’s analysis is perhaps nowhere better supported than in the relationship of the Jesuit order and Catholic Church with the Argentinian dictatorship (1976–1982), even as the history of this relationship was riddled with chiaroscuro (Verbitsky 2005). In comparison to its position vis-à-vis other Latin American dictatorships at the time, such as in Brazil, the Jesuit order’s position in Argentina was a quiet rather than overtly public critique of the regime. It was out of this context (of dictatorship) that Bergoglio’s relationship to the Jesuits came about. The ambiguity of the Jesuits’ investments in public life is thus inherited in full by Francis.

The lack of clarity of Bergoglio’s position—which I argue is a Criollo one—haunts his papacy. Francis’s visit to Chile in 2018, for example, was contested not only for his failure to denounce the past Argentina military regime, but also for his public unwillingness to align his voice against the Chilean government’s dismissals and violent rebuffs of Mapuche claims on sovereignty and access to their ancestral land. Francis—evoking a Criollo modality of power—has been perceived as aligned with conservative and violent regimes, rather than taking up the defense of local indigenous claims. In fact, in line with his predecessors, he has not repealed Pope Alexander VI’s Papal Encyclical *Inter Caetera* of 1493, which avows the sovereignty of the Kingdoms of Spain and Portugal over “the undiscovered world,” although he has received petitions to do so from different indigenous organizations in the Americas. In short, then, Francis is perceived as a progressive Pope, but his political and evangelical charisma is also imbued with the ambiguities, traditionalism, and repressive violence of Criollo histories in and from the Americas and the clerical Catholic Church at large.

Politics of Seduction: The Lampedusa Cross(es)

On 8 July 2013, a few months after his election, Pope Francis set off on his first official visit. Originally invited with no expectation by Stefano Nastasi—the then parish priest of Lampedusa, an island located 200 miles off the Tunisian shore—Francis embarked on the first of many subsequent breaks with papal etiquette and tradition. His first official mass was not flanked by cardinals or archbishops, nor attended by state dignitaries. Attired in a white papal robe, exchanging the expected gold for an iron cross, Francis used a wooden fishing boat as his altar. A *trait d'union* between the livelihood of the local natives of the island and a perceived condition of hope and despair for sea-crossers, the fishing boat has been marked and mediatically reinforced as an index of the deathscape in this part of the Mediterranean (Albahari 2016; Ben-Yehoyada 2016; Fassin 2016).² That is the case, for instance, in Massimo Sestini's 2015 World Press award-winning and widely circulated photograph, which captures from above a small fishing boat jam-packed with asylum seekers close to the shore of Lampedusa. Wooden fishing boats have by now given way to the use of rubber dinghies (deflated by border police to discourage their reuse). Banners marking Francis's arrival, unfurled as he walked through a crowd of locals, tourists, and sea-crossers, read "Only you can save us"; "You are one of us, welcome to those who [are seen as] the last ones." In this moment, the theme of a commitment to the 'margins' came into being in the newly performative papal domain.

Francis then walked, leaning gently on a papal scepter that was created for the occasion by Francesco Tuccio, a local carpenter. Formed in the shape of a cross, the scepter was of wood from shipwrecked boats that had carried migrants to the island's shores. The Pope censed the four directions of the altar. This ritual moment conferred sacredness to the boat and the cross, and by extension transformed other ordinary ship's wood from Lampedusa's coast into vital matter within a Catholic force that worked to make marginal people and undersea spaces visible. Later, the Pope blessed a wreath of flowers and threw it onto the sea. From the affectively charged instant of contact between the petals and the surface of the water, the spread of reverberations linked the prayers of the Pope to those who lay 'lost' beneath the surface. The connection with and the love for those who were lost took place through haptic vision: touching and praying by means of a material rendering that then became in common (the blessed wreath of flowers floating on the sea). Pope Francis theologically, mediatically, and pastorally foregrounded the *abrasso* (the embrace) and the importance of touch as the encounter with God via the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross: "Paradise is not a fairytale place, much less an enchanted garden. Paradise is the *embrace* of God, infinite Love, and we enter there thanks to Jesus, who died on the Cross for us" (Pope Francis 2017b; emphasis added).

In New Spain and in contemporary Latin America, there is a long-standing indigenous and Criollo affective attachment to images of the crucifixion that connect not only to the grimness of a suffering death, but also to the joy of rebirth, coded through a body on the Cross (Hughes 2010). For Francis, the Cross moves us away from one mode of living to another, from fascination with mundanity toward engaged social action. The presence of Jesus's Cross creates the potential for reflection and dialogue in the 'heart' (evoking St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*), saving us from the allure of materialism. This encounter with the cross in/of Lampedusa is performative and directed to action, shaping a call for new visibility and awareness of the suffering and joy of undocumented migration.

At the end of his first visit to Lampedusa, Pope Francis blessed the wooden cross with the mantra "Take it everywhere" (*portatela ovunque*). This cross and some of its cognates would subsequently travel across Italy and northern Germany, as well as to England and Wales (see ANSA 2016; CAFOD 2016; *Wir In* 2015). In April 2015, the British Museum commissioned and

acquired a Lampedusa cross from Tuccio. As the Museum's head curator Jill Cook explained to me, the cross shows a "politics of seduction" that will be a living document of "the historical moment we are embedded in." When religion and citizenship are in a dialogical tension of dissociation, the relation between the sacred and the political is best studied as a historical production, as the product of a condition of Western modernity that is in need of deprovincialization (Certeau 1988: 121). In fact, the Lampedusa cross's mobilization of a politics of seduction compels a disposition toward migrants' suffering. Through the papal touch,³ the Lampedusa cross becomes a material trace of violent histories with and beyond the sacrifice of Jesus.

The mediatically transmitted event of Pope Francis, in his first official papal visit, leaning on, embracing, and kissing the wooden cross has shaped a particular directionality for his papacy. Through the Lampedusa crosses, Francis's effort to make visible undocumented human mobility as a form of sacrifice, suffering, and violence—as well as joy—becomes actualized. In this way, the crosses become a potential for a renewed Catholic project, materially conjoining an aesthetic, transformative, and affective politics. These crosses move a sensorium, mobilizing people around immigration because they *commuovono* (move together) affective histories of exile and marginality. They not only move but also 'seduce' into action, especially against politics of erecting new walls or reinforcing existing ones (Vatican Radio 2016). This is so because they are material traces imbued with a force that resonates with *the* trace par excellence: the *corpus verum* (true body) of Christ. Through touch, the divine power of Christ is distributed into the life of the flesh and the life of the flock (Rivera 2015: 50; Santner 2016: 11).

The emergence, circulation, and 'museification' of the Lampedusa crosses that Francis has put in motion (*portatela ovunque*) point to how those crosses are political, aesthetic materialities that visibilize the 'invisibility' of suffering. Taking their strength from an original Lampedusa touch-event, the crosses combine a contemplative apprehension of God and an affective sensorial orientation within an immanent world, resulting in a passion for and a move into action. In an interview with Antonio Spadaro, a well-known Jesuit and director of the journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Pope Francis (2013b; emphasis added) explains:

God is found in the *gentle breeze* perceived by Elijah. The senses that find God are the ones St. Ignatius called spiritual senses. Ignatius asks us to open our spiritual sensitivity to encounter God beyond a purely empirical approach. A contemplative attitude is necessary: it is the feeling that you are moving along the good path of understanding and *affection toward things* and situations.

And yet they are still crosses, Christian crosses, highlighting paradoxical tensions between multiple faiths and a 'secular' (underpinned by Christianity) national space in conditions of (forced) migration and undocumented mobility across the Mediterranean. As Jesuit histories too—recalling Gramsci's take on the Jesuits here—these crosses are also challenging the (Italian state) terrain of privileging *jus sanguinis* over *ius soli* by calling for an embrace of citizenship beyond a line of descent toward citizenship rights due to being born and living on a land.

These tensions need to be put into focus with Francis's transmission of affects as tangible forces, whereby, as Brennan (2004: 3) expresses it, "the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another." Affects attached to a Criollo Pope are not the description of feelings emanating from a self-contained or, to use Povi-nelli's (2006: 3–4) words, a self-made, "autological" papal self. As I explain below, they are instead forces transmitted through mediatic events that coalesce around papal touch. While a touch suggests intimacy, as a mediatic event it can also imply distance (Immergut and Kosut 2014: 280). Pope Francis (2017a) calls for a tactile experience of Jesus and an 'embrace' of his presence:

Through your daily efforts, you remind us that Christ himself asks us to welcome our brother and sister migrants and refugees with open arms, with arms wide open. Welcoming in this way, with arms wide open. When our arms are open, we are ready for a sincere embrace, an affectionate embrace, an enveloping hug, a bit like this colonnade in the Square which represents the Mother Church which embraces all in the shared common journey.

Francis has held children in his arms against security warnings, has washed the feet of prisoners during Holy Thursday,⁴ has stopped the popemobile to meet the crowd, and has had his embrace returned by a group of cloistered nuns who nearly “ate him up” (in the words of Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe) while on a visit to Naples Cathedral in 2015. Francis’s mobilization of Criollismo is the mobilization of a history of inclusion and exclusion; in this sense, his papacy is producing a form of affective politics, a politics of seduction into action, here specifically on undocumented migration.

Since the election of Pope Francis, the conditions faced by immigrants around the world, and the political reverberations of these conditions, have been among the stronger points of contention within the Roman Catholic Church. The catechesis promoted by Francis on migration revolves around four gerundive conditions: (1) *welcoming* migrants and refugees through legal and safe channels; (2) *protecting* the legal status and a life of dignity of these people in their countries of origin and arrival; (3) *promoting* practices that foster the *dignity* of all and the cultivation of human potential “in all the dimensions that constitute the humanity intended by the Creator”; and (4) finally, inspired by John Paul II’s wording, *creating opportunities* for enrichment from migration that are based not only on processes of assimilation, but also on discovering the “secret” brought to life through migrants and refugees, which will help shape society, making it more “a reflection of the multi-faceted gifts of God to human beings” (Pope Francis 2018; cf. Pope John Paul II 2004).

Despite the clarity of these conditions, there remain deep tensions around undocumented migration in Europe that run through the Roman Catholic Church. One part of the Church sees migration through a communitarian and contextual approach—human dignity for all, a clear rebuff of violent forms of governmentality, and an interest in migrant cultures. The other grounds human rights for migrants theologically, in an ostensibly pre-cultural, universal understanding of human beings, which is ultimately the basis of European (Christian) civilization and values. This latter theological orientation, championed in particular by Pope Benedict XVI and his followers, sees migrants in light of a Catholic *humanitas*. This *humanitas* requires an imagined universal tradition, one that assumes, in troublingly unexamined ways, a specific notion of the heteronormative family (family reunification) as the motive and *telos* of migration.

It is through the contemporary articulation of a Catholic *humanitas* that the history and significance of a Criollo Pope appears most clearly. Following the fifteenth-century encounter with the New World, a tension between Sameness and Otherness was reinforced by a racialized understanding that shaped belonging to the category of human (*humanitas*) into an apparently inclusive, but actually exclusive, attribute. The continuing ideological impact of this Catholic *humanitas* within the twentieth-first century highlights a troubling attachment to the imagined Christian roots of the Western world that remains at the heart of the Roman Catholic Church. Francis’s explicit refusal of a populist attachment—an exclusionary Christian root of the fundamentally Eurocentric worldview embraced by other factions of the Church—aligns precisely with his status as a Criollo and Jesuit Pope. Indeed, Francis’s effort to reframe Church debates concerning immigration, hospitality, and belonging have generally cast him less as an antagonist than as a disrupter among those factions within the Church who see the universalizing discourse of Catholic *humanitas*—and the restrictive view of non-Christian European

immigration that this ostensible universalism has historically disguised—as still vital to the reproduction of the *Mater Ecclesia*.

This element of Francis's disruption needs to be understood as an index of the affective forces of an 'Atlantic Return'—a term I use to describe the multi-layered and ambiguous process of a return of people, ideas, and material culture from the Americas to Europe (and the Vatican, in particular) that defines Catholicism in the twentieth-first century. This Return is a field of force, with some Atlantic threads of histories, mobilities, and materialities being affectively transmitted in space and therefore alive in the present.⁵ This Return takes form through entrenched anxieties of conversion that the Catholic Church has faced since the fifteenth century, reappearing in the twentieth-first century like a kind of uncanny reversal of the project of full conversion of the Americas. The Return produces different and contrasting forms of affective attachments to a 'universal' Catholic Church—attachments that avail and at the same time challenge nostalgia for a Christian empire (Napolitano 2016).

The ambiguity of an Atlantic Return permits us to focus on Pope Francis not simply as a Criollo in the New World, but also as a 'decreolizing Creole' who comes into being through what W. E. B. Dubois (1994) would describe as 'double consciousness', in this case in movement and borne out through a second-generation returnee migrant.⁶ Francis's charisma is not only the product of the conflict of two modes of being—one that has prejudiced the terrain for the self-apprehension of the other—but also the index of a return of conservative affective histories to a Catholic center via a revitalizing movement through the peripheries. It is from this perspective on double consciousness that Pope Francis's racialized and ambiguous complexity becomes clearer, especially as it relates to his orientation to issues regarding indigeneity and gender 'at home' in the Americas.

Criollo Charisma and *Domus Divisa*

Pope Francis's mobilization of affects unfolds as an articulation of charisma, affect, and liturgy (as a form of religious *officium*, with its meaning of being invested with a liturgical work). Max Weber's (1968: 1115) classic reading of charisma posits that people pursue a charismatic leader in response to an "internal," non-rational pull. The bearer of charisma, in Weber's account, invests people with a sort of well-being that may socially escape "traditional and rational norms" (ibid.). According to Taves (2014: 89), though, a charismatic force is also the capacity to give life to something "that people believe would not or could not have occurred otherwise." For Taves, it is less a property of an individual or a group, and more what stands between people and is present in space. I would argue that if one of the elements of charisma is the "capacity to produce an effect, which does not require awareness" (ibid.: 84), then it can be studied as a form of spatialized affect.

If affect is a charged intensification of a gesture that produces an "event and a sensation" (K. Stewart 2007: 1)—for example, a wreath blessed and thrown onto the surface of the sea in the papal world I have been describing—then a focus on the circulation, transmission, and distribution of papal charisma as affect sheds light on the Catholic Church's power of affectively "structuring social forms" (Schaefer 2015: 52). Beyond asking whether Pope Francis is possessing or exuding a charismatic or priestly leadership, we ought to inquire into the character of the charismatic effects of his mobilization and transmission of affect, looking in particular at the liturgical coming-into-being of new devotional 'objects' like the Lampedusa cross and the mediatic circulation of touch-events of such crosses (*portatela ovunque*). This relic-like materiality informs a papal political intervention into conditions of contemporary undocumented and

forced migration (from invisibility to visibility) with political effects. But this comes at the potential cost of the love of the Church as a ‘united family’, which I will explain in this final section.

To resist a tendency to flatten the study of affects requires combining an attention to the rhizomatic potential of coming-into-being of affects with a study of the ‘verticality’ of subjectivity, which is to say the historical and political conditions that the latter entails (Navaro-Yashin 2009: 9). The affective sovereignty that Francis is putting in motion attempts both to ‘decenter’ the Catholic Church and to ‘reform’ the Roman Curia. His affective governance is that of an embrace, embodying the figure of the pastor who is close to his flock. During the 2013 Chrism Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica, Francis passionately exhorted other priests: “This I ask you: be shepherds, with the ‘odour of the sheep’, make it real, as shepherds among your flock, fishers of men” (Pope Francis 2013a). This was a sensorial way of making God ‘real’—one that was definitely different from that of his predecessor.

Francis’s mobilization of affectively charged touch-events and their politics of seduction forms a constant horizon for the Catholic Church—the making and remaking of the ‘horizontal’ *Mater Ecclesia*, or Mother Church. The ‘love’ for the Mother Church has a theological history within the Church, yet as one of the Church’s foundations, it also carries a potential danger. Pope Francis is perceived by some Church members as destroying the Church from within, and by others as reforming it in important and long-awaited ways. The love of the *Mater Ecclesia* stands uncomfortably at the intersection of an imagined genealogy of a universal Church (as in Catholic *humanitas*) and the vernacular, papal responsibility to reform it. This love thus becomes a terrain of contention, anxieties, and interruptions, animated, I argue, by the Criollismo of this Pope.

Within one segment of the Catholic Church, Francis is perceived as a trickster—not as the Criollo enabler of a new national unity but as an ‘outcast’, the instigator of a *domus divisa* (house divided), an interruption in the line of blood descent.⁷ There has been a steady campaign, particularly from within the Roman Curia, to frustrate and undermine the impact of Francis’s proposed reforms. Two examples, in particular, stand out. The first is a letter written by four traditionalist cardinals—Walter Brandmüller, Raymond L. Burke, Carlo Caffarra, and Joachim Meisner—and championed by the German Cardinal Müller on the interpretation of ‘love’ and the nature of the family in Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*. This letter questioned Francis’s “lack of clarity” on the issue of divorcees receiving the Eucharist rite. Pope Francis leaves the decision to local bishops, rather than asserting a dogmatic centralized posture of the Pope (see Petin 2016). The cardinals’ challenge revolves around the catechesis of the family, the stakes of which are made very clear in Cardinal Müller’s intervention of March 2016 when he depicts Pope Francis with specific wording: “Pope Francis is not a ‘professional theologian’, but has been largely formed by his experiences in the field of the pastoral care, which is very different here with us [in the West]” (cited in Hickson 2016). This letter responding to *Amoris Laetitia* is a contestation over the nature of the intimate event of love within a Catholic family formation (Povinelli 2006). These cardinals point to a threatening ambiguity that Francis brings into the Vatican structure. In fact, Pope Francis has been described by the American Capuchin Father Thomas Weinandy as “creating confusion” with his *Amoris Laetitia*. Weinandy argues that the Pope’s position is to “censor and even mock” those with traditional positions on marriage, styling them as “Pharisaic stone-throwers who embody a merciless rigorism” (cited in Hallett 2017).

A *domus divisa*—a household divided—is feared by these factions as a terrain produced by the push to decentralization as a result of Francis’s federalist impulse. The Pope is cast as a pastor who is capable of affectively putting in motion a renewed evangelization of the peripheries and borderlands, but who is not a true theologian, with the ultimate papal dogmatic power to reproduce

and command the Catholic Church and its Canon law. He is also perceived as a Pope who will open the door to undocumented migration in a way that weakens the Catholic *humanitas*, which privileges its cultural, European Christian roots.

Nothing could exemplify the latter better than the Catholic prayer march, called the “Rosary at the Borders,” which took place in Poland in October 2017. Held on the day of the commemoration of the naval Battle of Lepanto of 1571, the demonstration prompted thousands of people to walk the Polish national borders in defense of a ‘Catholic Poland’ against an ‘Islamic invasion’ (Berendt and Specia 2017). Francis, as a Criollo Pope, mobilizes a relation between blood, soil, and faith, but he does so differently from this wing of the Church. The promotion of a politics of seduction and the rich ambiguity of a Criollo papal emplacement is what empowers Francis’s capacity to readdress histories of violence and to renew the potency of an ethical papal diplomacy. This is an ethics that invites us also to engage with the unpredictability of God as a vector for social and subjects’ transformation through God’s distributive agency (Scherz 2018: 108–109).

In his 2017 visit to Colombia, Francis brought into view a theology of reconciliation that runs through the body of (pagan) women as well. His statement on the ‘pagan’ blood of Christ (Pope Francis 2017c; emphasis added) was promptly attacked by different constituencies as an expression of Francis’s potentially heretical (and, in a Criollo sense, ‘tricksterish’) tendencies:

The mention of women—though none of those referred to in the genealogy has the category of the great women of the Old Testament—allows us a particular rapprochement: it is they, in the genealogy, who tell us that *pagan blood runs through the veins of Jesus*, and who recall the stories of scorn and subjugation. In communities where we are still weighed down with patriarchal and chauvinistic customs, it is good to note that the Gospel begins by highlighting women who were influential and made history.

A wing of the Roman Curia, and of the wider Church for which it stands, sees what Francis has put in motion as an ‘infiltration’ of the power of the peripheries into the ‘solidity’ of the center, testing the elasticity of the body/Ecclesia. As Michel de Certeau (2000: 6) noticed in studying the seventeenth-century possessions at Loudon and the accusations against the charismatic Jesuit confessor of the female convent, who was declared a heretic by the Church and burned at the stake: “Shaken ecclesiastical institutions let in through their cracks, and also exude, certain religious symptoms—a mixture, so to speak, of the most archaic and the most *radical elements* ... These symptoms are then suspected and frequently accused together of constituting one and the same social and doctrinal ‘heresy’” (emphasis added). Pope Francis is not a heretic, but he is consistently othered by a part of his own Church, especially its metropolitan center of power. This is clearly not new to the relationship of the papacy and the Jesuit order, which has had a long, complex history of alignment and misalignment with papal directions.

Francis, the first Jesuit Pope, is an ambivalent exemplar of an Atlantic Return from the Americas to the heart of Catholic Europe. His papacy supplies new blood for Catholicism and a new evangelical endeavor to reach the peripheries. But the force of the Return he represents also undermines established forms of ideological and institutional reproduction within the Catholic Church’s theological center, as well as the survival of a part of the governing apparatus of the Vatican. Anxiety around a condition of *domus divisa* within the Catholic Church is not new, of course. However, an analysis of Pope Francis as a Criollo Pope allows for a more robust engagement with the *longue durée* of affective and racialized histories (with their dissolving and coagulating effects) that Francis both embodies and mobilizes through a charismatic, yet contested, politics of seduction, which is particularly apparent when viewed through the issue of immigration. Nonetheless, Francis’s affective proximity to the flock, and his distance from

the hierarchical echelon of the Roman Curia, is still a Jesuit history—one that is also constituted by the missionary encroachment of this religious order into the lives of native peoples first and, later, in the newly formed nation-states of the Americas through the educational reproduction of their elites. Yet in this article, I can only point to a direction of further complexity—the relationship between being a Jesuit and being a Criollo, of which Pope Francis is an exemplar. Both conditions within an Atlantic history have been an agency of, and a threat to, the reproduction of Catholicism, papal authority, and nation-state formations.

Counter to his papal predecessor, Benedict XVI, Francis has indeed opened a window to acceptance of gay and lesbian people in a world-famous press conference held during a return flight from a 2013 visit to Brazil: “If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him?” (Pope Francis 2013c). However, as I signaled at the beginning of this article, Francis has also sided with a part of the Church attacking the so-called ideology of gender, criticizing this ideology for promoting intimate identities that are radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. ‘Gender ideology’ is a rhetoric born in the 1990s with Pope John Paul II’s new evangelization linking theology with a particular reading of natural science against social theories of gender and sexual reproduction (Garbagnoli 2016: 189). The rhetorical move reinscribes gender into an anatomical difference, through a demonization of gender theories (depicted as the production of intellectuals in opposition to common people).

This ideology is also rooted in a Catholic imagination that fears a pre-modern, irrational, popular religion, as well as a ‘feminization’ from Mediterranean (Catholic) peasant societies (Favret-Saada 1980; Norget et al. 2017). Central elements of this pre-modern Catholic imagination include a never fully resolved material agency in divine providence—of stones, waters, and the like (Cohen 2015: 13) and their mattering to the current political landscape (Barad 2017)—but also a never-ending fear of heresy. The battle against the ideology of gender currently being unleashed by staunch Catholics in the Americas and in parts of Europe—evident in spectacular form in the burning of a Judith Butler effigy (as a ‘witch’) in São Paulo (Bizerra 2017)—is a pressing example of some of the jolts of an affective history of heresy, while the lack of its condemnation is the effect of a papal-Criollo double consciousness. The struggle over this ideology of gender—married to specific theological, pastoral, evangelical orientations—has opened a particularly contentious cleavage between ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ gender camps around the naturalization of the family as a ‘bastion of civilization,’ and its partition in opposition to evil in society. Theodicies are indeed parts of affective intimate politics, and bones of contention within and beyond the *domus divisa*, while issues of sexual abuse and the celibacy of the clergy are likewise haunting a Criollo Pope.⁸

I have presented here an analysis of a papal take on the “sacred vitality of society” (Muehlebach 2013: 458) alongside clear evidence of the racialization of Francis himself through a lens on his distributed affective charisma. This papal charisma has been oriented, more or less successfully, toward political action that focuses on a new visibility of undocumented migration and the subject of the poor (Napolitano 2017). At the same time, though, Francis carries with him aspects of conservative histories of Criollismo in the Americas that, in the name of governing over the soil, dismissed (and violently repressed) rightful claims of native, indigenous people.

Francis has shown a conservative alignment with the fight against an ‘ideology of gender’ and, at certain moments in his life, the lack of a public endorsement of grassroots indigenous struggles in Argentina. During his visit to Chile in January 2018, he not only conspicuously avoided taking a position on the alleged sexual abuser, Bishop Barros Madrid, but actually disavowed the victims’ claim—retracting this position a few months later after intense scrutiny (Horowitz 2018). Nor he has made an apology to abuse survivors of Canadian residential

Catholic schools, although repeatedly asked to do so. As an index of an Atlantic Return, Francis carries a double consciousness that is both emancipatory and conservative, while his Criollismo is haunted by the figure of the (national) indigenous native. Nonetheless, while for John Paul II the renewal of the Church was through the Holy Spirit and a clear charismatic agenda, for Pope Francis the renewal is very much seated, theologically and geopolitically, in the margins of the Church, which are becoming its new 'true' center—a Jesuit rendering of a twenty-first-century completion of the Second Vatican Council's mandate.

What I have charted here, then, has been a way in which this Pope is perceived within his flock and the Roman Curia, and how an attack on his form of governing the Church is deeply racialized. If so, then the capacity of the Roman Catholic Church's governance to contain schisms, what Carl Schmitt (1996) refers to as *complexio oppositorum*, should also be analyzed through the continuities between a papal charisma and a long affective history of race in and from the Americas. If Francis as a Criollo, as a trickster/heretic, and as a much-needed reformer Pope puts in motion a politics of seduction while also coming to being through an ambiguous Criollo history, then an anthropological study of the Catholic Church should put the focus on the theopolitical underpinnings of affective terrains and, in so doing, forge "new trajectories for the scholarly imagination" (Navaro 2017: 212; see also Elden 2010). The theological indeed partakes in the political, perhaps in unexpected and yet to be fabulated forms.

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NOTES

1. The former is an attentive exam to establish a legitimate equivalency between Canon law and texts that Bishops' Conferences want to promote. The latter is only a positive endorsement of the fidelity and congruency of a text to an original Latin script.
2. For insightful discussions on the shape-shifting formation of the Mediterranean and the relation between sovereignty and hospitality, see Ben-Yehoyada (2017) and Shryock (2012).
3. This touch is a form of haptic vision—a modality of touch distributed through the flesh that decenters the primacy of ocularcentric vision.
4. In 2015, Pope Francis washed the feet of prisoners at Rebibbia Prison, which houses over 90 percent of the country's non-Italian inmates (RaiNews 2015).
5. There is here a link between political theology and philosophy of history via an engagement with the ethnographic lens that I can only point to but not fully engage with in this article.
6. I wish to thank Charles Stewart for suggesting this angle of analysis.
7. Here the reference is to the theopolitical mobilization of the Gospel of Mark 3:24–25, where Jesus warns that a house/church divided will not stand.
8. For lack of space I have to leave out a consideration of the unraveling of sexual abuse that is plaguing the Catholic Church.

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