INTRODUCTION

Incarnate Politics beyond the Cross and the Sword

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Abstract: This introduction outlines an anthropological concept of ‘theopolitics’ emergent from ethnographic engagements with the oldest site of European colonialism—the (Latin) Americas. Defined as a query into the sensorial regimes enabling incarnate forms of power, theopolitics focuses on the sovereignties from below that are immanent in struggles between the universalisms of Christian imperialisms and the autochthonous forces they seek to police and unmake. The articles comprising this special issue advance this query by exploring processes of attunement to the prophetic voices of the dead and life itself, of the elasticity of incarnate forms of political charisma and crowds, and the potencies of precious matter and touch as domains for rethinking relationships among political anthropology, political economy, and political theology beyond a focus on the state.

Keywords: crowd, incarnation, Latin America, political anthropology, political theology, sovereignty, theopolitics

With this special issue, we hope to accomplish two related tasks. First, we lay the foundations for deploying the concept of ‘theopolitics’ in political anthropology. Currently emerging from theology as a counterpoint to the more anthropologically familiar concept of political theology, theopolitics juxtaposes the negative or apophatic dimensions of the divine—its prohibition on being named—to its positive or cataphatic ones in order to emphasize the capacity for divine action through processes of withdrawal and conditions of powerlessness. Here we use the concept to disrupt political anthropology’s tendency to segregate the domain of religion from the domain of the political and thus to stabilize institutions, such as the state and the church, whose legitimacy depends on this separation (Johnson et al. 2018). We argue that this concept anchors an

extraordinarily productive theoretical framework for grappling with phenomena that political anthropologists are encountering ever more frequently, both in their field sites and at home. These include the spectacularity of contemporary violence; the popular and elite religious categories and practices animating much of what counts as ‘politics’; and the continual re-emergence of projects for a liberatory ‘otherwise’ that cannot be reduced to, even as they sometimes intersect with, revolution. We are advocating, in short, for the central place of the theological (not just the religious) in contemporary anthropological engagements with the nature of power and terror. The articles gathered in this issue explore the forms of the otherwise that theopolitics introduces into anthropology in order to collectively advance a novel account of the struggles, excesses, and miraculous potentialities of contemporary politics in Latin America.

Our second task is to assert the importance of the Americas, the oldest site of European colonialism, for developing the anthropological implications of the concept of theopolitics. We use this site to provincialize the received genealogy of political theology, pulling out from the Westphalian formation of the European nation-state and harkening to an earlier event—namely, 1492—at the conclusion of the Reconquista and the commencement of the Conquest of the Americas. Amy Hollywood (2002) and Fenella Cannell (2005), among others, have argued that the implicit secularity of academic critique has blinded us to the vitality (and thus, we would add, the too often unmarked omnipresence) of Christianity all around us. Returning to the birthplace of the 500-year-long conjoining of capitalism and colonialism is not intended to advance the parochial claims of area studies, but rather to show how the site of the Americas can destabilize political anthropology’s understanding of its subject as a domain that is embedded in the Christian theological, but does not require attending to theology itself (Furani 2019; Lebner 2015). As the mediator between the Crown and violent processes of accumulation during the Conquest and long afterward, the Catholic Church and Christianity at large have played a key role in (re)configuring the regimes of the senses through which specific forms of power, labor, and life, as well as gendered and raced performativities, have emerged and are incarnated first in the Americas and subsequently in other colonial experiments. They have also determined what kinds of persons and entities have been endowed with agency and efficacy for politics as well as religion. By foregrounding the past and present role of the imperial Church in these processes, we hope to undo secularist understandings that confine theology to the domain of the supernatural, obscuring how it partakes through this history in the materiality of everyday life (Agamben 2013; Kotsko 2018; Mondzain 2005; Stimilli 2016).

In so doing, we seek to pull out the genealogies of political anthropology that pass through Christian empire. This field has been organized by relatively compartmentalized concepts of politics, history, and the state and themes that

emerge from them, like political violence. Many of these concepts were developed by anthropologists of Latin America, and much of the anthropology of Latin America has been framed by these concepts. Yet even for Latin America, political anthropology has resisted contemplating how Christianity, Catholicism, and religious tradition more generally shape the political. We argue, therefore, that the rich corpus of knowledge that has emerged from this work needs to better engage with the ‘substance of politics’, which is to say the material thickness of the political stories in which we are enmeshed. A theopolitical analytics proposes to examine the theological sensoria through which performances by the living, the dead, and a host of more-than-human entities are able to incarnate this substance, beyond or in flight from their capture by the sovereign powers of church and state. This analytics emerges from an account of the ongoing workings of the Church in the colonization of the Americas and resistances to it, and thus foregrounds Catholicism and theological concepts like incarnation that have a specific weight within Catholicism (but also within Byzantine theology and Christianity at large). We hope that it will also spark investigations into the theological formations that mediate other histories of Christian empire. We propose that the theopolitical, while emerging as an analytics from a particular theological tradition, should be seen as an ethnographic space that opens in the historical and colonial wake of the withdrawal of the divine for sensorial potentialities and material agencies that exceed this tradition.

Political Theology and Theopolitics

The genealogy of political theology, as least as taken up by anthropologists,¹ passes through the work of Carl Schmitt, primarily as discussed in certain works of political theorist Giorgio Agamben. Dominating this conversation has been the concept of ‘the exception’, which is to say Schmitt’s claim that sovereignty is constituted by the sovereign’s power to decide when the norms of state rule face a threat that calls their survival into question, and to suspend these norms in order to confront the threat. The theory of sovereignty this claim charts depends on Schmitt’s ([1922] 2005: 36) oft-cited dictum that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts,” casting the modern sovereign as the secularized analogue of God and the exception as a secularized analogue of the miracle. This framework emerges out of Schmitt’s reading of the history of the formation of the European state after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which separated church and state and relocated (modern) religion to a spiritualized and individualized interior, removed from the public(s). Agamben’s (1998, 2005) work on the ‘state of exception’ has been used to universalize this history, framing the contemporary state as characterized by a permanent invocation of the exception,

exemplified by spaces such as concentration camps and acts such as extraordinary renditions, in which violence itself has become the norm.²

With such examples constantly proliferating, this framework has found wide application within anthropology. But given its parochial history, anthropologists might be wise to pose certain questions before applying it to their research sites so readily. Schmitt, Samuel Weber (1992: 7) argues, espoused a kind of “*methodological extremism* for which the formation of a concept is paradoxically necessarily dependent upon a contact or an encounter with a singularity that exceeds or excludes the concept.” For Schmitt, this singularity might be seen as his notorious membership in the Nazi Party. His political theology is authoritarian, privileging stability and the maintenance of state power at a moment when the Weimar Republic seemed to augur its collapse. Hence, the sovereign decision is imagined as reinstating the order of the general—the law, the norm, the concept—against and over that which resists generalization. Yet if the relationship between the moment of the decision and the moment of the establishment of the state of exception is indeed like the one between God and the miracle, there is more room for equivocation and maneuver in the time between them than an authoritarian might wish.

In the Abrahamic theological traditions within which this relationship is imagined, the divine is intrinsically double in nature, manifesting herself affirmationally, in her cataphatic dimension, but simultaneously refusing her own utterance, in her apophatic one (Hollywood and Beckman 2012; Sells 1994). Attending to the apophatic, some Christian theologians have argued, opens up a ‘gap’, a space of oscillation between these two forms of divine being in language within which a Theo can be communicated performatively and poetically rather than propositionally (Schmiedel 2017: 221). In her resistance to being rendered as logos, concept, or metaphysics, this ‘God otherwise’ (Caputo 2006; Caputo and Keller 2007) is weak and vulnerable rather than omnipotent or universal, for in withdrawing from pronouncing herself, she also “relinquishes or resists power for the sake of openness to otherness” (Schmiedel 2017: 256). But this powerlessness still holds the power to provoke a response, to demand that we find the Kingdom of God for ourselves in our everyday. Attunement to the gap, and the oscillations between the cataphatic and the apophatic that take place within it, is the condition of experiencing this power. Here we borrow the concept of the gap from theology not to speculate on the ontological nature of the God who dwells within (we leave this to theologians), but to attune ourselves ethnographically to what persists and manifests in these oscillations.

Theologians of a ‘God otherwise’ draw on the liberatory strains within Latin American and Black theologies to think about the relationship of this God to justice on earth. But the otherwise can be terrifying as well as liberating. Accounts of this tension also rely on Walter Benjamin and Martin Buber, contemporaries of Schmitt who likewise found themselves confronted in the Weimar moment with

questions about the relationship between violence and the law. But Benjamin and Buber did so from a more precarious place—that of their Jewishness—and were equipped with political, intellectual, and ethical commitments that were the contrary of Schmitt's, from Marxism in Benjamin's case to anarchism in Buber's, and mysticism and Zionism in both. Their accounts of political responsibility invert Schmitt's, resisting the framing of politics as secularized theology by locating divine justice in the provisional nature of political orders rather than the transcendental and atemporal political legitimacy that Schmitt sought to institutionalize (Brody 2018; Svenungsson 2016). For Benjamin ([1978] 2019), the decision to sacrifice life for justice (Schmitt's exception) is *prior* to the law, not its instatement, and destroys the law rather than marking its limits, thereby bearing witness to something beyond the law—the divine in the form of a Messiah (see also de Wilde 2011). For Buber ([1968] 2000), likewise, justice undoes (human) politico-juridical orders and is characterized by an element of anarchic surprise—a prophetic rather than apocalyptic effort to realize God's sovereignty in the everyday. Buber named this form of justice 'theopolitics' and located its radical potential in its refusal to legitimate any order that seeks to "provide a permanent dwelling for God" (Brody 2018: 140; see also Lesch 2019: 199). Here, justice depends on releasing the emergency from its confinement within the exception and allowing it to do its messianic work.

Theopolitics also has roots in older Christian theologies like that of Joachim of Fiore, a twelfth-century monk and mystic who claimed to have received novel biblical revelations of a divine plan for history at a time when the Crusades, the schism between the Western and Eastern Church, and the consolidation of the Holy Roman Empire were calling Christianity's claims on earthly power into question. Against St. Augustine's avowal that human time after the founding of the Church was a period of awaiting and preparing for the Second Coming of Christ and the eternal Sabbath that would follow, Joachim believed that a Third Age of history, now under the auspices of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, was set to begin shortly after his lifetime. Through the Holy Spirit, revelation would be direct, requiring no further mediation involving texts or the church hierarchy, and ushering in an earthly Sabbath before the Last Judgment, one of peace and plenitude (the time of rest), modeled on the life of the religious orders. The Roman Church tended to hold Joachim's prophetic vision of this double eschaton at bay, sometimes even treating him as a quasi-heretic. Nonetheless, he had an enduring influence on actors as varied as the mendicants who led the Church's evangelization of the Americas, nineteenth-century theorists of modernity, and twentieth-century revolutionaries (Lara 2014; Riedl 2017)—in short, anyone seeking to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.

United in their pursuit of justice through resistance to the alienation of the divine from history, these theopolitical frameworks "question the borders of the political" (Brody 2018: 5). A human history in which the divine is immanent

is one that is stretched by countervailing forces, as Benjamin ([1978] 2019: 305) argues in his “Theologico-Political Fragment”: “Certainly the quest of free humanity for happiness runs counter to the Messianic direction; but just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom.”

Clarifying junctures and projects may emerge from the tensions between these forces, but they do not take the form of final ruptures or decisive exceptions. A theopolitical anthropology recognizes this dynamic by approaching sovereignty not as a Leviathan, but rather as a practice in and of movement, governed less by concepts and ideologies than by rhythms and aesthetics, and always in provisional form (Benjamin [1963] 2009). Intrinsically theatrical, as Maria José de Abreu (this issue) argues, theopolitics “names the reflective work by which historical conditions of the politico-theological are themselves made apparent.”

The hinge joining elastic performances of sovereignty to the substance of politics in the ethnographies gathered in this issue is incarnation, which we distinguish from the well-rehearsed anthropological concept of embodiment. With incarnation, we build on the intrinsic Christian ‘mystery’ of the nature of the flesh and blood of Christ—*hoc est corpus meum*—the impossibility, but also the ordinarieness, of that which somehow is at once human and divine, and which thus manifests both the power to constitute and the power of that which is constituted at one and the same time.³ Theologically, this mystery is informed by the Eucharistic transubstantiation, in which the divine may be invested in the material of the Host, but also by the kenosis, or emptying out, that Christ undertook to become Jesus, as the condition of divine receptivity to the flesh, and thus to the weakness, pain, and sorrow as well as the claims on justice that the flesh entails (Cavanaugh 1998).

This theological mystery is also a political conundrum at the heart of the state form. Kantorowicz’s ([1957] 2016) notion of ‘the king’s two bodies’, which has influenced anthropology as well as political theology (e.g., Feeley-Harnik 1985; Hansen and Stepputat 2006), elaborates on this conundrum. For Kantorowicz, the king’s body is doubly constituted: it is both a more-than-human part (Christ-like) and the individual/natural body of the king—a particularly potent juncture of an office and a form. Here the work of incarnation grounded the becoming of both the office of the king and that of the people who were incorporated in the body politic through the king’s participation in the divine. With the emergence of the nation-state and capitalism, the *corpus mysticum* ceased to serve as the figure of sovereign legitimacy. But as Eric Santner (2011) argues, its carnal remainder lingers in the flesh of ‘the people’, where the natural and the symbolic become enmeshed, and thus in the regimes of bio- (and necro-) politics through which this ‘spectral yet visceral’ substance is managed.

The theopolitical anthropology we propose in this special issue uses the prism of incarnation to invite ethnographic explorations of the processes through which the human and the more-than-human come into both union and disunion in political formations. Here we move from Buber's framing of theopolitics as a prophetic and charismatic force that has the potential for enabling new spaces for the sacred to participate in politics to a project for attending to specific modes of mediation of the divine in the everyday, and the intimacies and distances these generate. A theopolitical anthropology, in short, asks not only how theological categories permeate everyday life beyond the Schmittian framework of secularization, but also how these categories participate in long histories of the body, affects, and material religion, and how these histories are lived in the constitution of peoples and commons. An ethnographic angle on these questions engages theology not as a set of propositions but as a matrix of affective and situated histories, imbued with life forms and materialities and, from the perspective of Catholicism, embedded in the politics of the Church as a 'passionate machine' (Napolitano 2016; see also Oliphant 2019). If an anarchist anthropology takes the form of "low theory" (Graeber 2004: 9)—in the sense that it is addressed to the immanent questions that arise within transformative projects—then a theopolitical anthropology participates in this anarchist tradition by engaging the political questions emergent in a human-divine history.

Primitive Accumulation and the Church in and on American Soil

Christian theological engagements in and from the Americas have long struggled explicitly with questions of politics and the economy, suffering marginalization within dominant theological paradigms as a consequence. Liberation theology, which adopted a 'preferential option for the poor' and understood sin as a social phenomenon, is perhaps the best known example. Although it engaged the work of European theologians, liberation theology found its most radical and disruptive expressions in the Latin American and Black churches. Its quasi-institutionalization through the Latin American Episcopal Council produced enormous upheaval among the 'bases' it built in marginalized Latin American communities as well as within the Church itself (McAllister 2008). But the considerable criticism that has been leveled at liberation theology, especially after its suppression under Pope John Paul II, is rarely aimed directly at the radical social transformations it generated. Instead, it stands accused of a failure to be properly theological. John Milbank (2006) dismissed liberation theology as seeking to 'naturalize' the supernatural and thus to reduce theology to politics, while Cardinal Ratzinger (1984), the movement's scourge within the Church, argued that its worldly tools for addressing poverty ignored the Church's "own

means” for achieving these ends. Bringing together Marx and Christ, the world and the Word, critics of liberation theology insist, is a provincial error.

Yet such ‘errors’ are not exclusively the province of Marxist priests. The connivance of the Opus Dei movement with military regimes and dictatorships throughout Latin America and the current moral crusade by sectors of the Church against the ‘ideology of gender’ identify the Americas as a key site of conservative Catholic moves to violently contain prophetic justice within the law. Many of these harken explicitly to the Reconquista of the Iberian peninsula from Muslim rulers as a paradigm of politics as holy war, allying them with far-right currents within Europe itself and casting the region’s left, quite literally, as heretical. Steve Bannon, a key ideologue of Donald Trump’s quasi-fascist and white supremacist presidency, moves within these currents (Muehlebach 2018). Attacks on the papacy of Francis I by proponents of this vision of Catholicism pose a serious threat to the first pope to hail from the Americas (Napolitano 2019; see also Napolitano, this issue).

These uncomfortably fleshy Christianities, rooted in the Americas and returning from the Americas, might be seen as a prime location for embarking on a study of the theological dimensions of politics. Yet as a field, political theology rarely addresses itself to the Americas. In *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, Schmitt ([1923] 1996) argues that the Church’s *complexio oppositorum*—its ability to contain within any representation both the conceptual and the fleshy, both the abstraction and its concrete incarnations, without falling apart or needing to extinguish their contradictions—makes it the very form of universalism (Muehlebach 2009). Even when this form was secularized as political after Westphalia, the Church retained its exceptional power not only to represent the *complexio oppositorum* in general, but also to represent both “the idea of justice and the person of Christ” in particular (Schmitt [1923] 1996: 30; see also Marder 2008). This capacity to hold the theological and the political themselves in tension endows the Church with “a specific, formal superiority over the matter of human life such as no other imperium has ever known” (Schmitt [1923] 1996: 8). Not until his later *The Nomos of the Earth*, however, does Schmitt’s ([1950] 2006: 39) genealogy of this universal political form incorporate the “legendary and unforeseen discovery of a new world.”

For Schmitt ([1950] 2006: 67), *nomos* refers to a fundamental “relation between order and orientation” that endows legal systems with their title, in the sense of both sovereignty and ownership. All titles, he argues, are grounded—literally—in acts of land appropriation that are “the immediate form in which the political and social order of a people becomes spatially visible” (ibid.: 70). A true *nomos* of the earth—one that could encompass the planet as a whole—could thus only emerge with the Conquest of the New World and the subsequent extension of European measures, divisions, and social and political forms into new spaces by means of European acts of land appropriation.

Schmitt argues that the 1493 Treaty of Tordesillas, in which the Pope authorized Conquest to serve the aims of evangelization, was soon forgotten, secularizing the title of discovery and rendering the New World one without order, and thus one subject to the laws of occupation (ibid.: 89). This displacement of violence into the colonial space of exception, as a kind of territorial complement to the sovereign's juridical power to decide on the exception, was the grounding for the new legal regime, *jus gentium Europaeum* (European public law), which afforded Europe itself centuries of relative peace.

The centrality of the event of the Conquest to the history of Europe will come as no surprise to those who have elaborated concepts like the coloniality of power (Mignolo 2011; Moraña et al. 2008; Quijano 2000; Quijano and Wallerstein 1992) or racial capitalism (Gilmore 2007; Robinson [1983] 2000; see also Federici 2004; Mariátegui [1928] 1971), or those who have argued for the embedding of the history of metropolitan capitalist 'takeoff' in processes of indigenous dispossession, African enslavement, and plantation agriculture (Du Bois [1935] 2014; Dunbar-Ortiz 2014; Mintz 1985; Moreiras 2000; Williams 1944). Their work argues not only that what was peace for Europe was unimaginable horror for its colonies (a phenomenon that Schmitt acknowledged but that did not interest him), but also that this horror generated key infrastructures and technologies for the functioning of the contemporary world system (Mbembe 2019; Rifkin 2009). Alongside the spatial and juridical divisions of *jus gentium Europaeum*, these included formations of race, gender, and sexuality; concepts of economy and society; and hierarchies of humanity that knitted these all together into a global order (Buck-Morss 2009; Saldaña-Portillo 2016; Thomas 2016; Trouillot 1991; Wynter 1995).

As many of these scholars have noted, the Church, its missionaries, and its theologies were key agents of this world-historical transformation, and often of the violence with which it was accomplished. The fact that the Church has not yet acceded to repeated requests from indigenous peoples of the Americas to repudiate the Treaty of Tordesillas suggests that these agencies are still operative. But the question of how the *complexio oppositorum* confronted participation in the Conquest and what traces of this event persist in the political form that is the Church's legacy (in the Americas and elsewhere) is not part of this literature, which tends to assume that the Church was transformed into a mere "spiritual arm of ... newly emergent absolute states" (Wynter 1995: 13).

Schmitt is likewise unhelpful. As an unabashed enthusiast of European domination, Schmitt ([1950] 2006: 87) saw Christianity's role in the newly discovered Americas as non-controversial, framing it through the medieval figure of the *katechon* or restrainer, incarnated in the Holy Roman Emperor, who is theologically charged with holding back the appearance of the Antichrist and with it the Second Coming, thereby mediating between Christianity's singular eschatology and its historical incarnations. But as John Blanco and Ivonne del Valle (2014)

note, the extension of this mediating role to the Americas radically undermined the Church's claim to incarnate the idea of justice:

Paradoxically ... the culmination and fulfillment of the Christian order in a *global* Christian empire meant, at the same time, its dissolution: to restrain the Antichrist, Christianity had to allow for his very unleashing. Owing to the magnitude of its destruction, the *truth* of the war against paganism (as negation of the only God) is transformed into the negation of God and the order this God was meant to safeguard.

With the Conquest, in short, the gap in which God dwells became a historical one, opening up between the Church's capacity to articulate power and the unthinkable nature of the violence in which that capacity was founded.

As del Valle (2013: 51) observes, the "nakedness of power was ... a particular challenge for Spanish thinkers who insisted on being considered part of a Christian Empire," placing them at the vanguard of the war against paganism and the contradictions it generated. As Jennifer Scheper Hughes (this issue) shows, the integrity of the *corpus mysticum* of the Church in the colony was achieved only precariously, through the unstable inclusion of *indios* as this body's feet, paradoxically essential supports yet also degraded, severable parts. For Alberto Moreiras (2000), the polemics of Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas against the violence of Conquest were grounded in an appeal to Christian reason that assumed the reasonableness of the territorialization of imperial thought within (and thus imperial sovereignty over) the New World, rendering forever unthinkable the very phenomenon he was reasoning against, allowing the "psychotic night" of the primitive accumulation wrought by Conquest to persist at the heart of the ongoing global project of empire (ibid.: 361). Del Valle (2013: 59) sees the task of rationalizing violence as acceptable order as one that persisted. In his governmental treatises, late-sixteenth-century Jesuit José de Acosta (sometimes hailed as the father of the ethnographic method) deployed a baroque rhetorical strategy that recognized the undesirability of violence and exploitation even as it folded claims about their necessity into the articulation of proposals for a system of government.

The vertigo-inducing foldings and forgettings of attempts to rationalize the unthinkable established a relationship of 'extimacy' (Moreiras 2000) between the soil of the Americas and Christianity. The Church depended on the denizens of the Americas to fulfill its universalizing mission, but they could accede to political representation only through the Church's imperial categories, particularly that of race. As Hughes (this issue) argues, this relationship fundamentally transformed the Church itself. Thanks to the demographic collapse that primitive imperial accumulation set in motion, it was forced to become what she calls "an *ecclesia ex mortuis*, a church of the dead." Conversion in the context of dispossession and enslavement engendered a vast crowd of American phantasms

pullulating just out of reach, constantly threatening to refuse Christianity's gift of faith and estrange the Church from American soil. The contests between church and state in Europe over the next centuries were embedded in struggles to contain the consequences of unleashing the Antichrist—and with it the possibility of messianic justice as well—within the colonial space of exception.

Every success in extending Christianity's reach thus entailed a commensurate danger: "If the Indian is always already a Christian *in potentia*, the Christianized Indian is always already a potential apostate" (Nemser 2014; see also Hanks 2010; Hughes, this issue). An ever-expanding and -contracting frontier, beyond which the *complexio oppositorum* threatened to no longer stretch, required not only heavy policing of those subjects ostensibly already under the rule of the cross and the sword, but also an ongoing "effort at the deliberate *unmaking*" of pre-existing sovereignties and their *nomoi* (Johnson et al. 2018). Any agency that could potentially enact or reveal the endurance of other sovereignties—such as those of the dead, earth beings, animals, pre-Conquest forms of writing or architecture, African forms of kinship, or even non-Spanish words (Hanks 2010)—was thus a sign of heresy as well as disobedience. The geopolitics of the formation of the New World, in short, was always also a matter of theopolitics.

A theopolitical anthropology, however, points not only to a moment in the formation of the New World, but also to the constant re-emplacement of 'matter out of place' (Douglas [1966] 2002) in the wake of the global Christian imperial project. It is thus a creative opening to diverse orders of substance as well as to how particular substances both potentiate and interrupt projects of commons-forming and styles of political engagement that can be emancipatory, terrifying, subjugating, or all of these at once. The dead, the spectral, the chthonic, and the monstrous are among the figures of this process, but so are the conquistador, the populist, the narco, or the guerrilla priest. Or the Jesuit silver described by Michelle Molina (this issue), whose power to incarnate Christ could not be kept entirely at bay by the Crown notaries seeking to claim it for the notarial logics of the state and finding themselves instead captured by the Church's "sacramental logics." Or the touch of the first Pope from the Americas, which Valentina Napolitano (this issue) theorizes as a "theopolitical encounter" that breaks through the perceived Petrine "line of sovereign descent."

Pushing at the boundaries of political form, the theopolitical is a realm where competing sovereignties collide but also provisionally resonate with one another. Our concern here is to understand the rhythms shaping these collisions and resonances by exploring ethnographic moments in which (messianic) charisma is acquired through intimacy with and repulsion by the otherwise, rather than through its exclusion or relegation to the space of exception. These rhythms are evident in the baroque aesthetic, so foundational to Latin American art and religious practice, which, as Kristin Norget (2017: 189) argues, is

“mediative in a scalar and almost fractal fashion, absorbing contrasting elements and opposed forces while masking them, altering awareness and sensations, and hence having compelling, material effects on those who engage with it.” But they also figure in more properly political practices and formations, like the unstable ‘people’ in Rafael Sánchez’s account (this issue) of contemporary Venezuelan populism, which eludes Chavista attempts at totalization by participating in the horizontally proliferating energies that are also evident in Venezuelan popular religion. Kyle Lambelet and Carlota McAllister similarly explore in this issue the oscillations between presence and withdrawal in political performances of potent but unstable theopolitical entities such as the dead and life itself. The forms of charisma that these performances confer on formations of ‘the people’ partake of the Church’s mediations but also exceed them, and even, as in the case of the dam conflict McAllister examines, challenge the Church’s claims to sovereignty over these entities. Here theopolitics generates questions about the nature of the crowd and the specific substances of politics.

Political Anthropology for and from the Americas

Much Latin Americanist and Caribbeanist anthropology participates in the historical materialist tradition of Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz. The region’s anthropological lessons have thus tended to be framed as pertaining to the rise of global capitalism rather than the nature of culture. To understand this regional configuration, we can extend Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1992) insight that the ‘discovery’ of the New World and the obliteration of its originary populations, along with the wholesale importation of new ones that followed, made the Caribbean impossible to frame anthropologically without reference to history and the heterogeneity of multiple historicities (see also Thomas 2016). But despite the role of the Church in these phenomena and the ubiquity of ‘religion’ and religions within Latin American politics, religious questions are often parsed within this reading of history as epiphenomenal and thus unworthy of consideration, or as independent variables shaping or expressing some more sociologically interesting phenomenon, like the ‘feeling of belonging’ or cultural marginalization. This holds even—or perhaps especially—when the ‘religion’ in question, such as liberationist Catholicism, shares the ethnographer’s materialist tendencies. Within this tradition, tracing the operations of the Word in the world once again risks being seen as a category error.

This is not to say that political anthropologists, in Latin America and elsewhere, have been indifferent to the kinds of entities we evoke here as theopolitical ones. Scholars working in post-colonial contexts have confronted phenomena whose explanation defies sociological reduction by drawing on older anthropological and psychoanalytic literatures on mimesis, the fetish,

magic, animism, and witchcraft, and/or on the negative dialectics of the Frankfurt School, and bringing these into ethnographic relation with the phenomena of capitalism and colonialism and their mystification and violence.⁴ Recently, Latin Americanist scholars have named these phenomena with terms such as ‘the pluriverse’ (Blaser 2012; de la Cadena and Blaser 2018) and ‘other possibles’ (Escobar 2020). These point to the stakes of the ontological challenge that indigenous and Afro-descended struggles present to what Marisol de la Cadena (2015a: 33) describes as “prevalent state practices that demand simple either difference or sameness from indigeneity.”

Our theopolitical analytics is broadly aligned with these projects, and particularly with de la Cadena’s (2015b) call for attending to the “*anthropo-not-seen*: the world-making process through which heterogeneous worlds that do not make themselves through the division between humans and nonhumans ... are *both* obliged into that distinction *and* exceed it.” Yet our call for a renewed engagement with theology as a more-than-material force also challenges these framings of the relationship between sovereignty and charisma for their tendency to center the state and modernity as the site of the political and nature as their other, resecularizing analytic categories that are derived from very particular political theologies and their colonial enactments. God is also a charismatic non-human, we note, and the enfleshing force of Christianity should not be reduced to either difference or sameness with modernist ontologies.

The anthropology of Christianity, meanwhile, has developed primarily through engagements with Protestantism and especially its Pentecostalist forms. It tends to privilege the study of ethics and cultural rupture over confrontations with the historicity and political economy of Christianity. In a germinal article, Joel Robbins (2006) rightly argues that the encounter of anthropology and theology and openness to potentially mutual transformative ‘core projects’ can be highly fruitful. Where we diverge from his argument is in the claim that the relation between anthropology and theology hinges on the slippery field of ontological otherness. We argue that theopolitics should tune us in to an anthropology of the otherwise that considers the more-than-material properties of projects of political and historical (not cultural or philosophical) ruptures and transformations, including within anthropological theory itself, requiring us to think of Christianity and empire together.

In this special issue, we deploy this lens to examine a variety of theopolitical performances within and beyond Latin American Catholicism. For Napolitano, the “touch-events” performed by the first Pope from the Americas, who has shocked conservative Catholics by kissing the feet of South Sudanese diplomats and refusing to allow his ring to be kissed by the flock, perform a papal theopolitics. Juxtaposing these events to a touch-event ‘from below’ performed by Latin American women migrants on a beloved priest, she argues that these provisional and incarnate moments of withdrawal and foregrounding of the

Church's charisma challenge anthropological framings of the Pauline event as one of universal and temporal rupture. For de Abreu, the theopolitical is manifested in the horizontal sovereignty extended in Brazilian Charismatic prayer, which theatrically stages its own staging. Through gymnastic practices of breath and tautological repetition, drawing on the Byzantine rather than the Western rosary, Charismatics perform a pneumatic Theos who is never fixed or external, challenging the more earth-bound liberation theology commonly associated with Brazil, and showing that theopolitics is not exclusively a liberatory phenomenon.

Hughes and Molina examine key moments of transformation in the relationship between the Church and the Crown during the Latin American colonial period. For Hughes, a colonial theopolitics arises at the heart of the sixteenth-century Church's attempts to forge a *corpus coloniae mysticum* that could emplace indigenous subjects within colonial regimes by absorbing both indigenous territories and bodies into the Church. To generate a new imaginary of this mystical body in the absence of indigenous bodies, Christ's flesh had to be spatialized and hierarchized through racial categories. Molina's piece explores attempts by the Crown, on the eve of New Spain's independence, to contain the resonances of this imaginary within the logics and rhythms of the state, only to be thwarted by the theopolitical potencies of sacred matter.

Sánchez, Lambelet, and McAllister explore how processes of attunement to theopolitical entities are performed within formations of sovereignty from below. For Sánchez, the Venezuelan crowd that Chávez and Chavistas claim as the site of political legitimation, in what is often taken as a primordial example of populism, in fact enfold a people whose unfathomable theopolitical excesses destabilize both the exception and the decision, undermining any claim to populist sovereignty. Lambelet, meanwhile, surveys theatrical practices of protest undertaken by the School of the Americas Watch movement to show how the dead are invoked to disrupt the redemptive project of US military imperialism. Those killed by empire figure uncannily as its theopolitical debris, momentarily present but always still missing. McAllister's ethnography of a dam conflict in Chilean Patagonia examines the theopolitical resonances of the slogan "Water is Life," which is popular with anti-extractives movements across the Americas. Surveying different mobilizations of this equivalence during the conflict, she argues that protests against the dams acquired theopolitical potency when life became incarnate in the river threatened with damming, calling into question the legacy of Patagonia's difficult colonization and convening a new form of Patagonian sovereignty.

Together, the articles in this special issue suggest that a theopolitics in and from the Americas entails the enmeshing of sovereignty in a body politic characterized by its elasticity rather than its boundaries. Our contributors aim to evoke the rhythms governing the deployment of incarnate substances

in struggles between Christian imperial universalism and the autochthonous forces it has sought to both dismantle and police for over 500 years. By anchoring our exploration of theopolitics in the colonial externality of Christianity to the Americas and its ongoing extimacy to the exercise of power in the world that the Conquest wrought, we aim to provincialize Eurocentric accounts of the emergence of the secular state and in so doing extend post-secular critiques of the concept of the political into the practice of ethnography.

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Notes

1. For theologians, the term ‘political theology’ encompasses a variety of discussions of politics in theology, and thus potentially some of the ways we use theopolitics here. Lambelet (this issue) provides an overview of this usage.
2. In more recent work, Agamben (2013) tempers his own framing of the exception by reflecting on the roots of different forms of *oikonomia* (economy) in the Christian Trinitarian model. Space limits our discussion in this issue of the relationship between the theopolitical and the economic, but we recognize incarnation as also belonging to the domain of economic theology (Buck-Morss 2007).
3. Thanks to Connie Gagliardi for suggesting this formulation.
4. See, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff (2008), Coronil (1997), Ferme (2001), Forde and Hume (2018), Gordillo (2004, 2014), Mbembe (2001, 2019), Taussig (1986, 1992), and many others.

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