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Questioning religio-secular temporalities: mediaeval formations of nation, Europe and race

MATTHEA WESTERDUIN

ABSTRACT   Though the flexibility of race is often acknowledged, race is still very often considered as not, or not primarily, related to religion. Such a notion of race is not only embedded in a distinction between religion and the secular (race as secular, disconnected from religion) but is also tied to a religio/secular temporalization: it excludes mediaeval (supposedly religious) discrimination from the analysis of modern (supposedly secular) race-making. This separation leaves unanswered the question of what role Christian vocabularies and religion have played in European racial formations. In this article, Westerduin aims to think together formations that are separated by the religio/secular: religion and race, and mediaeval and modern race. In doing so, she argues that a focus on 'modernity' and a disengagement with 'pre-modern' times hides from view intimate connections between Christian theology and supposedly areligious categories such as 'race', 'nation' and 'Europe'. In the late Middle Ages, theology was not only fundamental with regard to the minoritization and racialization of non-Christians or non-proper Christians; Christian imageries were also intimately tied to the construction of 'nation' and 'Europe', thereby inserting religious/racial hierarchies in their very formation.

KEYWORDS   antisemitism, body, Christian theology, Europe, Islamophobia, Middle Ages, minoritization, nation, race, religio/secular, supersessionism, temporalization

> *Secularism is taken to be a sign of modernity … the triumph of reason and science over superstition, sentiment, and unquestioned belief. The state becomes modern, in this view, by suppressing or privatizing religion because it is taken to represent the irrationality of tradition, an obstacle to open debate and discussion.* Religion is associated with the past; the secular state with the present and the future.[1]

In her critical work on the gendered dimension of secularism, Joan Scott emphasizes the exclusivist temporality inherent in secularism's articulation of religion: 'tradition' and religion are relegated to the past as backward, while secularism's contemporaneity is taken for granted. This religio/secular temporalization not only associates particular forms of religion with the past, it also (implicitly) presupposes a separation between modernity and

1   Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2009), 95 (emphasis added).

pre-modern times, associating the former with the secular, the latter with 'inappropriate' belief and superstition. The problem I aim to address in this article is how this temporality is often reproduced in critical theories concerning the secular, religion and race.[2] With regard to critical race studies, mediaeval scholar Geraldine Heng argues that 'race theory is predicated on an unexamined narrative of temporality in the West: a *grand récit* that reifies modernity as a *telos* and origin'. Paradoxically, these critical approaches acknowledge that 'race' is not primarily a (modern) scientific or biological category, and understand 'race' as a flexible and non-stable category, always (re)invented and lacking an essential core. Yet, despite these insights, such critical approaches stop 'at the door of modern time'.[3] This temporal exclusion, I would add, is often tied to a religio/secular temporalization, especially in canonical understandings of race. In an article published in 1990, Kwame Anthony Appiah, for example, pairs biology with high modern racism, and theology with mediaeval discrimination, assuming historical shifts from mediaeval Christian hostilities to modern scientific racism, despite his sensitivity to the many ways in which 'race' can be deconstructed.[4] Analogous distinctions are made between modern 'scientific' antisemitism and theologically based pre-modern anti-Judaism.[5] In both instances, mediaeval discriminatory violence is understood in religious and theological terms, irrelevant for 'modern' race, while 'modern' race is understood in secular terms, unrelated to religion or theology.[6]

These divisions between 'irrational' (religious) discrimination and 'scientific' (secular) racisms not only exclude 'mediaeval race' from contemporary reflections on race. Religio/secular distinctions also limit the possibilities of analysing the racial dimension in Islamophobia today. Nasar Meer expresses

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2   For a discussion on the relations between, and temporalization of, (scholarship on) race, modernity and coloniality, see Nasar Meer, '"Race" and "post-colonialism": should one come before the other?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 41, no. 6, 2018, 1163–81.

3   Geraldine Heng, 'The invention of race in the European Middle Ages I: race studies, modernity, and the Middle Ages', *Literature Compass*, vol. 8, no. 5, 2011, 315–31 (319). I aim to question this frame of 'modernity', not to disengage the formation of race from the emergence of capitalism, colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, but rather to analyse what mediaeval race might highlight in the race/religion constellation in Islamophobia today. I do, however, acknowledge that every temporalization will necessarily foreground particular forms of exclusion, violence and repression, while leaving other forms unaddressed.

4   Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Race', in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds), *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1990), 274–87. Also cited in Heng, 'The invention of race in the European Middle Ages I', 326n8.

5   David Nirenberg, 'Was there race before modernity? The example of "Jewish" blood in late medieval Spain', in Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac and Joseph Ziegler (eds), *The Origins of Racism in the West* (New York and Cambridge; Cambridge University Press 2009), 232–64 (240.)

6   The distinction between cultural/theological anti-Judaism and biological antisemitism has been scrutinized in the extensive work on the 'Semite'.

this problem as follows: 'It is striking to observe the virtual absence of an estab-lished literature on race and racism in the discussion of Islamophobia; some-thing that is only marginally more present in the discussion of antisemitism.'[7] Despite understandings of race as an 'empty vacuum', easily merging with other hierarchical systems,[8] it is nonetheless often understood as something unrelated to religion or theology. This separation leaves unanswered the ques-tion as to what role Christian vocabularies and religion played in European racial formations. In this article I will argue that a focus on 'modernity' and a disengagement with 'pre-modern' times hides from view intimate connections between theology and supposedly areligious categories such as 'race', 'nation' and 'Europe'. In the late Middle Ages, 'religion' was not only fundamental to the minoritization and racialization of non-Christians or non-proper Christians; Christian imageries were also intimately tied to the construction of 'nation' and 'Europe', thereby inserting religious/racial hierarchies into their very formation. These racial formations were constituted at the crossroads of theology, culture, religious practices and politics, thereby disrupting religio/secular distinctions altogether. For this reason, I contend that mediaeval race might mirror the com-plicated ways in which 'religion' functions in contemporary race-making. Especially from the perspective that acknowledges the historical production of the religio/secular and that does not take this division for granted.

I will focus particularly on reconfigurations of Christian supersessionism. This supersessionism depended on the theological notion that Christianity, conceived of as 'the spiritual Israel', superseded 'Israel in the flesh', that is, Judaism. In the late Middle Ages, this 'spiritual Israel' not only came to be aligned to 'nation', excluding those not belonging to this new Israel, the Jews, but also to a 'Christian Europe'. In this constellation, Islam was per-ceived as either a return to the Old Law (Judaism) or a regression to pre-Chris-tian paganism. Like Judaism, Islam was associated with backwardness, literalism, blindness and the flesh, while Christianity was tied to spirituality, wholeness and the rightful orientation to body, gender, sexuality and scrip-ture. These imageries were intimately tied to notions of the body, rendering Jewish and Muslims bodies unstable, fragmented and polluting. Importantly, not only was the Jewish and Muslim physical presence understood in terms of pollution, but religious practices, such as circumcision, were as well. They

7   Nasar Meer, 'Racialization and religion: race, culture and difference in the study of anti-semitism and Islamophobia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, 385–98 (385). Over the last decade an increasing number of scholars have analysed the role of race in Islamophobia in past and present. They include, among others: Ramón Grosfoguel, Nazia Kazi, Yassir Morsi, Junaid Rana, Santiago Slabodsky, Ella Shohat, Walter Mignolo, Salman Sayyid, Abdoolkarim Vakil, Anya Topolski, Gil Anidjar, Maleiha Malik, Gil Hochberg and Hatem Bazian. Bazian also founded the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project, an initiative of the Center for Race and Gender at the University of California at Berkeley.
8   Ann Laura Stoler, 'Racial histories and their regimes of truth', *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 11, 1997, 183–206.

were imagined as threatening the integrity of Christian bodies and communities (such as nation and Europe/Church). This entanglement between racialized bodies and religious practices raises urgent questions for the relation between race and (the critique of) religion today, especially with regard to the ways in which criticism of Muslim and Jewish religious practices draw on these racialized imageries.

Mediaeval and (early) modern race

Some scholars are hesitant to locate race in pre-modern times because 'race' as a category did not exist before modernity.[9] However, etymologically, the Romance-language word *raza* (related to the English word 'race') is older than often assumed. In the fifteenth century, *raza*, *casta* and *linaje* (race, caste, lineage) were closely associated terms that linked religion, biology, animal breeding, behaviour and reproduction. While it was common among breeders of horses to use the term *raza* to refer to a pure bloodline or pedigree, it was almost simultaneously used to denote human differences, especially in relation to Judaism and Islam.[10] In a Spanish dictionary of 1611, the word *raza* is defined as 'the caste of purebred horses, which are marked by a brand so that they can be recognized. … Race in [human] lineages is meant negatively, as in having some race of Moor or Jew.'[11] Walter Mignolo comments, with regard to this pairing of lineage with Moor and Jew, that 'race' was synonymous with 'blood' and 'religion'.[12] These associations between bloodline, breeding and racial inferiority/superiority were not peculiar to Spain but widespread across Europe. The Italian Jacobus Sadoletus, for example, told the readers of his child-rearing manual in 1538: 'what is done with horses and dogs should also be done with men … so that out of good parents there might be born a progeny useful to both the king and the fatherland.'[13]

The appearance of these terms coincided with an 'anti-converso ideology' in Spain that produced and naturalized new religious categories and discriminations.[14] This ideology was highly contentious. David Nirenberg dates one of the earliest legislative disputes to 1433: 'Queen Mary decreed on behalf

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9   For example, Audrey Smedley, 'The history of the idea of race … and why it matters', paper presented at the American Anthropological Association conference, 'Race, Human Variation and Disease: Consensus and Frontiers', Warrenton, VA, 14–17 March 2007, available on the *Race: Are We So Different?* website at www.understandingrace.org/resources/pdf/disease/smedley.pdf (viewed 16 January 2020).
10 Nirenberg, 'Was there race before modernity?, 248–9.
11 Sebastian de Covarrubias, 1611, quoted in ibid., 251. See also Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press 1996), 87–126, 147–86.
12 Walter D. Mignolo, 'Islamophobia/Hispanophobia: the (re) configuration of the racial imperial/colonial matrix', *Human Architecture,* vol. 5, no. 1, 2006, 13–28 (19).
13 Quoted in Nirenberg, 'Was there race before modernity?', 251.
14 Ibid., 252.

of the converts of Barcelona that no legal distinction could be made between "natural" Christians on the one hand and neophytes and their descendants on the other, a decree which implies that some people were attempting to make precisely those distinctions.'[15] These debates continued throughout the fifteenth century and culminated in the proclamation of the 'purity of blood laws' (*lampieza de sangre*, literally 'cleanliness of blood') in 1492, after Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain, and the Iberian Peninsula was nominally Christian. The purity of blood laws distinguished between converts and 'Old Christians'. They were enforced out of fear that the 'New Christians' were false converts, privately practising Islam and Judaism, disloyal to the crown and in support of the Moorish enemy.[16] These laws made suspect all converted New Christians (conversos and Moriscos), and aligned religion to ancestry, foreignness and political disloyalty to the state and the church.[17] Some scholars date the emergence of 'race' or proto-race precisely to this moment, when Christianness was fully tied to bloodline and ancestry, and permanent and unbridgeable separations appeared between New and Old Christians.[18] Since many converts were fully assimilated and integrated into Catholic Spain, one could argue that 'the paradox of assimilation' emerged at this moment, when sameness rather than difference became suspect and, instead of religious difference, ancestral Jewishness or Muslimness was racialized.[19]

It is this notion of race as unbridgeable and binary that mediaeval scholar Suzanne Akbari seems to have in mind when she stresses that mediaeval race was entirely different from modern notions, despite its continuities. She argues:

15 Ibid., 252.
16 François Soyer, 'Faith, culture and fear: comparing Islamophobia in early modern Spain and twenty-first-century Europe', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, 399–416.
17 For the political dimension and hierarchy between antisemitism/Judaeophobia and Islamophobia in the (contemporary) reception of this history, see Ella Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements: Selected Writings* (London: Pluto Press 2017).
18 Meer, 'Racialization and religion'; Junaid Rana, 'The story of Islamophobia', *Souls*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2007, 148–61 (153); Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2014). For a genealogy of (the purity of) blood laws and modern race in early and mediaeval Christian discourses, see Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press 2016).
19 For an in-depth analysis of the relation between secularism, Jewish emancipation and the 'paradox of assimilation', see Yolande Jansen, *Secularism, Assimilation and the Crisis of Multiculturalism: French Modernist Legacies* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2013). Building on the work of Hannah Arendt, Patchen Markell, Jeffrey Alexander and Zygmunt Bauman, Jansen traces the intimate ties between the emergence of a religion–*laïcité* framework, assimilation and the 'Jewish question'. She argues that, in the course of assimilation, sameness, instead of difference, became racialized, as a consequence of the continuous screening and (semi)public testing of the extent of assimilation, producing 'Jewish' difference and inequality in the process.

> Within the medieval discourse of bodily diversity—in sharp opposition to
> modern racial discourse—corporeal difference is not an either/or, black/white
> dichotomy. Rather, it is a continuum, with the monstrous races found at the
> fringes of the ecumene located on one end, and the normative European
> body on the other. Saracen[20] bodies are located along this continuum, which
> is precisely why the Saracen body is so variable in the literature.[21]

Akbari thus argues that modern race divides people into unbridgeable and
binary categories (either white or black, either Indian or European, either
Christian or Jew). However, mediaeval race was not predicated on such binar-
ism: instead it distinguished between assimilable and unassimilable Sara-
cens.[22] While I follow Akbari's analyses of mediaeval race, I propose to
reverse her argument entirely, suggesting that the absence of binarisms in
mediaeval race is precisely why we should connect it to contemporary con-
structions of race. Mediaeval formations of race foreground characteristics
(of contemporary) 'races' that are often overlooked, and help to recognize
the importance of greyscales in historical and contemporary race-making.
Alongside either/or classifications, 'race' functions on a continuum,
between, for instance, Eastern European and Western European Jews, Oriental
and Occidental Jews, European and Arab Jews, between assimilable and unas-
similable Saracens, the good and bad Orient, between white and black Sara-
cens, and between moderate and radical Muslims: scales in which (the
production of) inequality and difference are closely tied to gender, class, reli-
gious orthodoxy and closeness to whiteness/Europeanness.

In addition to these internal hierarchies, mediaeval race can also highlight
the entanglement of 'nation', Europe, race and religion, an argument that I
will discuss in what follows.

Screening, disciplining and the production of difference by the Latin Church and 'nations'

Geraldine Heng dates the emergence of the concept of race in the thirteenth
century, when institutions of control (both the Latin Church and embryonic
'nations') innovatively screened, disciplined and produced difference inside
and outside of Latin Christendom, imagined as 'Christian Europe'. She
points to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 as a 'symbolic' moment of 'this

20 'Saracen' was a term that identified both religious and ethnic/racial alterity. It was not
    used to address Arab Christians. In what follows, I will use 'Saracen' and 'Muslim'
    interchangeably, though their references differ slightly.
21 Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the
    Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press 2009), 160.
22 The conversion stories of the Saracens Fierabras and Floripas, for example, demonstrate
    how the models of integration into the Christian community differ across gender lines
    (ibid., 189).

new epistemic formation', as it generated seventy canons and a massive codification of rules that regulated many aspects of daily life and inter-actions with racial/religious minorities.[23] Jews and Muslims, for instance, were prohibited from entering public office, were mandated to tender tithes and wear distinguishing dress. The latter was justified at Lateran IV in sexual and reproductive terms, separating Jewish/Saracen from Chris-tian bodies: 'It sometimes happens that Christians mistakenly have sexual relations with Jewish or Saracen women, and Jews or Saracens with Chris-tian women.'[24] These measures coincided with the rise and proliferation of another institution preoccupied with creating boundaries and making visible what is not: the Inquisition. Both Lateran IV and the Inquisition pro-duced forms of screening and governmentalities aimed at regulating the insides of a person: controlling and uncovering what is supposedly hidden in the body.[25] This obsession with managing the human microcosm was intimately tied to the Church's macrocosmic expansionist politics, resulting in the eleventh-century Crusades and the establishment of the 'Outremer' in the Near East for 200 years;[26] the occupation of the Greek Christian territory of Constantinople in 1204; and the 'soft (doctrinal) power' of Dominican and Franciscan missions that symbolically extended Latin Christianity's reach from Maghrebi Africa to Mongol Eurasia, India and China.[27]

The unifying and expansionist measurements of the Latin Church coincided with the emergence of fragmentizing mediaeval 'nationalisms'. These, however, were not oppositional developments. Rather, 'nations' extended and built on the governmentalities set out by the Church. Adding national measures to Lateran IV not only helped to regulate 'national' Christian life, but also enabled drawing boundaries between a Christian nation and those not belonging to that nation: non-Christians and non-proper Christians. The English crown, for instance, did so by intensifying the clerical policing of 'Jews'. By setting apart 'Jews' from 'Englishmen', a collective Christian English identity could be created out of an otherwise fragmented community. Consequently, the establishment of boundaries between religio/racial

23 Geraldine Heng, 'The romance of England: *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Saracens, Jews, and the politics of race and nation', in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2000), 135–71 (137).

24 Quoted in Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1999), 162.

25 Heng, 'The romance of England', 138–9.

26 See, for thirteenth- and fourteenth-century papal investment in the extension of the papacy and Latin Christianity to North Africa, Eurasia, Eastern Europe, India and China, James Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels: The Church and the Non-Christian World, 1250–1550* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1979). On late med-iaeval crusading, see Aziz Suryal Atiya, *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Methuen 1938).

27 Geraldine Heng, 'The invention of race in the European Middle Ages II: locations of medieval race', *Literature Compass,* vol. 8, no. 5, 2011, 332–50 (336).

minorities and a Christian English majority was a constitutive moment in the formation of 'England': knowing who the 'Jews' were was essential for an emerging national self-understanding.[28] The fixation on the size and placement of the badge that Jews were ordained to wear was a case in point: debating the visibility of an otherwise unstable group helped construe and separate both minority and majority.[29] Although English 'nationalism' was one of the first to occur, England was not exceptional in its governing, scrutinizing, prosecution and expulsion of the Jews: it differed from other Western European countries only in its earliness, intensity and inventiveness. Its policies against the Jews, however, were archetypal of the treatment of Jews throughout Western Europe.[30]

Emerging nationalisms: proud new Hebrews

The construction of a nation of 'Christian Englishmen' was intimately tied to Christian theological tropes. It has only recently been recognized how early formulations of national identity depended on the Christian symbolism of the Eucharist—the communion between Christ's body and the faithful—uniting 'England' as one body, while excluding those not belonging to that body, such as heretics, witches, lepers and Jews, among others.[31] In this imagery a new correlation was established among the Eucharist, the body of Christ, the monarch and the community of the English 'nation'. Somewhat similar to the symbolism of the Eucharist, in which the Host embodied the communion between Christ and the community of the faithful, the monarch was believed to embody the national community, 'England'. The Latin Church had paved the way for this transformation: while, formerly, the notion of the *corpus mysticum* (the mystical body of Christ) was used to describe the sacramental bread of the Eucharist, the Host, in the twelfth century, it came to be tied to the Church as the organizing body of communion

28 Heng, 'The romance of England', 149. See Étienne Balibar for a similar argument on the modern nation state in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. of Balibar from the French by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso 1991).

29 The Council of Oxford specified the size of the badge of both sexes, Henry III ordained the badge needed to be worn in a prominent position on the breast, Edward I increased the size of the badge, specified the colour, and ordained that it be displayed by children above the age of seven (Heng, 'The romance of England', 148).

30 Heng, 'The invention of race in the Middle Ages II', 335. See also Robert C. Stacey, 'Anti-Semitism and the medieval English state', in J. R. Maddicott and D. M. Palliser (eds), *The Medieval State: Essays Presented to James Campbell* (London and Rio Grande, OH: Hambledon Press 2000), 163–77; and Patricia Skinner, *The Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical, Literary and Archaeological Perspectives* (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press 2003).

31 Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'The diversity of mankind in *The Book of John Mandeville*', in Rosamund Allen (ed.), *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers 1050–1550* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2004), 156–76.

between Christ and the faithful.[32] A division was established between Host (Christ's individual body, *corpus verum*) and the Church (*corpus mysticum*). Similarly, a distinction could be made between the individual body of the monarch and the monarch embodying a whole community, the nation. This reliance on the symbolism of Christ's communal body in the construction of the 'nation' had major repercussions for the position of the Jews: on the one hand, it inherently set apart the Jewish community as an alien and inassimilable part of an emerging national body while, at the same time, this setting apart of Jews as 'Jews' was a necessary stage in the consolidation of an otherwise internally fragmented 'English nation'.

Similar to these newly established links between the nation and the Eucharist, innovative connections were established between the biblical trope of the Chosen Israel, and the embryonic English 'nation' after its expulsion of the Jews in 1290. Formerly, the concept of 'Israel in the spirit' was aligned to the Ekklesia (the Church), over and against 'Israel of the flesh', denoting the Synagoga (the Jews). Now, the spiritual Israel was paired to the 'nation', instead of the Church, excluding the Jews from that same nation. 'Israel of the spirit' came to serve as an expression of 'the uniqueness and superiority of the English people'.[33] During the struggle between King John and Pope Innocent III, for example, an anonymous writer asked God to intervene and rebuke the biblical king 'David' as a personification of King John, and free 'Israel', that is, the English: '*Liberetur Israel?*'[34] Despite identifications with the past sufferings of Israel, such poems ignored the fate of contemporary Jews entirely, omitting the physical and mental violence inflicted on them by those identifying as 'Israel', the English.[35] What is more, the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 made it possible to completely align England to the new Israel without uncomfortable reminders of its predecessor, the Jewish community. It also enabled putting to use the symbol of 'the Chosen People' in inter-Christian conflicts: distinguishing between the Scots and Welsh as heretics, and England as the true Israel. The 'Songs of the Scottish Wars', for example, described the French, Scots and Welsh as infidels, against which the 'new Hebrews', the English, waged war.[36] Other emerging 'nations', such as France, applied the rhetoric of the 'new Hebrews' as well, including its exclusion of the 'old Hebrews'. Similar to the situation in England, the expulsion of the Jews was part and parcel of the French crown's centralizing

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32 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2016), 196–8.
33 Sophia Menache, 'Faith, myth, and politics: the stereotype of the Jews and their expulsion from England and France', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 75, no. 4, 1985, 351–74 (360).
34 'Song on the Bishops', in Thomas Wright (ed.), *The Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II* (1839), quoted in Menache, 'Faith, myth, and politics', 361.
35 Menache, 'Faith, myth, and politics', 361–2.
36 Ibid., 362–3.

policies, encouraging a process of national identification with the true Israel: early fourteenth-century France gradually turned into the 'Holy Land', its monarch became the 'Most Christian king' and its inhabitants the 'Chosen People'.[37]

Saracen Otherness

Connections between community, theology and religio/racial Otherness were established in literary imaginations of Saracen alterity as well. As opposed to the epic poems of the *chanson de geste*, the Middle English romance genre depicted Muslims increasingly as essentially different from Christians. *Sowdone of Babylone*, for instance, not only more often depicts the skin colour of Muslims as 'some bloo, some yolowe, some blake', but also ascribes to them deformities and animalistic characteristics, such as leopards' heads and boars' tusks.[38] What is more, theological notions of Islam as idolatrous, superficial or literalist were played out on Saracen bodies. In the Middle English text *Mary Magdalen*, for example, much attention is paid to the liturgy performed by the 'Prysbytyr'.[39] The presbyter displays relics of Muhammad's body and allows the worshippers to kiss them. This emphasis on the different parts of the body of Muhammad—'the nekke bon', the 'yeelyd', 'bonys' and 'blod'—'invites the reader to see Muslim worship as characterized by fragmentation, as being of an essentially partial and decaying nature'.[40] The text further states that Muhammad's eyelid 'woll make yow blynd for ewyrmore'.[41] This emphasis on Saracen blindness resonates with theological tropes on the spiritual blindness of the Jews: theologically, they were accused of being 'blinded' to the truth of Christ, because they read scripture 'according to the flesh' instead of 'to the spirit'.[42] The text thus illustrates how a supersessionist imagery of literalism and blindness does not simply construct religious difference; it is also tied to bodily/racial markers and hierarchies.

These images of the fragmented body of Muhammad, reflecting the decaying nature of Muslim worship, mirrors the wholeness of the resurrected body of Christ, symbolizing the unity of the Christian community. In her work on the gendered body and the symbolism of the resurrected body of Christ, Caroline Bynum contends that fragmentation and wholeness, as complementary

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37   Ibid., 370–1.
38   Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 220, 214.
39   Ibid., 219. The narrator ascribes Christian clerical characteristics to Islamic worship.
40   Ibid., 220.
41   Quoted in ibid., 219.
42   2 Corinthians 3: 12–17. For the importance of the theological imagery of blindness and veil for political secularism and secular law, see Robert A. Yelle, 'Moses' veil: secularization as Christian myth', in Winnifred Sullivan, Robert A. Yelle and Mateo Taussig-Rubbo (eds), *After Secular Law* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Law Books 2011), 23–42.

notions, were crucial in mediaeval Christian conceptions of the self: saints in hagiographies, for example, often acquired their holiness through the assertion of (bodily or symbolic) wholeness in the midst of the fragmentation and decay of a fallen world. Bynum writes: 'What is underlined repeatedly is either a reassembling of body parts for burial or . . . the victory of intactness over division.'[43] Consequently, whereas the hagiographies stress the overcoming of fragmentation and decay, the scattered parts of the body of Muhammad stress the inherent fragmentation of Muslim bodies and communities. The oppositional pairing of wholeness and fragmentation, I would add, also resonates with what I discussed earlier in relation to the nation, Jews and the symbolism of the Eucharist. Several late mediaeval English texts depict Jewish bodies not only as wrongly oriented towards gender and sexuality, but also as inevitably ending in dismemberment and decay. These texts stress the shattered character of the Jewish diaspora, via the imagery of individual fragmented bodies.[44] Consequently, the imagery not only establishes an intricate relation between worship and the physical set-up of the body, but also between worship, body and communities. Importantly, the imagined disintegration of Muslim and Jewish bodies not only endangered the integration of the Christian community, it also affirmed its wholeness: Muslim and Jewish fragmentation constituted the suggestion of 'Christian Europe' and/or 'nation', while posing a threat to that wholeness, embodying the danger of disintegration.

Religious practices and pollution

Let me conclude by drawing some connections between worship and mediaeval notions of 'purity' and 'pollution'. As the term 'purity of blood' suggests, concepts of purity were crucial in the formation of (early) modern race, producing gendered, racial, class-based boundaries and hierarchies, yet their religious and theological dimensions have often been overlooked. In what follows, I will not simply discuss the relation between pollution, worship and the sacred, but rather their relation to religio/racial difference of Saracens and Jews. In the thirteenth-century *Roman de Mahomet*, Alexandre du Pont ascribes the following words to Muhammad:

> Let the law of Moses return
> And everyone be redeemed

43 Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press 1995), 309, 312, quoted in Abkari, *Idols in the East*, 221.
44 Steven F. Kruger, 'The bodies of Jews in the late Middle Ages', in James M. Dean and Christian K. Zacher (eds), *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard* (Newark: University of Delaware Press 1992), 301–23. See also Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 134.

> Let the new law be squashed,
> And the old one, restored,
> Along with circumcision of the flesh[45]

Du Pont invokes a binary that was crucial in Christian polemics against Judaism: the equation of the Jew's inferiority with circumcision of the flesh, and the alignment of Christianity with the new law and circumcision of the heart. This binary might suggest a preference for disembodied practices over embodied ones, an interpretation that would be dominant in Protestant polemics against Judaism and Catholicism. However, according to mediaeval Christian texts, the error of Muslims and Jews was not the embodied-ness, or fleshliness, of the practice of circumcision. It was its 'out-of-placeness', not its physicality, that caused pollution. A clear example of the entanglement of this out-of-placeness with pollution and sacredness is articulated by Bernard of Clairvaux in his letters on the Second Crusade. In these letters, he likens Muslims to dogs and swine (forbidden animals in Islam and Judaism) and claims that they 'pollute the sacred places'. Their presence in Jerusalem 'profanes the holy of holies, the place where the … immaculate Lamb was purpled with blood'.[46] Hence, Muslim bodies can make a holy place unclean, while the blood of the Lamb (Christ), in the right place, makes it holy and sacred.[47] The quote not only shows how notions of filth and cleanliness are aligned to profanity and sanctity, but also how these binaries construe religio/racial difference: Muslims, likened to dogs and swine, pollute the place, while the blood of the Lamb (an inversion of the derogatory 'swines and dogs', and embodiment of the Christian community) makes it clean.[48]

The inversion of sacred and polluted blood in relation to race and religious practices is even more explicit in Robert of Reims's version of Pope Urban's sermon at Clermont:

> They destroy the altars, having defiled them with their uncleanness.
> They circumcise the Christians, and the blood of the circumcision
> They either spread upon the altars or pour into the vases of the baptismal font.[49]

Here, it is not simply Muslim bodily presence that causes 'uncleanness', but rather the forced circumcision of Christians and the spilling of their blood. The baptismal font that makes Christians clean is defiled with their own blood. Again, blood in the right places, namely the cross and the Eucharist (altar), is sacred while, in the wrong place and in the wrong practice—forced bodily circumcision—it causes defilement and pollution. Importantly,

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45 Du Pont, quoted in Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 259.
46 Quoted in ibid., 237.
47 Ibid.
48 Note that animalization is not in and of itself derogatory.
49 Robert of Reims (Robert de Monk), 'Historia Iherosolimitana' (RCH Occ 3:727), quoted in Akbari, *Idols in the East*.

the quotation not only refers to the wrong kind of circumcision practised in Judaism and Islam; it also recounts the involuntary circumcision of Christians by Muslims. The fear of forced circumcision in this text echoes the blood libels, and the libel of Host desecration against the Jews in England and France.[50] Similar to the blood libel, it is not simply the wrongfulness of the practice that is stressed, but rather the fear of pollution of Christian bodies. By spreading the polluted blood (from forced circumcision) on the baptismal font, Muslims are undoing the work of Christ, making Christian bodies (as nation and Europe/Church) unclean. Importantly, Saracen bodies are not the primary cause of pollution here. Religious practice itself is part and parcel of this racializing process. This raises urgent questions for debates on religious Muslim and Jewish practices in the context of nations and of Europe today. That is, to what extent does criticism of these practices draw on these racialized imageries? Not least because these contemporary debates are closely tied to notions of dis/integration and fragmentation of 'political bodies', such as 'nation' and 'Europe'.

Europe's racial pasts and political futures

Though the flexibility of race is often acknowledged, it is still rarely considered as being related to religion. Such a notion of race is not only embedded in a distinction between religion and the secular (race as modern/secular disconnected from religion), but is also tied to a religio/secular temporalization: it excludes mediaeval (supposedly religious) discrimination from analysis of modern (supposedly secular) race-making. In this article, I aimed at thinking together formations that are separated by the religio/secular: religion and race, and mediaeval and modern race. An engagement with mediaeval race foregrounds, first of all, the importance of greyscales and elasticity in race-making, alongside binarisms. Second, it highlights the entanglement between race and the formation of 'nation' and 'Europe'. National divisions have partly depended on universalizing measures of the Latin Church, which set Christians apart from non-Christians, creating religio/racial difference in its unifying politics. Consequently, while the construction of the nation—'ingland the nacione', the 'englis tong' and 'englijs men in comune'[51]—produced internal military conflicts with other Christians, such as the Welsh, Irish, Scots and French, it also depended on a transnational Christian vocabulary that informed the idea of a 'Christian Europe'. Christian imagination, such as the symbolism of the Eucharist and the 'true Israel', was tied to both the construction of nation and Europe, thereby creating religio/racial difference in their very formation. Hence, we cannot but think together supposedly areligious formations, such as Europe, nation, race and religious Otherness, not least because it is often unclear where theology or religion

50 Ibid.
51 Heng, 'The romance of England', 151.

stops and race-making begins: as I have shown, supersessionist theologies were played out on Muslim and Jewish bodies, for instance, in tying the notion of scriptural 'blindness' to bodily fragmentation or dismemberment. In addition, not only were Jewish and Saracen bodies understood in terms of pollution; religious practices too were seen as undermining Christian bodily and communal wholeness (Europe and nation). This raises urgent questions about the role of religious practices in the process of race-making today, especially in the context of (the history of) 'Europe' and 'nation'. To what extent are controversies concerning religious practices, dress and build-ings informed by mediaeval and modern imageries of the 'pollution' of Europe and nation, anxieties that are not only tied to 'foreign' non-Christian, non-secular, non-white bodies, but also to religious practices and objects? Can we even distinguish between the critique of non-Christian religion and religio/racialized imaginaries of bodies, nation and Europe? And, most urgently, would it be possible to conceive of alternative political futures of 'Europe' as an imaginative geography that takes seriously its history and very dependency on religio/racial exclusions? In other words, could 'Europe' be conceptualized in ways that would disrupt its very existence?

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