Race, Periodicity, and the (Neo-) Middle Ages

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In the last decade there has been a notable body of work on premodern racial and ethnic representation. In medieval studies, questions of race and racism, anti-Semitism, and premodern colonialisms have been explored in collections such as *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen; in the special issue on race of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, edited by Thomas Hahn; and in the monograph *Empire of Magic*, by Geraldine Heng.[1] Through such studies we see not only how the concept of race has proved central to postcolonial inquiry but also how the investigation of the early history of such concepts as race, ethnicity, and nation opens new perspectives onto both the past and the present.

Western European Christian understandings of human difference in the Middle Ages must be viewed within broader frameworks of categorizing human groups, that is, within discourses that were, Robert Bartlett asserts, "no more straightforward than our own."[2] Medieval authors considered not only genealogy but also elements of "environ-

[1] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000); Thomas Hahn, ed., "Race and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages," special issue, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001); Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[2] Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 42. On the different but related topic of the so-called monstrous races see the classic study by John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

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mental influence," ultimately placing the greatest importance on "the cultural and social component of ethnic identity" (45). For Bartlett, the idea of race in the medieval period would appear much closer to that of "ethnic group," a categorization that emphasizes linguistic, legal, political, and cultural affinities more than somatic features as markers of racial difference. There are crucial distinctions between this type of notion of race and those that animate, for example, the racist systems of apartheid or anti-Semitism under national-socialism. While Bartlett rightly notes such differences in his important study *The Making of Europe*, he nevertheless employs the term *race*, demonstrating its relation to the more "malleable" and, for the Middle Ages, more significant factors of religion, law, language, and custom. These combined elements figured in the creation of "Europe" as a construct, or the "Europeanization of Europe" in the Middle Ages.[3] Some scholars resist the use of the term *race* in medieval contexts, but avoiding "semantic squabbles" by avoiding the term *race* "would make a history of racism going back to the Middle Ages impossible."[4] In medieval studies, scholars have attempted to write this history, challenging traditional notions of periodization and engaging with political and theoretical debates that have relevance to the present day.

This essay similarly attempts to engage with this recent work, but by approaching the questions it raises from a somewhat different direction. My goal is to intervene in ongoing discussions of race and periodicity, particularly vis-à-vis medieval culture, in order to investigate the informing role of the medieval and more particularly of medievalisms in the construction, representation, and perpetuation of modern racisms. While some medievalists have explored questions of race and racism in medieval contexts, "neomedievalists," primarily journalists and international relations experts, have presented very different visions of the Middle Ages on the pages of *Foreign Affairs*, *Time*, and the *Atlantic*. Their approaches rely on a vision of medieval Europe that is

[3] Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 267–91.

[4] Kwame Anthony Appiah, review of *Racism: A Short History*, by George M. Fredrickson, *New York Times Book Review*, August 4, 2002, 11. For an argument against the use of the term *race* in medieval contexts see William Chester Jordan, "Why 'Race'?" *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 165–73.

frozen within traditional notions of periodization and that is uniformly Christian and normatively white.

These representations of medieval Europe figure integrally into some influential contemporary portrayals of concepts like "the West" and "Western civilization." For instance, John Ganim asserts that

> the idea of the Middle Ages as it developed from its earliest formulations in the historical self-consciousness of Western Europe is part of what we used to call an identity crisis, a deeply uncertain sense of what the West is and should be. The idea of the Middle Ages as a pure Europe (or England or France or Germany) both rests on and reacts to an uncomfortable sense of instability about origins, about what the West is and from where it came.[5]

Ganim's insight into the representation of medieval Europe as "pure" is extremely important. Alongside the stereotyped portrait of the Middle Ages as a backward, brutal period exists an idealized nostalgia inflected by notions of racial and religious purity. This vision of a simplified, sanitized Middle Ages is at work in neomedievalist writings, which have grown out of another Western identity crisis, the struggle to understand the West's place in the world order following the collapse of communism. Before turning to these more popular politicized conceptions, I examine how the Middle Ages has figured into some prominent theoretical discussions of the history of the concept of race, such as those by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Etienne Balibar. I then turn to two literary texts that furnish striking representations of religious difference linked to somatic difference: Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and the Middle English romance *The King of Tars*. These texts help illuminate the tangled relationships between theological and biological (or, more accurately, pseudobiological) notions of race in both the premodern and the modern eras. Indeed, they demonstrate important connections between premodern and modern conceptions of race. Grasping these connections will not only enable a more comprehensive understanding of the history of the concept but also help dispel the vision of a homogeneous European past that continues to inform a wide range of influential and popular conceptions of "the West" and

[5] John Ganim, "Native Studies: Orientalism and Medievalism," in Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, 125.

"the rest," including prominent political analyses such as Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis.

Race and Periodicity

Generalized discussions of the concept of race tend to give only the most cursory notice to medieval texts and contexts, if they consider them at all. Influential discussions of the concept and its historical development continue to be structured around limiting traditional periodizations. An often-cited example is Appiah's essay "Race." An elegant, important essay in many ways, it stands out because it avoids the medieval–early modern divide by avoiding the "Middle Ages" altogether. Appiah argues that "ethnographic" notions of difference existed in the traditions "of the classical Greeks and the ancient Hebrews" but were unlike nineteenth-century "racialist" schemas, which were heavily influenced by the idea of "the nation."[6] Appiah examines the "long process of transition from the views of the ancient world" to "racialism" by reference to early modern drama (277). The figures of "the Moor" and "the Jew" in the plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare were not, he claims, based on actual information gleaned from contact with the few blacks and Jews present in England at the time: "Rather, it seems that the stereotypes were based on an essentially theological conception of the status of both Moors and Jews as non-Christians; the former distinguished by their black skin, whose color was associated in Christian iconography with sin and the devil; the latter by their being, as Matthew's account of the crucifixion suggests, 'Christ-killers'" (277–78). Because of their "theological" basis, Appiah finds that "Elizabethan stereotypes" differ from later racialist ones in that they represent somatic difference as only an indication, not the root, of deficiency in beliefs or morals (278).

Appiah's goal is to emphasize for a general audience the distance between these early modern models and the nineteenth-century "racialist" formulations with which he begins his discussion, and one can-

[6] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Race," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 275.

not expect his brief entry in a guide to complex terminology to cover every era in depth. Yet his focus on early modern texts is indicative of the problems that traditional periodization poses for historical investigations of the concept of race, particularly in English literary studies, which, despite the current use of the term *early modern*, still often figures the "Renaissance" as a pivotal, if not the pivotal, nodal point of literary and cultural development in England and the West.[7] Although Appiah steers around the medieval-Renaissance divide, he ends up redrawing familiar contours by simply placing the shift from "theological" to "biological" later in time, even if the temporal moment for this transition is not made explicit. His choices for periodization seem crucially shaped by the traditional curtain that separates the Middle Ages from serious consideration, since it was, of course, in the medieval period that the theological ideas inherited by the Elizabethans were developed and gained their greatest strength and influence.

In *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, Ivan Hannaford engages similar notions of periodization. He asserts that "it is unhistorical to perceive the concept of race before the appearance of physical anthropology proper, because the human body, as portrayed up to the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation, could not be detached from the ideas of *polis* and *ecclesia*."[8] The idealized body of the church that Hannaford references, however, is not simply abstracted but represented allegorically in medieval theological, philosophical, literary, and visual works as the figure of Ecclesia, often in contrast with a figure for the Jewish people, Synagoga. While it would be inaccurate to equate either with the racialized figures of nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourses, Synagoga is often depicted as a beautiful but fallen woman who embodies a

[7] See David Aers, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the 'History of the Subject,'" in *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 172–202; Lee Patterson, "On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies," *Speculum* 65 (1990): 92–95; and Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380–1589* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[8] Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 147.

supersessionist view of the Old Law.[9] She is one in a long line of representations of Jewish females that can be traced back to the biblical matriarchs and forward through Marlowe's Abigail and Shakespeare's Jessica to the "beautiful Jewess" of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, a figure that was very much part of racialized anti-Semitic discourses by that time.[10] Using nineteenth- and twentieth-century biological models as the standard for determining whether one can make connections between ideological formations, as Hannaford would have it, hinders investigation into how medieval concepts, particularly theological ones, may have shaped later ones in ways about which we are still unaware.[11]

[9] See Margaret Schlauch, "The Allegory of Church and Synagogue," *Speculum* 13 (1939): 448–64; and Wolfgang Seiferth, *Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages: Two Symbols in Art and Literature*, trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald (New York: Ungar, 1970). For the historical development of the figure of Synagoga see Christine M. Rose, "The Jewish Mother-in-Law: Synagoga and the *Man of Law's Tale*," in *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings*, ed. Sheila Delany (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3–24; and Achim Timmermann, "The Avenging Crucifix: Some Observations on the Iconography of the Living Cross," *Gesta* 40 (2001): 141–60.

[10] See Sander Gilman, "Salome, Syphilis, Sarah Bernhardt, and the Modern Jewess," in *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 97–120. For discussion of the "beautiful Jewess" figure in literary history see Lisa Lampert, "'O My Daughter': The *schöne Jüdin* and the *neuer Jude* in Hermann Sinsheimer's *Maria Nunnez*," *German Quarterly* 71 (1998): 254–70.

[11] References to periodization boundaries between medieval and modern that resemble Hannaford's in their rigidity are perhaps nowhere more apparent than in discussions of prejudice against the Jews, in which scholars often employ the term *anti-Judaism* to reflect the theological ideas of the Middle Ages. The term *anti-Semitism* is associated with the biological theories of the nineteenth century, when it was coined. In his entry "Anti-Semitism," in the important reference work *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer, 13 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1982–89), 1:338–42, Robert Chazan asserts that this term, whose usage has been "loose and idiosyncratic," is "in many ways inappropriate to the Middle Ages." This division between medieval and modern extends beyond academic contexts, as evidenced by the 1998 Vatican Commission document "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah," which emphasizes nineteenth-century notions of anti-Semitism, drawing a sharp distinction between the religious anti-Judaism that developed most fully in the Middle Ages and the modern "biological" forms of racist anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust. This view is strongly challenged by David Kertzer, *The Popes against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Knopf, 2001). The text of the Vatican Commission document appears in *First Things*, May 1998, 39–43. For an overview of terminologies see Johannes Heil, "'Antijudaismus' und 'Antisemitismus': Begriffe als Bedeutungsträger," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 6 (1998): 92–114.

Hannaford's conception of the medieval seems to depend on a misuse of Jacob Burckhardt, as Hannaford repeatedly asserts the problematic notion that in the Middle Ages there was no notion of "self."[12] Hannaford's discounting of medieval concepts is all the more troubling because of the influence his work has had. In *Against Race*, for example, Paul Gilroy's analysis relies heavily on Hannaford for its understanding of the history of racist ideologies prior to the seventeenth century, and Hannaford's influence may in part account for Gilroy's lack of serious consideration of theology or religion, components of which, I would argue, remain central to the racisms that he examines as global discourses.[13]

I do not intend here to provide an exhaustive list of the historical or theoretical examinations of race that have elided or distorted medieval contexts. More significant are the effects of such treatments. In *Racism: A Short History* George M. Fredrickson notes that investigations of anti-Semitism and of other forms of racism, such as "white supremacism," have remained separate and divergent bodies of scholarship.[14] Fredrickson's project, which attempts to address that gap, makes important connections in large part, I suggest, because it takes a longer view of the history of the concept of race, opening with a chapter charting "the segue between the religious intolerance of the Middle Ages and the nascent racism of the Age of Discovery and the Renais-

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The best historiographical discussion of the problem is the introduction to David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). See also the introduction to Lisa Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference from Paul to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[12] For an insightful recent discussion of Burckhardt and periodization see Timothy J. Reiss, "Perioddity: Considerations on the Geography of Histories," *MLQ* 62 (2001): 430–32.

[13] See Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), esp. 54–96.

[14] George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 157. This type of division is exemplified in the special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* on "race and ethnicity in the Middle Ages" (see n. 1), in which discussion of Jews and anti-Jewish sentiment is virtually nonexistent. See comments by Jordan, 166. See also the important discussion on anti-Semitism and race in early modern contexts in James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

sance" (12). Fredrickson may here appear to reinforce traditional periodization boundaries, but he actually calls familiar binaries into question even as he tries to present clear and meaningful distinctions between terms.

For Fredrickson, racism "exists when one ethnic group or historical collectivity dominates, excludes, or seeks to eliminate another on the basis of differences that it believes are hereditary and unalterable" (170). Whether or not one accepts this definition, Fredrickson's treatment is valuable because his acknowledgment of medieval concepts allows one to see how those ideas about human difference sometimes do and sometimes do not appear to fit his definition. Still more important, it allows for a sharper discussion of religious ideas in the concept of race and for a deeper exploration of the very permeable boundaries between racism and "culturalism." Culturalism is a reification of cultural difference that did not hold sway in the Middle Ages but was merely "nascent" (12). As Fredrickson shows, medieval contexts are notable for their lack of rigidity and their sometimes inclusive representations of cultural difference. These representations are expressed not in pseudoscientific language but in religious discourses that still have relevance to modern racisms (15–48).

Etienne Balibar notes the prevalence of a new type of racism based on notions of culture rather than of biology, arguing that Europe is experiencing "a racism without race" directed primarily at immigrant populations.[15] What Balibar calls "bodily stigmata" are part of the "phantasmatics" of this "neo-racism," but the bodily markers of difference are signs of "cultural tradition" and "moral disintegration" rather than of "a biological heredity" (24). In contrast to the medieval concepts discussed by Bartlett and Fredrickson, neo-racism holds that cultural difference is "immutable."[16] "Biological or genetic naturalism,"

[15] Etienne Balibar, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 1991), 17–28. For two excellent discussions of "neo-racism" in relation to early literary texts see Julia Reinhard Lupton, "Othello Circumcised: Shakespeare and the Pauline Discourse of Nations," *Representations* 57 (1997): 73–89; and Robert L. A. Clark and Claire Sponsler, "Queer Play: The Cultural Work of Crossdressing in Medieval Drama," *New Literary History* 28 (1997): 19–44.

[16] My reading of Balibar is indebted to a formal response by Ania Loomba to an earlier version of this essay as well as to much informal subsequent discussion and exchange.

Balibar observes, "is not the only means of naturalizing human behaviour and social affinities. . . . *culture can also function like a nature*, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin" (22). For Balibar, anti-Semitism is the most "supremely differentialist" form of racism, for it is based on perceptions of cultural difference in which the so-called Jewish essence "is that of a cultural tradition, a ferment of moral disintegration" (24). This degraded essence is all the more threatening because it is not readily detected. Balibar argues that

> the whole of current differentialist racism may be considered, from the formal point of view, *as a generalized anti-Semitism*. This consideration is particularly important for the interpretation of contemporary Arabophobia, especially in France, since it carries with it an image of Islam as a "conception of the world" which is incompatible with Europeanness and [as] an enterprise of universal ideological domination, and therefore a systematic confusion of "Arabness" and "Islamicism." (24)

Balibar, focusing on the "nationalistic inflexion" given to anti-Semitism in early modern Spain, sees the Spanish blood laws as the earliest "crystallization" point of modern anti-Semitism (23). He makes his provocative observations about contemporary France without reference to the longer history of the connection between European anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic sentiments.

Medieval Christianity's encounter with Islam was not simply an echo or a generalization of Christian encounters with Jews; rather, it played a crucial role in shaping the history of anti-Semitism. Medieval Christian writers often grouped Muslims and Jews together. The infamous dress regulations of Lateran IV in 1215 decreed special sumptuary markers for both Jews and Saracens. But there were always crucial differences in Christian attitudes toward Jews and Muslims, differences that R. W. Southern, in a classic formulation, argues were based on the fact that Islam—not populations of Jews, who were divided into small communities within larger Christian ones—was the "most far-reaching threat in medieval Christendom. It was a problem at every level of experience."[17]

[17] R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 3, quoted in Jeremy Cohen, "The Muslim Connection; or, On the Changing Role of the Jew in High Medieval Theology," in *From Witness to*

As Christian thinkers attempted to deal with Islam during the time of the Crusades, they turned, Jeremy Cohen shows, to the figure of the Jew, who had been until that point "the primary enemy in Christian religious polemic" (147). Christian polemic then shifted to incorporate both types of religious other. The Jew may have served as "a springboard for formulating a deliberate response" to Islam (146), but this response was not, as Balibar would have it, a generalization. It was instead a complex interaction that not only played a role in Christian thinking about Muslims but altered Christian views about Jews as well. One important result was that the figure of the Jew lost its place of "singularity" in Christian discourse (148). Cohen asserts that the grouping of Jews and Muslims together in Christian thought, along with the increased use of rational argumentation and Christian awareness of Jewish postbiblical texts, contributed to the declining status of Jews in medieval Christendom and to the polemic against them (143–44). It is crucial to remember the originary relationship between Judaism and Christianity and the special way that it shaped medieval and modern Christian figurations of Jews and the Jewish. This relationship, however, justifies neither the "privileging" of anti-Semitism as a uniquely virulent prejudice nor an understanding of it as historically isolated from other forms of discrimination. Such approaches blur crucial early history and blunt our critical tools for tracing the complex ways that different kinds of religious intolerance have developed and intersected.

Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought, ed. Jeremy Cohen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 145. Other useful studies of medieval Western European Christian views of Muslims, Arabs, and Islam are Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1993); David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto, eds., *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999); and John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). For analysis from a literary perspective see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "Imagining Islam: The Role of Images in Medieval Depictions of Muslims," *Scripta Mediterranea* 19–20 (1998–99): 9–27; and Akbari, "The Rhetoric of Antichrist in Western Lives of Muhammad," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8 (1997): 297–307.

In Black and White: *Parzival* and *The King of Tars*

Recent work on medieval Western European literary texts by Christian authors has revealed numerous examples of how somatic differences typically associated with ideas of race have been linked to representations of religious difference, particularly that of the Muslim or Saracen. These texts consistently join whiteness with goodness and purity. White skin is not simply a conventional marker of beauty, as in "Isolde of the white hands," but also, in Bruce Holsinger's provocative phrasing, "the color of salvation." Holsinger's reading of whiteness in Bernard of Clairvaux shows how the portrayal of blackness in some of his sermons reflects militant Crusading ideology and also, apparently, vernacular representations of Saracens.[18]

Although Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* provides a prime literary depiction of a non-Christian character marked by blackness, general examinations of the history of the concept of race tend to mention it only in passing, if at all. One of the jewels in the crown of the Middle High German canon, *Parzival* creates in its nearly twenty-five thousand lines three overlapping realms: those of Arthur, the Grail, and the Orient.[19] Like much of the romance tradition, *Parzival* builds on earlier texts, principally Chrétien de Troyes's *Li Contes del Graal*. But one of Wolfram's additions is the story of Parzival's father, Gahmuret, and his love affair with the beautiful, black queen of Zazamanc, Belacane, who is not a Christian but a heathen, a strange conflation of pagan and Muslim attributes. Belacane's people are "as black as night," and Gahmuret feels "ill at ease" among them, although he chooses to remain (liute vinster sô diu naht / wârn alle die von Zazamanc: / bî den dûht in diu wîle lanc. / doch hiez er herberge nemen [17.24–27]). In spite of her

[18] Bruce Holsinger, "The Color of Salvation: Desire, Death, and the Second Crusade in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*," in *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*, ed. David Townsend and Andrew Taylor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 156–86. Holsinger's excellent postcolonial examination of the dynamics of black and white in relation to Bernard's spirituality and the violence of the Crusades complements my understanding of *Parzival*, which Holsinger mentions briefly.

[19] The reading of the three narrative strands is a fundamental premise of Arthur Groos, *Romancing the Grail: Genre, Science, and Quest in Wolfram's "Parzival"* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

much-emphasized color, and because of her nobility, Gahmuret is drawn to her.[20] They fall in love and marry.

But, encouraged by a man from Seville who is "not like a Moor in color," Gahmuret abandons Belacane. Following this man's advice, Gahmuret conceals his actions "from those whose skins are black" and, in an echo of the Aeneas and Dido story, steals away, leaving Belacane a letter explaining that if only she had been willing to convert to Christianity, he would not have been forced to leave her.[21] Belacane laments that indeed she would have been willing to convert; in a familiar trope, the poet likens her innocent tears to the waters of baptism (28.9–17). She is pregnant and later bears Gahmuret's son, Feirefiz, who is spotted black and white. Heartbroken over her abandonment, Belacane kisses again and again the sign of Gahmuret's paternity, her son's white markings (57.19–20). Eventually she dies of grief, and Feirefiz virtually disappears from the narrative, reappearing only in the romance's penultimate book to challenge Parzival. The two are half brothers, since Gahmuret has married another woman after deserting the black queen. Feirefiz reappears without being named, a mysterious knight of great prowess and wealth. The brothers engage in a strenuous battle, during which Feirefiz displays his noble qualities, which are arguably superior to Parzival's. Finally, they recognize each other and embrace.

[20] "If there was anything brighter than daylight—the queen in no way resembled it. A woman's manner she did have, and was on other counts worthy of a knight, but she was unlike a dewy rose: her complexion was black of hue" (ist iht liehters denne der tac, / dem glîchet niht diu künegin. / si hete wîplîchen sin, / und was abr anders rîterlîch, / der touwegen rôsen ungelîch, / nâch swarzer varwe was ir schîn) (24.6–11). The Middle High German excerpts from *Parzival* are from *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, ed. Karl Lachmann, 6th ed., newly edited by Eduard Hartl (1926; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1961). References are to stanza and line. The English translations are all from *Parzival*, trans. Helen M. Mustard and Charles E. Passage (New York: Vintage, 1961).

[21] "In the city of Seville was born the man whom, some time later, he [Gahmuret] asked to take him away. He had already guided him many a mile; he had brought him here; he was not like a Moor in color. And this ship captain replied, 'You must quietly conceal this from those whose skins are black; my boats are so swift that they can never overtake us, and we shall get away'" (Von Sibilje ûzer stat / was geborn den er dâ bat / dan kêrens zeiner wîle. / der het in manege mîle / dâ vor gefuort: er brâhte in dar. / er was niht als ein Môr gevar. / der marnaere wîse / sprach "ir sultz helen lîse / vor den die tragent daz swarze vel. / mîne kocken sint sô snel, / sine mugen uns niht genâhen / wir sullen von hinnen gâhen") (54.27–30 to 55.1–8).

Feirefiz accompanies Parzival to King Arthur and then to the Grail castle, where Parzival completes his quest by asking the correct question of the Grail king and ending his torment. Feirefiz falls in love at first sight with the Grail maiden, Repanse de Schoye, and converts to Christianity for love of her, ultimately conquering foreign lands in the name of Christianity and through their son, the legendary Prester John, who converts India.

Despite the brevity of his appearances, Feirefiz is not an incidental character. Black and white and the contrast between them are at the center of *Parzival* from its complicated opening images:

> Ist zwîvel herzen nâchgebûr,
> daz muoz der sêle werden sûr.
> gesmaehet unde gezieret
> ist, swâ sich parrieret
> unverzaget mannes muot,
> als agelstern varwe tuot.
> Der mac dennoch wesen geil:
> wand an im sint beidiu teil,
> des himels und der helle.
> der unstaete geselle
> hât die swarzen varwe gar
> und wirt och nâch der vinster var:
> sô habet sich an die blanken
> der mit staeten gedanken.
>
> [If inconstancy is the heart's neighbor, the soul will not fail to find it bitter. Blame and praise alike befall when a dauntless man's spirit is black-and-white mixed like the magpie's plumage. Yet he may see blessedness after all, for both colors have a share in him, the color of heaven and the color of hell. Inconstancy's companion is all black and takes on the hue of darkness, while he of steadfast thoughts clings to white.] (1.1–14)

There are clearly biblical and, some have argued, mystical influences at play in this passage.[22] In addition to its moral and spiritual meanings, the passage resonates with the romance's portrayal of its characters as

[22] For a reading in relation to Cistercian mysticism see H. B. Willson, "The Symbolism of Belakâne and Feirefîz in Wolfram's *Parzival*," *German Life and Letters*, n.s., 2 (1960): 94–105.

either black or white or, in Feirefiz's case, a mixture of the two. Critical responses to the question of race in *Parzival* range from assertions of Wolfram's "relative tolerance" (in *Willehalm* as well as in *Parzival*) to denunciations of the "rassisches Ressentiment" (racialized resentment) in Gahmuret and Belacane's encounter.[23] Whether one views Feirefiz as the subject of heroic praise or the object of prejudice, as the narrative progresses he becomes a shaping foil for Parzival, embodying the moral ambiguities and struggles that the narrator introduces in these opening lines.[24] This exploration of the moral coding of black and white launches a poem of immense length and complexity that features black, white, heathen/Muslim, and Christian characters. Erich Auerbach asserted that the "fundamental purpose" of romance is a "self-portrayal of feudal knighthood with its mores and ideals."[25] Feirefiz embodies the stained, imperfect nature of his half brother, Parzival, who masters his ignorance and his failings on a journey of blunder, growth, and eventual triumph. In the text this ideal is figured as Christian and white against a blackness linked with hell as well as with heathen culture. The text's opening images figure this contrast as marked by color, with black, the color of hell, representing what must be overcome and with white as "the color of salvation" (Holsinger, 156–86).

Parzival, then, can be seen as a chronicle of the growth of good, the whiteness of the soul, in one man, Parzival, while Feirefiz becomes an emblem for the narrative retelling of that development. Just before the brothers recognize each other, Feirefiz asks Parzival to describe the

[23] Alfred Ebenbauer, "'Es gibt ain mörynne vil dick susse mynne': Belakanes Landsleute in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 113 (1984): 21. Jerold C. Frakes argues that fictional Muslims in Wolfram's work must undergo "forced metamorphosis" to achieve the tolerance that critics often praise in Wolfram's treatment of "heathens" ("Race, Representation, and Metamorphosis in Middle High German Literature," *Nowele* 31–32 [1997]: 119–33). See also the comprehensive guide to Wolfram's work by Joachim Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, 6th ed. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), esp. 52–54, 249–50.

[24] David Blamires also argues that Feirefiz's body "pictographically expresses" the moral ambiguities that Parzival must overcome to become Grail king and that are discussed in the poem's opening lines (*Characterization and Individuality in Wolfram's "Parzival"* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965], 438–41). On Feirefiz as black hero see Fredrickson, 28.

[25] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 131.

brother he has never met, and the latter replies that he is "'like a parchment, written upon in black and white'" (als ein geschriben permint, / swarz und blanc her unde dâ) (747.26–27). With this description Feirefiz becomes a symbol not only of the development of the knight but of the romance text itself. Before he encounters the questing Parzival, he has already achieved knightly renown through his vast riches, his successful relationships with noble women, and his exceptional fighting acumen. Yet it is Parzival, Feirefiz's white brother, who is ultimately the transformed, completed heroic character. Feirefiz's development as a lover, fighter, and ruler seems complete by the time he meets Parzival. He is still a heathen, however, and his conversion, when it happens, is sudden, driven by his desire for a beautiful woman. Though fully legitimate, it is portrayed in arguably comic terms. Indeed, Feirefiz's rapid conversion stands in stark contrast to the slow education in religion through which so many key characters guide Parzival.[26] Even after his conversion and complete acceptance into the world of the Grail castle, Feirefiz bears his blackness as a mark, the sign that he was born to the heathen queen, Belacane. Feirefiz, then, is an example not simply of a heroic black character or of protoracial representation, but of complex negotiation of color as a mark of difference against and through which the image of an idealized knight, the Christian and white Parzival, is developed.

In the early-fourteenth-century Middle English romance *The King of Tars*, color as a mark of identity is represented even more dramatically than in *Parzival*. The poem tells the story of a young Christian princess who, for the sake of her people, marries a Saracen king, feigning conversion to his faith. Soon she bears a child who is greatly deformed, a mere lump of flesh, but upon its baptism the child is transformed into a beautiful, healthy baby. His father then also converts, and his black skin bleaches white. Thus blackness is not indelible; instead, a convert can be "washed white" with baptismal waters.[27] The romance,

[26] Other critics have noted these comic elements. See, e.g., Blamires, 452; and Siegfried Richard Christoph, *Wolfram von Eschenbach's Couples* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1981), 222–27.

[27] On this trope in the early Christian tradition see Frank M. Snowden Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 196–207.

which appears in three manuscript versions, derives from a fascinating mix of historical accounts and folklore. Its background is furnished in part by actual campaigns undertaken by Mongols, or Tartars, as they were known in the medieval period, during the late thirteenth century and by a record of King Ghazzan's marriage to an Armenian princess. In these accounts we find analogues to the interreligious marriage and its outcome in *The King of Tars*: unions resulting in offspring somehow monstrous, either lumplike, freakishly hairy, piebald, or half animal, a phenomenon rooted in folklore.[28] Judith Perryman argues that *The King of Tars* creates from these accounts characters that then lost their moorings to historical figures and took on symbolic roles. The historical Ghazzan, although friendly to Christians, was Muslim, yet various European chronicles asserted for him a Christian identity. *The King of Tars* moves away from historical complications to work on a symbolic level, in which an unequivocally Christian king is threatened by a Muslim sultan (Perryman, 44–49). The text's focus on a clear-cut battle between Christianity and Islam is sharpened through its deployment of white and black to mark the two opposing faiths.

In an important reading Siobhain Montserrat Bly stresses the romance's concern with interfaith union.[29] The narrator compares the sultan's reluctance to marry outside his religion to the reluctance a Christian man would feel about marrying a heathen:

> Wel loþe war a Cristen man
> To wedde an heþen woman
> Þat leued on fals lawe;
> Als loþ was þat soudan
> To wed a Cristen woman.
> (ll. 409–13)

[28] See Siobhain Montserrat Bly, "Stereotypical Saracens, the Auchinleck Manuscript, and the Problems of Imagining Englishness in the Early Fourteenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2001), 150–57; and Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 136–41. See also the introduction to the modern edition, *The King of Tars*, ed. Judith Perryman (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980), 42–50. Subsequent citations refer to this edition.

[29] Siobhain Montserrat Bly, "Religion and Biology: Saracens, The Problems of Categorization, and *The King of Tars*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (forthcoming). I thank Bly for sharing this work with me and for her comments on this essay.

> [A Christian man would be very loath to wed a heathen woman who believed false law. Just as loath was that sultan to wed a Christian woman.]

Such reluctance, the poem shows, is well founded, since the offspring of the sultan and the princess is so deformed as to be a "rond of flesche" (round of flesh) (l. 580), with neither "blod & bon" (blood and bone) nor "nose no eye" (nose or eye) (ll. 582, 584). The poem makes it clear that the marriage remains a mixed one, since the princess has converted only for necessity's sake. She dons Saracen dress and goes through the motions of worshipping the Saracen gods, but privately she remains true to her own faith.

As Bly points out ("Stereotypical Saracens," 183), we abruptly learn of the sultan's blackness just before he converts—"Þan cam þe soudan, þat was blac" (then came the sultan, who was black) (l. 799)—and afterward his skin becomes white: "His hide, þat blac & loþely was, / All white bicom, þurth Godes gras / & clere wiþouten blame" (Through God's grace, his hide, which was black and loathly, became all white and clear without blemish) (ll. 928–30).[30] The sultan's former blackness is clearly associated with his beliefs, and this reference then contrasts with

[30] Related recent discussions are Geraldine Heng, "The Romance of England: *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Saracens, Jews, and the Politics of Race and Nation," in Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, 135–72; Steven F. Kruger, "Conversion and Medieval Sexual, Religious, and Racial Categories," in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 158–79; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 113–46; and Thomas Hahn, "The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the Modern World," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 1–37. Elizabeth Robertson briefly discusses *Parzival* in relation to Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale," which has many themes in common with *The King of Tars*, and argues that *Parzival* is "typical of the kind of work Chaucer might have drawn on to develop his own ideas about the interaction of Christian and Islam." Robertson takes care not to make further connections between Wolfram's work and Chaucer's ("The 'Elvyssh' Power of Constance: Christian Feminism in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Man of Law's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 [2001]: 151). To my knowledge, there is no evidence for more than a general thematic connection between the two works. Carolyn Dinshaw also discusses the question of race and the "Man of Law's Tale" in the same issue as Robertson ("Pale Faces: Race, Religion, and Affect in Chaucer's Texts and Their Readers," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 [2001]: 19–41).

the poem's opening description of the Christian princess, who is "as white as feþer of swan" (as white as feather of swan) (l. 12). The sultan's black appearance resonates with other descriptions of Saracens in the romance. The swan-white princess later has a dream in which she is attacked by black hounds (l. 448) and is then comforted by Jesus, who appears to her "in white cloþes, als a kniȝt" (in white clothes, as a knight) (l. 451) to reassure her. When she wakes, she prays: "On her bed sche sat al naked, / To Ihesu hir preier sche maked" (On her bed she sat all naked. / To Jesus she made her prayer) (ll. 460–61). Her naked body may be read as erotic, but it is also vulnerable and, as she is still a virgin, innocent. Given the poem's opening description of her, she is also a vision of whiteness, likened to Jesus in his white robes and sharply contrasted to the hounds of her dream (and to her Saracen husband). As in the memorable opening lines of *Parzival*, black and white are the colors of evil and good in *The King of Tars*. Although the distaste for interfaith marriage is mutual among Christians and heathens, the fact that it is Christian baptism that miraculously heals the child, not worship of Saracen gods, makes it clear that Christianity is the superior faith.

Heng's recent analysis of *The King of Tars*, part of her important study of race and the genealogy of the romance, shows that the text raises numerous unresolved questions about the causes of the monstrous birth. Whether it is the result of the princess's union with the sultan, of his tainted Saracen identity, or of her false conversion, this birth sends an unequivocal message about human difference in the midst of swirling doubts: "The inescapable, explicit lesson . . . is that religion, which we had assumed to belong purely to the realm of culture, can shape and instruct *biology*: a startling logic suggesting that secreted within the theory of religious difference in this tale is also a theory of biological essences seemingly indivisible from religion" (*Empire of Magic*, 228). *The King of Tars* provides us with a "twilight, interzonal space in which culture *and* biology overlap" (229). Heng's analysis reveals a deep entanglement of the discourses of nature and culture that reaches back into a period sometimes presumed to be free of racial discourse. What is most important about this insight is not the revelation of an "origin" for racism, however, but an understanding of the creation of normative whiteness. As Heng asserts, "*The King of Tars*, as a medieval artifact, sup-

poses *the normativity of whiteness*, and of *the white racial body*, as the guarantor of normalcy, aesthetic and moral virtue, European Christian identity, and full membership in the human community, *in complicity with* the possession of a human essence conferred by religious discourse acting as biological determination" (231–32).

The stark linkage of spiritual and physical essences found in *The King of Tars* differs considerably from the host of traits that Feirefiz possesses in *Parzival*. The representations of blackness in the two poems range from the exoticism of Wolfram's Belacane and Feirefiz to the "loathsomeness" of the sultan in *The King of Tars*. The connection between Christian belief and a morally inflected whiteness, however, is consistent. Although Feirefiz is not bleached white, the romance's opening lines call black "the color of hell." Ania Loomba asserts that the character of Feirefiz "does not tell us that differences in skin colour were not important at the time, but rather that religious and cultural differences were already colour-coded."[31] The models proposed in these poems, however, do not make "culture" into a "nature" as neo-racism does (Balibar, 22; see also Loomba, 38). Unlike modern notions of racial essence, these texts point to the possibility of change, although this change requires conversion and is based on a fixed belief in Christianity as the only true religion.

What are we to make of the differences between *Parzival* and *The King of Tars*? These poems may be considered exceptional in their representations of color difference, and it is clear that they cannot provide us with definitive answers about perceptions of race in the Middle Ages. Nor can they locate for us medieval origins for the racisms that developed and held sway in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet neither are these examples conclusive evidence of a Dark Ages, marked by ignorance, superstition, and persecution, or of a world "before race," in which markers of nobility and wealth trumped somatic and perhaps religious difference. It is precisely because of their ambiguities, their malleability, and their emphasis on culture and especially religion that these examples are important.[32]

[31] Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47–48.

[32] For links between color and cultural difference, specifically religious difference, in another medieval text see Sharon Kinoshita, "'Pagans Are Wrong and Chris-

With their focus on whiteness as the normative marker of Christian identity, these examples can help us face more squarely contemporary occurrences of what Balibar calls "neo-racism" and Fredrickson calls "culturalism," for they encourage us to understand racism as a phenomenon that incorporates notions not only of somatics and biology but of cultural, specifically religious, difference as well. One fruitful line of research might be to analyze how Richard Wagner added, omitted, and reshaped Wolfram's representations of the other in his opera *Parzival*. As Marc A. Weiner's discussion of anti-Semitism in Wagner's works suggests, such a study might reveal how the medieval came to be inflected in the racial ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[33] It might also lead us to consider connections between the glamorized, commodified images of black bodies of twentieth- and twenty-first-century popular culture analyzed by Gilroy in *Against Race* and the differently but equally glamorized, exoticized bodies of Belacane and Feirefiz, also imagined in a culture noted for its focus on the visual. To see these possible discursive links, I would argue, the curtain of traditional periodization that limits consideration of the medieval needs to be lifted. The Middle Ages must be taken into account not as a frozen or static period, as it is still often depicted, but as one that still informs the imagination and ideology in ways that are more than simply nostalgic.

Contemporary Neomedievalisms

Static representations of the Middle Ages figure in accounts of contemporary global politics, both in the writings of international relations theorists and in the work of journalists who address broader audiences in popular periodicals such as *Time* and the *Atlantic*. I want to turn now to these examples to approach the question of "race and the Middle Ages" from a slightly different direction, examining the notable absence of explicit discussion of race in the medievalisms used by those writing about international relations.

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tians Are Right': Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 79–111.

[33] Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

My discussion needs to be understood in relation to current trends. The concept of race is undergoing shifts in meaning in both academic and public contexts. In 1998 the American Anthropological Association (AAA) issued a "Statement on Race" that concluded that "present-day inequalities between so-called racial groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational and political circumstances."[34] This statement draws on recent scientific research that indicates that there is no genetic basis for categorizing human beings into races. This research has also been reflected in editorial statements in medical literature. The journal *Nature Genetics* now requires its contributors to "explain why they make use of particular ethnic groups or populations, and how classification was achieved."[35] In May 2001 the *New England Journal of Medicine*, citing the AAA statement, published an editorial declaring that "race is a social construct, not a scientific classification."[36] The issue is, however, clearly not settled in the medical profession. The accuracy and efficacy of these perspectives have been challenged from an epidemiological perspective by Neil Risch et al., who argue that "ignoring our differences, even if with the best of intentions, will ultimately lead to the disservice of those who are in the minority."[37]

Both sides of this debate have a well-founded concern for the impact of racial categorization on actual groups and individuals, and there is strong evidence of the force of such debates outside the academic sphere (in areas that the original researchers may never have intended), such as the controversial attempt for a "Racial Privacy Initiative," which ultimately failed as a proposition on the California gubernatorial recall ballot of October 2003. The initiative's advocates spoke of what they called a "colorblind society," a goal based at least in part

[34] "AAA Statement on Race," *American Anthropologist* 100 (1998): 712–13.

[35] "Census, Race, and Science," *Nature Genetics* 24 (2000): 97–98.

[36] "Racial Profiling in Medical Research," *New England Journal of Medicine* 344 (2001): 1392–93.

[37] Neil Risch et al., "Categorization of Humans in Biomedical Research: Genes, Race, and Disease," *Genome Biology* 3 (2002): 2007.1–2007.12, genomebiology.com/2002/3/7/comment/2007. See Nicholas Wade, "Race Is Seen as Real Guide to Track Roots of Disease," *New York Times*, July 30, 2002, late edition. For an overview of the debate within the field of genetics see Morris W. Foster and Richard R. Sharp, "Race, Ethnicity, and Genomics: Social Classifications as Proxies of Biological Heterogeneity," *Genome Research* 12 (2002): 844–50.

on the idea that race was a defunct category.[38] While the Racial Privacy Initiative stands at the opposite extreme of the political spectrum from Gilroy's analysis, both approaches demonstrate that the concept of race is undergoing crucial shifts in meaning. The debates of which they are part may seem to have little to do with the "longer history" of race and with the medieval contexts I have referenced, but the events of September 11, 2001, have added new urgency to particular "social constructions" of race, especially those closely linked to religious belief and identification. Patrick J. Geary shows how certain nostalgic or "mythic" refigurings of the medieval past, especially mythologized stories of national origin, were used in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries to foster nationalist goals, often with disastrous consequences.[39] As John Dagenais demonstrates in his contribution to this special issue, the "Middle Ages" is by definition a "middle" time constituted by and constitutive of the "modernity" against and through which it is created. As conceptions of modernity and political concepts of the national and the global change, so too will conceptions of the Middle Ages. We find powerful examples of our contemporaries drawing on and reshaping the medieval in relation to the events of September 11, which have been figured as a major historical rupture, after which everything has changed.

In response to the September 11 attacks, world leaders drew on what we might call mythical paradigms, declaring war in religious terms that resonated with the public. The prime minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, declared the inherent superiority of Christian over Muslim civilization, voicing neo-racist sentiments determined by religion and culture rather than by biological conceptions of race.[40] President George W. Bush's invocation of crusade also laid bare the background of medieval theological and territorial conflict behind current polemic

[38] Rebecca Trounson and Nancy Vogel, "The Recall Election; Propositions 53 and 54; Both Ballot Measures Go Down in Defeat," *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 2003; Miguel Bustillo, "Ban on Gathering Racial Data on 2004 Ballot," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2002, California Metro edition.

[39] Patrick J. Geary, *The Myths of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[40] Steven Erlanger, "Italy's Premier Calls Western Civilization Superior to Islamic World," *New York Times*, September 27, 2001.

and debate in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.[41] Berlusconi's and Bush's remarks can be dismissed as statements made in the heat of the moment, and indeed both leaders later softened their remarks.[42] Their views, however, reflect less visible and more sophisticated theories of international relations in which particular visions of the Middle Ages and the medieval are represented. I want to conclude by discussing some of the ways that the Middle Ages has been appropriated by political analysts in the last decade and by suggesting how this work might intersect with the "longer history" of race.

In the field of international relations, neomedievalism, also called "the new medievalism," deploys the Middle Ages as an analogy with which to understand a world in which the sovereign state no longer holds sway and supra- and multinational bodies wield economic and political power in ways that create ambiguous and overlapping structures of power.[43] Neomedievalists seek, as Ronald J. Deibert explains, to understand the sources and structures of "political authority," turning to the "overarching theocracy" of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, for example, as a way to assess the influence of an organization like Greenpeace or of supranational governing bodies like the European Union and the World Trade Organization.[44] They draw analogies between the complex allegiances negotiated by medieval nobility and the situation of high-level employees of today's multinational corporations, the "transnational elites," who have more in common with their counterparts on other continents than with those of lower economic status in their own countries (Kobrin, 375–78).

Like any of the versions of the Middle Ages described by Umberto

[41] See "Bush Gets More International Support for U.S. 'Crusade' against Terrorism," *Washington Post*, September 17, 2001, final edition; and John F. Harris and Todd S. Purdum, "After the Attacks: The White House; Bush Warns of a Wrathful, Shadowy, and Inventive War," *New York Times*, September 17, 2001, late edition.

[42] See "Bush Steps Back from Word 'Crusade,'" *St. Petersburg Times*, September 19, 2001; "Bush's Rhetoric Fuels Violence, Critics Charge," *Toronto Star*, September 19, 2001, Ontario edition; and Philip Wilan, "On the Brink of War: Berlusconi: Words That Led to Uproar Had Been 'Twisted': Italian PM Says Sorry for Attack on Islam," *Guardian* (London), September 29, 2001.

[43] See Stephen J. Kobrin, "Back to the Future: Neomedievalism and the Postmodern Digital World Economy," *Journal of International Affairs* 51 (1998): 361–86.

[44] See Ronald J. Deibert, "Neo-medievalism," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of International Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1114.

Eco in his essay "Dreaming of the Middle Ages," the one created by international relations theorists emphasizes some elements of the past and ignores others.[45] Neomedievalists stress not the hierarchies of medieval authority but the absence of "claims of sovereignty that could be calibrated in relation to distinct political spaces."[46] Their visions generally share an emphasis on a medieval world of shifting, complex, and overarching alliances and power structures that create space and territory comparable, international relations theorists hold, to a postmodern world of cyberspace.

This neomedievalism has become so popular that "untrained visitors to the IR [international relations] field in recent years might mistake it for a subfield of medieval studies, given the amount of published materials dedicated to the topic" (Deibert, 1115). I assume that by "untrained visitors" Deibert means those not trained in international relations theory. The label would apply equally, however, to those unfamiliar with medieval studies; neomedievalist paradigms have much more to do with contemporary situations than with historical ones. Many neomedievalists seem well aware that they are creating broad analogies; indeed, they are not concerned with generating exact one-to-one correspondences between medieval and current situations. Their goal is to break with "realist" models of the Cold War era and to devise conceptual tools for understanding a historical shift they judge to be as great as the one attributed to the traditional transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. That is, "thinking about the Middle Ages, the last pre-modern period, might help us to imagine possibilities for a post-modern future" (Kobrin, 366).

Such a statement reveals a fundamental reliance on traditional periodization. Neomedievalist discussions also manifest, notably, a perceived split between a religious Middle Ages and a secular modernity, a rift that resembles the misleading binary of the biological and the theological in histories of the concept of race. Indeed, the models do appear to map onto one another. Hedley Bull, who in 1977 introduced the idea of a "new medievalism" as one possibility for coming orders in

[45] Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 59–86.

[46] Richard Falk, "A 'New Medievalism'?" in *Contending Images of World Politics*, ed. Greg Fry and Jacinta O'Hagan (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 111.

world politics, stressed its secular character.[47] Neomedievalist models take for granted a medieval Europe united under and "resting on the ultimate truth of Christianity" (Falk, 113). This dichotomy between the religious and the secular sharply divides the medieval from the modern and labels the former backwardly religious in contrast to progressive secular modernity. While some neomedievalist models valorize the complexity of medieval political and legal associations, moreover, they can tend to disown medieval religiousness. Whereas religion is often seen as a form of stabilizing control in the "old Middle Ages," it is more likely depicted in the "new Middle Ages" as a source of inspiration for the lawlessness, anarchy, and violence forecast for the coming era.

In "The Coming Anarchy," Robert Kaplan, whom international relations theorists have linked to neomedievalism, predicts that "environmental degradation" and extreme inequities are creating a "bifurcated world" divided between the rich, who have the technology to master a ravaged and ravaging nature, and the poor, who do not.[48] For neomedievalists, the new world order is at its best a noble medieval court, where the "transnational elites" move through their world of multiple allegiances much as medieval knights moved through theirs (Kobrin, 375). At its worst, the "new Middle Ages" is a new world disorder, where chaos reigns and groups of bandits, bound by no sovereign nation-state, wreak havoc in the midst of need, greed, and loyalties to leader, creed, or tribe. The former Third World changes from a "Dark Continent" to a "Dark Ages," spread across a geographically broad range.[49] This type of neomedievalism generates a neoprimitivism

[47] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 245–55.

[48] Robert Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *Atlantic*, February 1994, 44–76. As Simon Dalby points out in a biting critique, Kaplan's world could also be divided between "the rich, who read magazines like *Atlantic*, and the rest, who don't" ("Reading Robert Kaplan's 'Coming Anarchy,'" *Ecumene* 34 [1996], rpt. in *The Geopolitics Reader*, ed. Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Simon Dalby, and Paul Routledge [New York: Routledge, 1998], 197).

[49] Kathleen Davis argues that in both academic and popular discussions the Middle Ages can come to figure as a "future perfect" for modern times ("Time behind the Veil: The Media, the Middle Ages, and Orientalism Now," in Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, 105–22). Kathleen Biddick argues that important theories of the ideologies of modernity, such as Benedict Anderson's concept of "the nation," rely on a vision of the Middle Ages that can be seen as "supersessionist," reminiscent

that does not celebrate or ennoble the savage other but only fears it. In popularizations of these views, the dark dangers of religion are often linked to Islam, which threatens a secularized Christendom.

This depiction of a stand-off between Islam and the West draws on another theory of international relations that has garnered much attention in the last decade, the controversial "clash of civilizations" thesis put forth in 1993 by Samuel P. Huntington in the influential journal *Foreign Affairs*.[50] Huntington's prediction concerning post–Cold War geopolitics divides the world into seven or eight "civilizations": "Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin-American and possibly African." "The most important conflicts of the future," he asserts, "will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another" (25). Like neomedievalism, Huntington's thesis joins temporal and spatial dimensions. "The Cold War began," he writes, "when the Iron Curtain divided Europe politically and ideologically. The Cold War ended with the end of the Iron Curtain. As the ideological division of Europe has disappeared, the cultural division of Europe between Western Christianity, on the one hand, and Orthodox Christianity and Islam, on the other, has reemerged" (29–30). For Huntington, the new dividing line of the "Velvet Curtain of Culture" has replaced the "Iron Curtain of Ideology." This line is the same as "the eastern boundary of Western Christianity in the year 1500" (30). In a bizarre moment of temporal-spatial disjunction, Huntington literally divides a map of Europe with a year—1500 (fig. 1). This date

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of the imagined relationship between the Old Testament and the New ("Coming out of Exile: Dante on the Orient[alism] Express," *American Historical Review* 105 [2000]: 1236; see also Davis, 105–7).

[50] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 22–49; Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). Huntington's thesis has since moved from foreign policy journals into more mainstream forums. During the *CBS Evening News* on September 16, 2002, for example, Dan Rather asked Afghan president Hamid Karzai if he saw "a war between civilizations, a religious war if you will, Islam against Christianity and Judaism." Karzai replied, "Absolutely not" (see www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/09/16/eveningnews/main522171.shtml). For more detailed critical responses to Huntington's thesis see Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *Nation*, October 22, 2001; and Jacinta O'Hagan, "A 'Clash of Civilizations'?" in Fry and O'Hagan, 135–49.

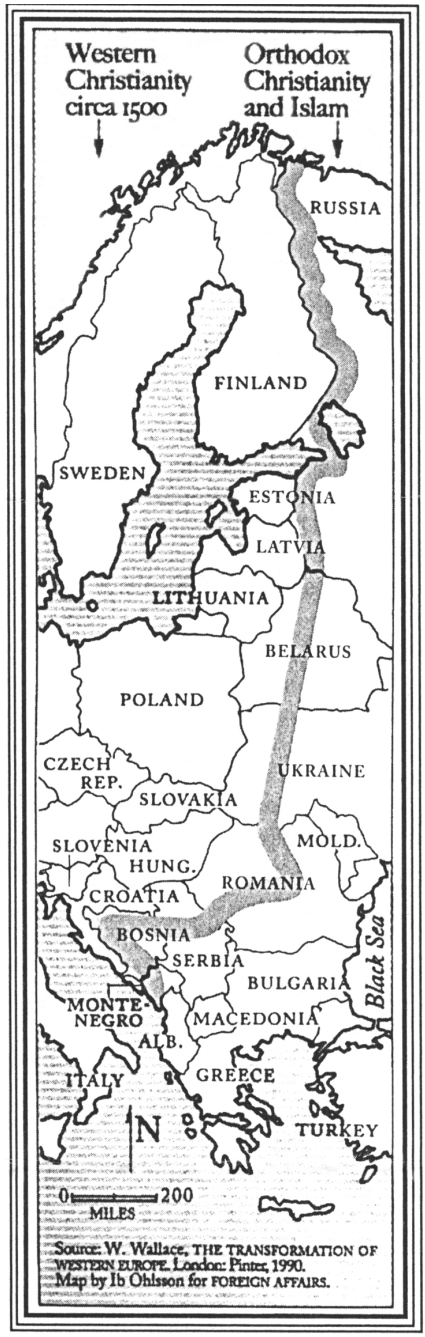

Figure 1. Europe c. 1500, map by Ib Ohlsson, in Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" 30. Reprinted by permission of *Foreign Affairs* (72:3, Summer 1993). Copyright 1993 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

is, of course, part of the common periodization of the great epochal shift figured between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.[51]

While Huntington sets out to deal with potential clashes between civilizations, his central preoccupation would appear to be the "1300 years" of conflict on the "fault line" between Islam and the West.[52] Both his article and his book-length discussion of the thesis emphasize the conflictual nature of this relationship and draw especially on the work of Bernard Lewis, whose 1990 article "The Roots of Muslim Rage" yielded the formulation "clash of civilizations." For Lewis, the roots of the clash grow out of a long history: "We are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historical reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the world-wide expansion of both."[53] This representation of an "ancient rivalry" brings the past into the present and renders the temporal spatial. The latter shift obscures historical specificity as Islam and the West become separated by time and space with a rigidity more characteristic of iron than of velvet. Within such schematics, a history that also holds the intricacies and intermingling of a world like the one portrayed in *Parzival* seems impossible. This vision of black and white is far starker than Wolfram's. *Parzival*, while very much in line with a supersessionist (what Huntington might call a "universalizing") view of the world, still presents a more complex set of relationships among Judaism, Islam, and Christianity than Lewis's view of Islam in conflict with a "Judeo-Christian" heritage ever could. In *Parzival* Jews, Christians, and Muslims may be separated by the things that make up "civilization," but they are also clearly and powerfully connected through them. *Parzival* represents the exchange of language, letters, art, and narrative and depicts

[51] Gearóid Ó Tuathail comments on the same map in "Samuel Huntington and the 'Civilizing' of Global Space," in *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), rpt. in *The Geopolitics Reader*, 172.

[52] Huntington's book-length treatment of the "clash" thesis does deal with other clashes, but the conflict between the West and Islam remains the central one for him, as Said also observes in "The Clash of Ignorance."

[53] Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *Atlantic*, September 1990, 60, and *Time*, June 15, 1992, 24–28, quoted in Huntington, 32.

political alliance and intermarriage with a complexity also seen in *The King of Tars*, the "Man of Law's Tale," and the *Chanson de Roland*. Religion, at the core of Huntington's clash, is a source of conflict in these medieval narratives, to be sure, but even as these texts advocate conversion to Christianity for unbelievers, they also represent the relationships between Christians and nonbelievers as complicated and as mediated by the myriad elements of their spiritual, cultural, and material worlds.

Huntington's vague notion of civilization, like Berlusconi's, also makes "culture" into "a nature." Huntington has complained that the question mark in his article's title has been ignored by his critics. However, his earthquake analogy, which made the clash between civilizations seem as inevitable and uncontrollable as a tectonic shift, rattled that question mark to pieces before the essay ever went to print. Such naturalizing of human conflict, coupled with the limiting views of history that traditional periodization can foster, creates a conceptual boundary that deters critical thinking across time and cultures.

It seems clear, in the wake of recent instances of "racial profiling" of Arabs and Muslims, that while somatic markers are still crucial to contemporary racisms, racism is no longer concerned merely with biology. Rather, in a bizarre reversal, notions of race are returning to what Appiah describes as a "premodern" state, in which somatic difference is a marker or sign of unbelief, not its cause. Current debates over the changing but still urgent problem of the color line need to be expanded and complicated to include the cultural components of racism revealed by Balibar's concept of neo-racism, especially the religious or theological components that can transform "culture" into "a nature." In the April 1925 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, W. E. B. DuBois, revisiting his famous 1903 assertion about the color line, examined global questions of racism and labor following the Great War.[54] A century after *The Souls of Black Folk* appeared, racism is equally important to the global situation that Huntington's *Foreign Affairs* essay attempts to describe, but recent mainstream debates over clashes of civilizations and religions do not often address racism explicitly. One can find discussions of "race in America" and the "clash of civilizations" within single issues of period-

[54] W. E. B. DuBois, "Worlds of Color," *Foreign Affairs* 3 (1925): 423–44.

icals such as the *Atlantic*, but the two topics are consistently treated as mutually exclusive.[55] One reason for this may well be that discourses in the United States remain without adequate historical background or the vocabulary to discuss how perceptions of race are inflected by religious difference. A longer view of the history of the concept of race might contribute not only to the development of such a vocabulary but also to an understanding of the changing contexts and forms of contemporary anti-Semitism in relation to religious and theological ideologies and debates that begin in the medieval period.[56]

Medieval examples of what Toni Morrison calls the "long history of the meaning of color" demonstrate how religious identity figures into Western notions of difference in ways that are not necessarily motivated by hatred but nonetheless embrace a vision of normative, Christian whiteness that is an integral part of the imaginative "making of Europe."[57] *Parzival* is an example both of this normative vision and of its complexity and flexibility. Traditional periodization, by precluding serious consideration of the Middle Ages, impedes our understanding of these early, crucial constructions and contributes to the static, negative schematics of cultural interaction that may have disastrous consequences at both the local and the global levels. What is needed is to undertake a more thorough examination of the longer histories of racist and neo-racist sentiments, not to find the origins of racism but to

[55] See, e.g., the May 2003 issue, which contains passionate letters to the editor about race in America, including debate over "Jewishness" as a racial category, in the wake of the most recent census ("Mongrel America," 18–22), and also features Bernard Lewis, "'I'm Right, You're Wrong, Go to Hell': Religions and the Meeting of Civilizations" (36–42).

[56] See, e.g., Mark Lilla's contribution to the May 2003 YIVO/Center for Jewish History conference on contemporary anti-Semitism, "The End of Politics: Europe, the Nation-State, and the Jews," *New Republic*, June 23, 2003, 29–34, which makes provocative reference to both medieval and Enlightenment thought but also, I think, underestimates their significance to current problems.

[57] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 49. On the question of Christianity in another type of "making of Europe," the wording of the Constitution to be adopted by the European Union member states, see Richard Bernstein, "Continent Wrings Its Hands over Proclaiming Its Faith," *New York Times*, November 12, 2003; and Thomas Fuller, "Europe Debates Whether to Admit God to Union," *New York Times*, February 5, 2003.

develop more sophisticated, historically informed theoretical approaches to racism as cultural and religious differences come to play more prominent roles in shifting U.S. and global discourses on race.

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