

# Fabricated Muslim identity, female agency, and cultural complicity

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# Fabricated Muslim Identity, Female Agency, and Cultural Complicity: The Imperial Project of *Emaré*

Amy Burge and Lydia Yaitsky Kertz

## Introduction

Extant in only one fifteenth-century manuscript, the Middle English romance *Emaré* has nonetheless enjoyed significant critical attention in recent years.<sup>1</sup> A short, tail-rhyme romance in the Breton lay tradition, the romance follows the titular heroine, Emaré, daughter of the Emperor Sir Artyus, who escapes her father's incestuous desires through exile in a rudderless boat. Washed up on the shores of Galys, Emaré is rescued and eventually marries the reigning king yet, due to the machinations of her mother-in-law, she is once again exiled, this time with her infant son. The pair eventually beach in Rome, where Emaré and her son are finally reunited with her repentant father and husband. One of the most prominent aspects of *Emaré* is a luxurious cloth gifted near the beginning of the romance to Emperor Sir Artyus by Sir Tergaunte, "The rych Kynge of Cesyle."<sup>2</sup> The Emperor orders the cloth to be refashioned into a robe or a cloak for his daughter Emaré to mark their upcoming nuptials. The description of the cloth—its various material

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1. Over twenty versions of the Constance narrative to which *Emaré* belongs survive in various European languages, but the Middle English text is only extant in London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A.ii (folio: 71r-76v).

2. *Emaré*, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995, rev. 2001), 80, also available online at <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/laskaya-and-salisbury-middle-english-breton-lays-emare>. All quotations are from this edition of the poem, cited parenthetically by line numbers.

and figural subcomponent parts, the process of its making, and its early history —takes up a significant portion of the text; Amanda Hopkins has calculated that approximately one-tenth of the poem's 1035 lines are spent describing the cloth and its context, and the cloth reappears at key moments of the text.<sup>3</sup> With explicit references to the cloth and the process of figural embroidery woven throughout the narrative, *Emaré* is a text that capitalizes on material culture.

Assembled from silk and gold thread, decorated with gems and precious stones, and embroidered with recognizable images from known romance narratives, the cloth functions as a new reconfigured totality, capable of consolidating amatory and political alliances. The very process of weaving and of decorating the cloth can be read as a gathering of cross-cultural narrative and materials. Much of the description foregrounds its locus in the Near and Far East, populated by elite Muslim men and women. The cloth was made by the Emir's daughter (109) for the man she loved—the son of the Sultan “of Babylone” (158). The unnamed Muslim princess decorated the cloth with gems and stones, birds and flowers, and images of famous romance couples. Into this romance compilation, she inserted a portrait of herself and her lover, for whose “sake the cloth was wrowght” (160). That this cloth was made for a non-Christian by another non-Christian suggests that it was never meant to leave the Islamic cultural and material world. Yet, the materials with which it is constructed come from undefined and distant locales: “full wyde” (117). It is composed of metal and organic threads, gold and silk, twisted together, embroidered in “gold and asowr” (113). The cloth also has a history in the West, among Christians. It is “wan” (173) from “the sowdan” (173) through the “maystrye and . . . myghth” (174) of the King of Sicily's father, who gave it to his son, Sir Tergaunte, “for gret love” (175), who subsequently gave it to the Emperor. *Emaré*

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3. Amanda Hopkins, “Veiling the Text: The True Role of the Cloth in *Emaré*,” in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows, and Morgan Dickson (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 71–82. The cloth appears at Emaré's refusal to marry her father (lines 242–50), her rescue in Galys (350–51), the attraction of the king of Galys to Emaré (391–400), Emaré's mother-in-law's expression of hatred (438–50), her exile from Galys (590–91), and her arrival in Rome (697–702).

thus alludes to the plunder of Islamic wealth that occurred during the Crusades and outlines one of the main routes by which Islamicate fabric entered Western Europe. The geography of the cloth's trajectory—from Babylon through Sicily to Artyus' court—also traces some of the trade routes that connected Christian and Islamic worlds. The cloth is thus composed of multiple components and, in its own movements, draws attention to the relations between these components.

The unusual prominence of the cloth has intrigued scholars who have recognized its significance but disagree as to its meaning. Ad Putter notes various interpretations of the cloth as representing Emaré's inner perfections and as an "indirect expression of her sexual allure," while himself asserting that the text appears clueless of what the significance of the robe is; this conclusion is shared by Amanda Hopkins who states that the cloth "seems to have no clear function."<sup>4</sup> Margaret Robson and Anne Laskaya and Anna [Kłosowska] Roberts identify the cloak as a love-charm, which explicitly represents sexual love and inspires it. Laskaya and Roberts suggest "that blame for the father-daughter incest rests with chance, with heathen practices, with exotic Eastern magic, rather than with Artyus himself."<sup>5</sup> Edith Rickert has proffered a historically specific reason for the text's focus on the cloth, proposing that *Emaré* is here alluding to the visit of Richard I to Sicily in 1191, where he was presented, by King Tancred, with "many magnificent gifts, including *pannis sericis*: a silken cloth."<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Sklar recenters the conversation on the robe and, particularly, on the figure of Emaré within it, arguing that "its exotic provenance, its suspect origins, and its

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4. Ad Putter, "The Narrative Logic of Emaré," in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (New York: Longman, 2000), 175; Hopkins, "Veiling the Text," 72.

5. Margaret Robson, "Cloaking Desire: Re-reading Emaré," in *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. Jennifer Fellows et al. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 67; Anne Laskaya and Anna [Kłosowska] Roberts, "The Rhetoric of Incest in the Middle English *Emaré*," in *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna [Kłosowska] Roberts (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 107.

6. Edith Rickert, *The Romance of Emaré*, EETS, e.s., 99 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908), xxxi.

polysemous textuality, crucially determines the course of her destiny.”<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Perkins reads the cloth as a *mise en abyme*, an encapsulation or a distillation of the entire narrative in miniature, as an aesthetic set piece.<sup>8</sup> On the level of scholarly discourse, the cloth performs as it does within the text: it spurs controversy, it dazzles, it intrigues, it repels, and it ultimately disappears. In our reading of the cloth, we do not attribute any magical powers to it, nor do we use the cloth as exculpating evidence for incestuous desires. Instead, we frame our reading of the cloth, as well as the image of Emaré enclosed in it as a fabricated Muslim woman, through the lens of assemblage theory to circumscribe networks of power in which Emaré as a white Christian princess participates.<sup>9</sup>

Most scholarship on *Emaré* attempts to place the text within networks of other texts, inviting readers to see *Emaré* as a subcomponent of a larger assembled whole. Editors tend to stress the poem’s affiliation with the Constance group, bringing it into interpretive clusters that include Chaucer and Gower as well as continental works. Helen Cooper classifies it as belonging to a group of texts about a “calumniated wife,” widening the Constance group to include Shakespearian romances.<sup>10</sup> Sklar finds productive parallels between *Emaré* and romances of the East and travel narratives, noting the exoticizing and Orientalizing trends in the text.<sup>11</sup>

7. Elizabeth Sklar, “‘Stuffed wyth Ymagerye’: Emaré’s Robe and the Construction of Desire,” *Medieval Perspectives* 22 (2007): 155.

8. Nicholas Perkins, “Ekphrasis and Narrative in *Emaré* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*,” in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 47–60.

9. Our use of the term “Saracen” references its indication of Christocentric fictionalizations of Islam and Muslims rather than the reality of medieval Islamic culture. Shookoofeh Rajabzadeh argues that “with few exceptions and unless it is a direct quotation, all qualified and unqualified uses of Saracen should be replaced with the word Muslim” to “acknowledge that a misrepresentation exists and to legitimize the violence of that misrepresentation.” The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure,” *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9–10 (2019): 4, <https://doi-org/10.1111/lic3.12548>. We follow Rajabzadeh’s recommendation, using “fabricated Muslim” to refer specifically to Emaré’s performative signification as “Saracen.”

10. Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 106–36.

11. Sklar, “‘Stuffed wyth Ymagerye.’”

Other approaches stress the supernatural elements from Christian (penitential romance) to pagan (fairy needlework), bringing the poem into conversations with other similarly inclined texts.<sup>12</sup> Amy Vines looks at *Emaré* within the context of literary and didactic literature contained in the manuscript and suggests that romance becomes yet another vehicle for educating the country's noblemen.<sup>13</sup> Of particular significance for our argument on the cloth-assemblage is the work of Elizabeth Scala and Tom White, both of whom extrapolate from the text toward a larger compiled unit.<sup>14</sup> Scala argues that the cloth can be read as a textual composite like a late medieval manuscript anthology. In a sense, Scala is reading the cloth as an assemblage, though she does not call it that, recognizing the compilational function of named romance couples embroidered on its surface. Such texts are frequently found bound together with other romance and non-romance texts, serving as discrete units within a larger assembly. Tom White expands on Scala's argument with a theoretical component from Bruno Latour, Michel Serres, and Tim Ingold, arguing that "*Emaré* models the movement between the textile objects of romance, romance texts, and the textile object that is the medieval manuscript."<sup>15</sup> White connects this textile metaphor back to "the pliability of the fabric of romance itself," a point he makes that is in line with Eugene Vinaver, Christine Chism, and Monica Wright: "the

12. Dieter Mehl, *Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968); Andrea Hopkins, "Female Saints and Romance Heroines: Feminine Fiction and Faith among the Literate Elite," in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, ed. Rosalind Field, Phillipa Hardman, and Michelle Sweeney (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 121-38; Laskaya and [Kłosowska] Roberts, "The Rhetoric of Incest in the Middle English *Emaré*"; Andrzej Wicher, "The Fairy Needlewoman *Emaré*: A Study of the Middle English Romance *Emaré* in the Context of the Tale of Magic," in *Evur happie & glorious, ffor I hafe at will grete riches*, ed. Liliana Sikorska and Marcin Krygier (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 145-53.

13. Amy Vines, "'Who-so wyll of nurtur lere': Domestic Foundations for Social Success in the Middle English *Emaré*," *The Chaucer Review* 53, no. 1 (2018): 82-101, <https://doi-org/10.5325/chaucerrev.53.1.0082>.

14. Elizabeth Scala, "The Texture of *Emaré*," *Philological Quarterly* 85, no. 3/4 (2006): 223-46; Tom White, "Textile Logics of Late Medieval Romance," *Exemplaria* 28, no. 4 (2016): 297-318, <https://doi-org/10.1080/10412573.2016.1219478>.

15. White, "Textile Logics," 306.

fabric of romance produces new works in a textile economy of use and reuse. . . . Romance, like tapestries and other woven objects, is dependent on replicating patterns, both structurally and aesthetically.”<sup>16</sup> In doing this cultural work of producing and reproducing social, political, and literary forms, romance becomes a test case for examining how the workings of empire are habituated and replicated.

While these scholars are thinking on the larger scale of manuscript and genre as in themselves amenable to assembly or as structurally assembled from various in-themselves-complete component parts, we focus on *Emaré* not as part of a larger network of texts but as a text itself invested in ideas of connection and assemblage. Rather than foregrounding the connections the cloth makes outwards from the text, we examine the cloth as in itself already an assemblage, the interweaving networks of which help us articulate the medieval workings of empire. We draw on the work of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Manuel DeLanda, Geraldine Heng, and Reina Lewis to articulate this reading of the cloth. Within this program of Christian empire building, *Emaré*, as a white Christian princess who exhibits conventional piety, traces the movement of faith-based imperial expansion. *Emaré*’s changing status—from victim of incestuous desires, to fabricated Muslim, to herald of imperial advancement—can be understood in terms of assemblage. By bringing together assemblage theory, medieval material culture, postcolonial medieval studies, and feminist scholarship, this article models new ways of approaching material culture in feminist medieval studies and invites further material feminist intervention in postcolonial medieval studies.

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16. White, 307, 298; Additionally see Christine Chism, “Romance,” in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100–1500*, ed. Larry Scanlon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 57–70; and Monica Wright, *Weaving Narrative: Clothing in Twelfth-Century French Romance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009). This replication of patterns is suggestive of Chrétien de Troyes’s definition of his romance work as “Une mout bele conjunture” or “une molt bele conjointure.” *Erec et Enide, édition critique d’après le manuscrit B.N. fr. 1376*, ed. Jean-Marie Fritz, *Le Livre de Poche*, “Lettres gothiques” (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992), line 14. For further discussion see Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, “*Erec et Enide*: The First Arthurian Romance,” in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 103–19.

## Cloth as Assemblage: A Theoretical Framework

A concept first developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *assemblage* is a helpful way to illuminate the argument we are making about the function of the cloth in *Emaré*. Initially figured in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980 in French; 1987 in English) and *What is Philosophy?* (1991 in French; 1994 in English), and subsequently developed by Manuel DeLanda in *A New Philosophy of Society* (2006), assemblage is concerned with the relations between a whole and its parts.<sup>17</sup> Medieval studies has become aware of the usefulness of the concept, particularly for studies of material culture and the “global Middle Ages.” The appropriateness of assemblage to think about the relationship between micro and macro, or local and global, is evident from Ben Jervis’s work on English towns and the Anglo-Italian wool trade, in which he uses assemblage theory to examine “the multi-scalar interactions that defined the lives of communities in the Middle Ages.”<sup>18</sup> Within literary studies, the concept of assemblage has been taken up by new materialism, object-oriented ontologies, and queer studies scholarship as a productive way of excavating modes of relation.<sup>19</sup> We here set out the main aspects of assemblage that we use in our reading of *Emaré* in expectation that it will be useful

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17. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

18. Ben Jervis, “Assembling the Archaeology of the Global Middle Ages,” *World Archaeology* 49, no. 5 (2017): 666, <https://doi-org/10.1080/00438243.2017.1406397>; see also Ben Jervis, “Assemblage Theory and Town Foundation in Medieval England,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 26, no. 3 (2016): 381–95, <https://doi-org/10.1017/S0959774316000159>.

19. Examples of medieval literary scholarship that has made use of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s work more widely include essays in Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger, eds., *Queering the Middle Ages*, *Medieval Cultures*, 27 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), and much of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s work, especially *Medieval Identity Machines*, *Medieval Cultures*, 35 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), and Jeffrey J. Cohen and Todd R. Ramlow, “Pink Vectors of Deleuze: Queer Theory and Inhumanism,” *Rhizomes* 11/12 (Fall 2005/Spring 2006): n.p., <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/cohenramlow.html>.



for future scholarship, particularly for identifying the relations of exteriority and the processes of territorialization, de- and re-territorialization, as complex ways through which peoples and objects are detached, integrated, and reintegrated into the social fabric of a medieval literary text.

Drawn from the French word *agencement*, meaning “a construction, an arrangement, or a layout,”<sup>20</sup> in its simplest form, an assemblage is:

A multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes, and reigns—different natures. Thus, the assemblage’s only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a “sympathy”. It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind.<sup>21</sup>

Thomas Nail explains that “an assemblage is a multiplicity, neither a part nor a whole”—what Deleuze and Guattari call a “fragmentary whole.”<sup>22</sup> Various referred to as “bundles of associations” and self-organizing material systems, these assembled multiplicities are defined by their external relations “according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities.”<sup>23</sup> This emphasis on the interactions between components is key to assemblage theory. In contrast to organismic entities, where component parts are constituted by relations of interiority and thus reciprocally constituted (i.e., the constituent parts do not exist outside of the complete entity), assemblages are defined by relations of exteriority, where component parts are “self-subsistent.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, “a component part of an assemblage may be detached

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20. Thomas Nail, “What is an Assemblage?,” *SubStance* 46, no. 1 (2017): 22.

21. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 69, quoted in Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 1.

22. Nail, “What is an Assemblage?,” 23; Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 16.

23. Jervis, “Assembling the Archaeology,” 670; Daniel Smith and John Protevi, “Gilles Deleuze,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2018 edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/deleuze/>; Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 9.

24. DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 9.

from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different.”<sup>25</sup> In this, assemblage is the inverse of intersectionality, an idea first introduced into feminist theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw.<sup>26</sup> While intersectionality recognizes networks of connection through which humans experience relations of power (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, etc.), these subcomponents are integral to one’s identity and are therefore not separable or movable. Assemblage theory, on the other hand, reveals the way subcomponents can stand alone and be deliberately shifted. Assemblage theory thus offers a way to look at the whole and the part simultaneously.

The cloth-as-assemblage in *Emaré* is composed of multiple separable parts, which in themselves constitute complete entities, capable of being removed and plugged into other systems or assemblages. The gems that decorate the cloth—“stones of myche prys” (92) that are “Sowghte [. . .] full wyde” (117)—collectively create kaleidoscopic color combinations as well as refracted light, merging with the shine of gold and silk threads to create a dazzling quality that often prevents onlookers from actually seeing the cloth or the woman who wears it. The same gems and stones participate in other systems of signification, external to the text, such as medicinal and lapidary science, biblical foundations of the New Jerusalem, decorative programs of devotional objects, and as trim and accessories for aristocratic costumes. The decorative ground of “bryddes” and “Flowres” (166) is a common motif found in tapestries and other woven fabrics across Christian and Islamic worlds, which makes this decorative element imminently replaceable.

The figural embroidery of romance couples that adorns the three corners of the cloth—“Ydoyne and Amadas” (122), “Trystram and Isowde” (134), “Florys and Dam Blawnechflour” (146)—reference texts that proliferated in manuscript and visual form, often in conjunction with other texts. As we mention above, Scala describes this gathering of figural images of romance as a similar practice to that of compiling late medieval

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25. DeLanda, 10.

26. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* Issue 1, Article 8 (1989): 139–67.

manuscript anthologies.<sup>27</sup> The ability to remove and replace romance images in various combinations is also evident in fourteenth-century ivory romance caskets.<sup>28</sup> The addition of an autobiographical image in the fourth corner—the Emir’s daughter and the Sultan’s son—renders this particular combination of images of romance rather unique, while simultaneously testifying to the love connection forged between the two. This image, however, is composed as a recognizable maiden with “an unyknor” (164) scene, itself often found on ivory romance caskets, wooden misericords, and in manuscript painting. This scene is the epitome of detachable as it circulates independently and in conjunction with other images, locating its meaning, whether secular or devotional, from additional context. The cloth, therefore, breaks apart these romance compilations like manuscript anthologies or ivory caskets by separating out certain items and creating a new assemblage.<sup>29</sup> Enclosed within the outer boundaries of this new cloth-assemblage, the internal boundaries between autobiography and romance iconography, between sacred and secular, between Christian and Muslim, are collapsed and reconfigured to bring about a new totality circumscribed by the boundaries of the finished cloth.

Yet, as noted above, an assemblage is held together by extrinsic junctures that “connect them but do not constitute them”; “what counts are not the terms or the elements, but what is ‘between’ them, the in-between, a set of relations.”<sup>30</sup> Based on the nature of the relations of exteriority, assemblages can “be structured in a *hierarchical* way, which

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27. Scala, “The Texture of *Emaré*.”

28. Lydia Yaitsky Kertz, “Shadows and Reflections: *Tristan and Isolde* in Manuscripts and Ivory,” *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2014): 131–54; Elizabeth L’Estrange, “Gazing at Gawain: Reconsidering Tournaments, Courtly Love, and the Lady Who Looks,” *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 44, no. 2 (2008): 74–96, <https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.1745>; Paula Mae Carns, “*Compilatio* in Ivory: The Composite Casket in the Metropolitan Museum,” *Gesta* 44, no. 2 (2005): 69–88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25067115>.

29. This is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari mean by de- and reterritorialization, a concept we will explain later in this article.

30. Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, viii, quoted in Nail, “What is an Assemblage?,” 23.

is to say, in a vertical dimension, by transferring more and more power and decision-making processes to the top, or they can grow as *meshworks* of horizontal agglomerations by distributing decision-making processes along smaller scales of equal status.”<sup>31</sup> Assemblage as a series of power relations invites us to look more closely—or to look differently—at the various networks of power the cloth is implicated in and, in particular, their shifting from vertical, hierarchical relationships to horizontal, more apparently egalitarian relationships.

The horizontal connections in the cloth-assemblage are between the body and the cloth, between amatory partners, and between the two women who work silk (Emaré and the Emir’s daughter). The cloth-assemblage’s vertical connections trace power relations between parent and child within the project of Christian empire building, which implicates and makes use of royal women, while ultimately relegating them outside the realm of political power. In its original design, the cloth marked a horizontal love relationship between the Emir’s daughter and the Sultan’s son; it is a love token created by the Emir’s daughter and freely given to her lover. This relationship carries the promise of an alliance between two Islamic political units. We can surmise that the gift is accepted by the intended lover, for it passes into the possession of his father, the Sultan of Babylon. An optimistic reading allows for a happy union of the lovers, however brief. This relationship is frozen in time as an embroidered image even after the cloth is diverted from its intended destination. The transfer of the cloth from the Sultan’s son to his father, from the Sultan to Sir Tergaunte’s father, and yet again from the father to Sir Tergaunte reveals multiple power relations both vertical and horizontal. Sir Tergaunte then expands the connection by bringing the cloth to the Emperor Sir Artyus, Emaré’s father, as a gift, thereby reconfiguring the assemblage to include yet another father figure. Scala notes the echo of the original love relationship marked by the cloth, arguing that the cloth is a betrothal gift, intended to mark a future relationship between Tergaunte and Emaré: a betrothal that never materializes.<sup>32</sup>

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31. Dennis Mischke, “Assembled Togetherness: New Materialism and the Aporias of Cosmopolitanism,” *Rhizomes* 21 (Winter 2010): n.p, <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue21/mischke.html>.

32. Scala, “The Texture of *Emaré*,” 232.

In a radical break of assemblage-style horizontal alliances, which are not intended to mark lines of descent or filiation, the Emperor gifts the cloth to his daughter Emaré, ordering that it be unmade and refashioned into a robe or a cloak. His intention is to reformulate the relationship with his daughter as an amatory one.<sup>33</sup> Once he has dismissed Sir Tergaunte, the Emperor Sir Artyus experiences a sudden longing to see his daughter Emaré (188), who had been residing with a noblewoman, Lady Abro. The Emperor recognizes that his daughter has grown to become a beautiful and courteous lady and that he wishes to marry her: “So he was anamored hys thowghtur tyll, / Wyth her he thowghth to worche hys wyll / And wedde her to hys wyfe” (226-28). The Emperor also recognizes that his desires are not quite licit. He therefore sends messengers to Rome to acquire a papal dispensation to validate his lust for his own daughter (232-40), and he secures said permission in the form of a “Popus bullus” (239). The Christian Emperor’s incestuous intentions, validated by a papal bull, are an attempt at reconfiguring the assemblage from the forbidden vertical relation between father and daughter into a horizontal marital alliance. Happy at the prospect of his now-sanctioned nuptials, the Emperor orders the cloth to be reshaped into a robe or a cloak for his daughter/bride, exploiting the cloth’s own history of shifting vertical-horizontal alliances:

Then was the Emperour gladde and blythe,  
 And lette shape a robe swythe  
 Of that cloth of golde;  
 And when hyt was don her upon,  
 She semed non erthely wommon,  
 That marked was of molde.  
 (241-46)

Emaré’s refusal and eventual expulsion circumvent his plans, yet this moment in the text is revealing of how the unstable assemblage is

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33. We note, as Ross G. Arthur does, that “Sir Artyus becomes enamored of his daughter before she is given the cloak.” See “Emaré’s Cloak and Audience Response,” in *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*, ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 85-86.

reconfigured in the union of Emaré with the cloth, in which “She semed non erthely wommon.” Until the moment Emaré dons the robe, right before her first expulsion from her father’s land, no one had actually worn the cloth; Emaré becomes the first instantiation of the cloth as clothing, intended to join a human body with a piece of textile. It is at this point that Emaré becomes the most recent in marked relationships integrated into the cloth-assemblage.

Thus, the cloth is itself an assemblage of text, character, and culture that knits together stories from the Christian and Muslim worlds that can be read as a whole (as a synecdoche for medieval imperial culture), but which can also be separated into its constituent parts. Thinking about the cloth as an entire object woven by the Emir’s daughter, it is a complete, whole item. Yet, as a construction of narrative and object, the individual elements that make up the cloth can be understood separately, with their own symbolism. In this way, the cross-cultural elements that constitute the cloth (especially the mixing of Christian and Muslim lovers)—in other words, the *relations between them*—are brought into focus. It is by further focusing on these relations—the in-between parts—that we can read Emaré herself as part of the assemblage and make visible the ways in which the cloth-assemblage mediates and is mediated by her identity. It is through a reading of Emaré as implicated in the cloth-assemblage that the romance’s imperial politics can be discerned.

### Becoming Muslim: Virtual and Fabricated Identities

The cloth as an assemblage reveals the connections between its constituent elements and integrates the Emir’s daughter and Emaré into the cloth-assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari outline the boundaries of assemblages using the example of a wasp and an orchid: what DeLanda calls “self-subsistent components.”<sup>34</sup> They identify the wasp and the orchid as “heterogeneous elements” that nonetheless form an assemblage:

It could be said that the orchid imitates the wasp, reproducing its image in a signifying fashion (mimesis, mimicry, lure, etc.). But

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34. DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 11.

this is true only on the level of the strata—a parallelism between two strata such that a plant organization on one imitates an animal organization on the other. At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp.<sup>35</sup>

Just as the wasp and the orchid are drawn from different natural categories, so too does medieval understanding of religion indicate how a Christian and a Muslim can be seen as separate categories. This is evident in medieval art and literature; the presentation of Muslims as monolithic “others” is particularly apparent in Middle English literature (although this may be more nuanced than it appears).<sup>36</sup> Despite the continued economic contact between East and West, many European writers envisioned Christians and Muslims as categorically different from each other, creating fictive civilizations as representations of each. Geraldine Heng reads medieval travel writing, for example, as “a project of distinguishing Christian and Islamic civilizational identities as absolutely different from each other, shorn of commonality, and denying the trace of any resemblance.”<sup>37</sup> Yet, in *Emaré*, through the cloth-assemblage, a connection is made between Emaré and the Emir’s daughter that is constituted in precisely the terms Deleuze and Guattari outline: we can observe a “becoming-Muslim” of Emaré and a “becoming-Christian” of the cloth and, by extension, of the Emir’s daughter.

The text is quick to foster a connection between the two women through the cloth and its associated craft. As many critics have noted,

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35. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 10.

36. See, for instance, Amy Burge, *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance* (New York: Palgrave, 2016); Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

37. Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 135, emphasis in original.

Emaré's craft skills are repeatedly emphasized; the text notes "Of her hondes she was slye" (67) and her host, Sir Kadore, remarks that "She ys the konnyngest wommon / I trowe, that be yn Crystendom, / Of werke that Y have sene" (427-29). Her skill with "sylke" (730) evokes parallels with the Emir's daughter who originally made the "glysteryng" (100) cloth. If Emaré is the best seamstress in "Crystendom," is the Emir's daughter the best in "hethennes"? Robson takes this further, arguing that the cloth is effectively a message from the Emir's daughter to Emaré: women weave their messages to one another, even if the Emir's daughter had originally intended the message to woo a male lover.<sup>38</sup> This suggests that the love story of the Emir's daughter, woven into the cloth, but unresolved in the text, is continued by Emaré. The intense viscosity of Emaré similarly encourages the reader to associate her with the cloth. Emaré is unusually *seen*: Laskaya notes that she does not speak until line 251, a quarter of the way into the romance, and suggests that the construction of scenes focused on male voices, actions, and perspectives align *Emaré* with the scopophilic.<sup>39</sup> Anne Savage argues, "when people see her, they see it [the cloth]."<sup>40</sup> When Emaré first puts on the robe, refashioned from the cloth, "She semed non erthely wommon, / That marked was of molde" (245-46). This description is repeated: "She semed non erdly thyng" (396); "he thowghth right / That she was non edryly wyght" (700-701). When the king of Galys's mother sees Emaré for the first time, we are reminded that Emaré is wearing the cloth which "on her shon so bright" (439). This prompts the queen to comment "I sawe never wommon / Halvendell so gay!" (443-44), and further establishes Emaré's primary identity as visual and bound up in the cloth.

Through these signifiers of association, Emaré's connection with the cloth is foregrounded, allowing us to observe her as part of the cloth-assemblage. The shift from wearing to becoming part of the cloth-assemblage is accounted for in the components of an assemblage, which

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38. Robson, "Cloaking Desire," 68.

39. Laskaya "The Rhetoric of Incest," 105.

40. Anne Savage, "Clothing Paternal Incest in *The Clerk's Tale*, *Emaré*, and the *Life of St Dymrna*," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), 353.



can be *material* or *expressive*. DeLanda gives the example of a community network as assemblage, where a group of people are constituted by material components (bodies, buildings, food) as well as by expressive components (language, body language, choice of conversation).<sup>41</sup> Understanding that an assemblage is made up of both material and expressive components helps to outline its active function; as DeLanda points out, an assemblage is constituted not by the sum of its parts, but by the “exercise of their capacities.”<sup>42</sup> Reading the cloth as an assemblage helps to illuminate its expressive function (which is its effect on Emaré’s body when she wears it) and how this develops from/with the material aspect. The scopophilic focus on Emaré means that when she wears the robe made of the cloth, her identity is mediated through it. The cloth thus permits a reading of Emaré, given her hybridity and connections with the Emir’s daughter (she wears her cloth, shares her skills, and might provide the continuation of her love story), as a fabricated projection of the Muslim woman. Assemblage theory supports this idea of projected identity. DeLanda writes that:

An ensemble in which components have been correctly matched together possesses properties that its components do not have. It also has its own tendencies and capacities. The latter are real but not necessarily actual if they are not currently manifested or exercised. The term for something that is real but not actual is *virtual*.<sup>43</sup>

So the material components of the cloth (the stories, the result of the Emir’s daughter’s weaving) combine (or assemble) to convey additional, new properties which are real but not actual—they are virtual. Emaré’s association with the cloth-assemblage thus allows her to be read in the cloth’s cultural terms as a fabricated or virtual Muslim woman.

Indeed, the “olde qwene[s] . . . wordus unhende” (445) support reading Emaré as a fabricated Muslim “other.” She tells the king of Galys:

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41. DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 12–13.

42. DeLanda, 11.

43. DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 5, emphasis in original.

Sone, thys ys a fende,  
 In thys wordy wede!  
 As thou lovest my blessynge,  
 Make thou nevr thys weddyng,  
 Cryst hyt de forbade!  
 (446-50)

Amanda Hopkins has cautioned against reading too much into the mother-in-law's words here, claiming that the text is clear that her doubts are rooted in malice, not in her reaction to Emaré's appearance.<sup>44</sup> Yet we would not so easily deny any potential double meanings here. "Fende" is widely used in romance to indicate supposed Muslim alterity, and, revealingly, the queen specifically identifies Emaré as a "fende" when dressed in the robe made of the cloth: she is "a fende / *In thys wordy wede*" (our emphasis). Emaré is more usually described as separated from the cloth: "godely unthur gare" (198; 938); "wordy unthur wede" (250; 366; 612); "comely unthur kelle" (303); and "semely unthur serke" (501).<sup>45</sup> It is only when she is part of the cloth-assemblage—"In thys wordy wede"—that Emaré is read as a "fende" or otherworldly. We argue that Emaré is here visually positioned as a Muslim woman by her soon-to-be mother-in-law: she appears to be a "fende" when she wears the cloth. Thus, through its assemblage, the cloth has imbued Emaré with new, *virtual*, capacities. We are not suggesting that the reader, or even any of the characters of the romance think that Emaré is a Muslim woman. The relationship between Emaré and the Emir's daughter is one of exteriority: they are connected but not permanently or immutably. The cloth-assemblage is merely a representation of the corporeal reality of the Emir's daughter, expressed in virtual and symbolic terms. Emaré does not *become* Muslim when she wears the cloth, though she incurs some of the negative attitudes elicited from Christian distrust of foreign luxury goods.<sup>46</sup>

44. Hopkins, "Veiling the Text," 77.

45. Lydia Yaitsky Kertz, "Cloth as Skin: Cross-Cultural Contact in Emaré," conference paper presented at International Medieval Congress, Leeds, UK, July 3-6, 2017.

46. There is a suggestive connection here, beyond the scope of our argument,

The separateness of Emaré and the cloth can profitably be considered through the concept of deterritorialization. Assemblages can become more homogenized and strictly bound through what has been called “coding”; inversely, through decoding, assemblages can still be complete, but the rules become a little less rigid.<sup>47</sup> One articulation of this decoding is what Deleuze and Guattari call territorialization: “a parameter measuring the degree to which the components of the assemblage have been subjected to a process of homogenization, and the extent to which its defining boundaries have been delineated and made impermeable.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the various gems and stones, gathered from far and wide, can be gathered into a single cloth-assemblage. Similarly, romance couples from different textual traditions can be brought together, temporarily eliding their difference of textual origin and faith-based identity. The territorialization of assemblages is often related to questions of power, in particular, the ability to shift and reconfigure existing power structures. In other words, the heterogeneous components of the assemblage can, as earlier explained, be simultaneously part of other assemblages. As Jervis puts it, “they overflow their bounds and are implicated in other assemblages.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, “[d]eterritorialization is the way in which assemblages continually transform and/or reproduce themselves.”<sup>50</sup> Jervis sees this as analogous to changing power structures, arguing: “from an assemblage perspective . . . we can see systems as persisting, but always having the capacity to be broken down or transformed as the relations which constitute them change.”<sup>51</sup> As power structures within assemblages are emergent they can be changed, and the “existing power structure” can “vibrate to a new rhythm.”<sup>52</sup> This is evident in *Emaré*, as the intimate power of the Emir’s daughter’s gift is transmuted first into

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with other romances of the East in which a woman is replaced in the text by a luxury object (such as in *Floris and Blancheflour* where a cup replaces the heroine for large parts of the narrative).

47. DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 15-16.

48. DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 3.

49. Jervis, “Assembling the Archaeology,” 671.

50. Nail, “What is an Assemblage?,” 34.

51. Jervis, “Assembling the Archaeology,” 671.

52. Jervis, 671.

non-intimate political power, through military and diplomatic exchange between various male rulers, then into forbidden intimate power (incest) by Emaré's father, and finally, through Emaré's own association with the cloth-assemblage, into a prop of empire.

The fact that Emaré is constantly highlighted as separate from the cloth even as she is associated with it reminds us of the properties of an assemblage—that “the parts of an assemblage do not form a seamless whole.”<sup>53</sup> The romance repeatedly reminds us that Emaré is separate from the cloth, and it is clear that when Emaré is wearing the cloth, it is the cloth that is seen: “when she was theryn y-dyghth / She semed non erdly thyng” (395-96). The reader is never allowed to forget that Emaré is “in the robe of nobull ble” (270). Moreover, the virtual or fabricated change that being part of the cloth assemblage has wrought on Emaré is not permanent. By the end of the romance, Emaré reclaims her name, although acknowledging its previous self-imposed changes from Emaré to Egaré (358-60, 907-9, 922-24, 1006-8), and the robe is not so relentlessly foregrounded; instead of reuniting with her estranged father “in the robe bright and shene” (933), at the moment the reader would expect this formulaic line to appear, the text substitutes “Walkyng on her fote” (1017). The cloth has not permanently altered Emaré; she is not read as a fabricated Muslim woman by any other character, apart from her mother-in-law, and the cloth's effect is muted as her family are reunited in one of the most holy Christian cities, Rome.

The way different characters (and, by extension, the audience of the romance) process this visual information is revealing of their intentions towards Emaré, whose association with the cloth-assemblage invites a multiplicity of intentions. Ross G. Arthur notes that Emaré's “state of wonder . . . leads to different responses in the story's different characters,” which he argues are indicative of their respective virtue: “[t]he good characters either are slow to interpret the cloak or else respond positively and honorably toward the virtues it represents. . . . The bad characters, on the other hand, respond badly.”<sup>54</sup> Of interest to our argument are those reactions which are implicated in Christian

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53. DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 4.

54. Arthur, “Emaré's Cloak and Audience Response,” 90.

imperialism. Emaré's mother-in-law and husband both react towards her in colonizing ways; her mother-in-law settles on exile—"lede her out of that kyth" (594)—while the king of Galys proposes to possess her through marriage: "I wyll have that fayr may / And wedde her to my quene" (431-32). These ultimately contradictory colonial actions seek to expunge the abject through banishment or to make the unknowable intimately knowable through marriage. As the visual "wonder" of this romance, Emaré in the cloth asks the reader to wonder—to think—about the colonizing impulses of her crusader husband and his mother. Nicola McDonald posits that "wonders" act "as repositories of hidden meaning" that "demand . . . a probing or scrutinizing . . . that is most often expressed, in the romances, as a question": what does this mean?<sup>55</sup> For the king of Galys and his mother, Emaré is the question that they answer in colonial terms.

Furthermore, we argue, the text is interested in how Emaré internalizes the colonizing impulses applied to her while she is associated with the cloth and reformulates these into her own imperial agenda through which she shifts from victim to agent. This is achieved through deterritorialization of the cloth-woman-assemblage. The romance is clearly at pains to point out the separateness of Emaré and the cloth to indicate that the heterogeneous parts of the assemblage can be isolated. Amanda Hopkins agrees:

The basic premise of the epithets ["wordy unthur wede"; "semely unthur serke"] highlights the distinction between clothing and person, between outward appearance and inner nature . . . reminders of the disparity between interior and exterior, undermining any identification of the robe as a symbol of the heroine. . . . Thus the cloth is defined by its exteriority, by its separateness from Emaré.<sup>56</sup>

Hopkins's use of the word "exteriority" here is suggestive—as we have argued, the cloth is assembled through relations of exteriority which bind together Emaré, the Emir's daughter, and the elements that make

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55. Nicola McDonald, "The Wonder of Middle English Romance," in *Thinking Medieval Romance*, ed. Katherine C. Little and Nicola McDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 18-19.

56. Hopkins, "Veiling," 80-81.

up the cloth. Yet, these same relations can be reconfigured. Here, the repetition of “worthy under wede” and its variants echo the repetition required to solidify assemblages, except in this case it is solidifying the deterritorialization of the cloth-assemblage. Deterritorialization can result in the emergence of more democratic, less hierarchical structures, as in the horizontal alliance of Emaré and the Emir’s daughter through the cloth-assemblage. Yet, in some cases deterritorialization, the breaking apart of the assemblage, leads to a *re*territorialization, where the assemblage is re-formed in a way that emphasises imperial or state power. Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that “[y]ou may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject.”<sup>57</sup> They characterize this as *negative*—relative negative deterritorialization—or “the process that changes an assemblage in order to maintain and reproduce an established assemblage.”<sup>58</sup>

Reading the cloth as assemblage certainly indicates how the “boundaries between East and West [are] interpenetrable.”<sup>59</sup> Yet, an assemblage’s ability to de- and reterritorialize actually serves to strengthen the text’s rigid “Euro-Christian ethos” (to borrow Sklar’s phrase) through Emaré’s privileged position as a white Christian heroine.<sup>60</sup> The process by which Emaré is detached from the cloth-assemblage (deterritorialization) is mirrored in the romance’s impulse towards the strengthening of Christian Empire (reterritorialization). In other words, Emaré breaks away from the assemblage of the cloth in order to realign or reterritorialize its elements in support of another assemblage: that of Christian imperialism.

### Emaré as Agent of Christian Empire

The cloth-assemblage, constructed from components drawn from Muslim and Christian cultures, foregrounds the interplay of faith-based

57. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 9.

58. Deleuze and Guattari, 508–10; Nail, “What is an Assemblage?,” 34.

59. Sklar, “Stuffed wyth Ymagerye,” 155.

60. Sklar, 155.

political units, between cultures often framed as existing in relations of enmity. The horizontal relations inherent in the cloth function to emphasize the connection between Emaré and the Emir's daughter who created the cloth. However, the text's emphasis on Emaré's separateness from the cloth at key and repeated moments is a reminder that Emaré is always already part of another assemblage: the hierarchical assemblage of Christian Empire, to which she belongs, given her role as the Emperor's daughter and a crusader's wife. The delineation of power in *Emaré* is complex. The intersection of gender and religion shapes the relations between characters and nuances typical power dynamics. As an approach that emphasizes the way components can shift and change the structure of an assemblage through cycles of de- and reterritorialization, assemblage theory is a type of systems analysis that makes visible the working of Christian imperialism in a text like *Emaré*. We argue that Emaré's actions in the text resignify and reterritorialize the cloth-assemblage to create a Christocentric assemblage that upholds the project of empire even as it elides Emaré's own feminine agency and influence. *Emaré* directly addresses contemporary anxieties about a deterritorialized Christian Empire, imagining a homogenous and complete assemblage of Christians arising from the fragmentation of the Islamic cloth-assemblage. What becomes apparent when reading the cloth as assemblage is the movement from micro (cloth) to macro (empire) and the way white women like Emaré are complicit in support of Christian imperial power.

Emaré, as a white Christian woman dressed in a cloth woven and decorated by a Muslim princess, safely navigates open waters and foreign lands because even at her lowest points—at points of banishment and physical exile—she remains a part of the larger Christian Empire. Her journeys not only trace Christian geography, but they also bring her from the periphery in northern Europe or Britain to the center in Rome. Without identifying her precise port of origin—all we know is that Emaré's father, Sir Artyus, is a Christian Emperor somewhere in northern Europe or possibly in the British Isles—the multiple expulsions and sea voyages propel Emaré to new Christian lands. She first arrives on the shores of Galys, most likely Galicia in the northwestern corner of the Iberian Peninsula, and the second time in Rome, the center

of papal authority and the heart of Latin Christendom. Emaré's linguistic, national, or geography-based markers of identity do not signify in the romance. Instead, her markers of identity are her performative Christian piety, her white skin, her skills at clothwork, and the dazzling robe.<sup>61</sup> Her excessive piety interpolates her into this transnational Christian community, guaranteeing her safety, and acts as a tool for recoding and reterritorializing the cloth-assemblage. Her piety is also her pathway from victim to agent of her own destiny as well as of Christian imperial politics.<sup>62</sup>

*Emaré* is a text concerned with themes of empire and faith and the precarity of Christian imperialism. As Geraldine Heng reminds us, the pan-territorial Christian identity to which Emaré lays claim harkens back to the Crusading era, a distant yet remembered and frequently reinvented past.<sup>63</sup> *Emaré*, centering on the peregrinations of a pious Christian female protagonist, whose origins are purposefully obscure, taps into the same transnational Christian collective identity that had been weaponized as a means of organizing expeditions to the Holy Land. From the time of the First Crusade until the final losses of Christian colonial holdings in present-day Palestine, Israel, and Syria, the rhetoric of Christian unification attempted to bridge the schismatic divisions between Catholic and Orthodox followers of Christ as well as between various ethnic identities that fell under these umbrella terms. Yet, from the start, the assemblage of Christian imperialism known as the Crusades was ripe for deterritorialization.

In the various accounts of Pope Urban II's call for Crusade at the Council of Clermont in March of 1095, the rhetoric of Christian solidarity is defined in its antagonistic relation to peoples deemed as interlopers in the Holy Land, frequently envisioned as "Saracens" or even the Antichrist. Fulcher of Chartres records Urban's rhetoric as a call to

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61. Kertz, "Cloth as Skin."

62. Geraldine Heng cites David Wallace's term for this theological Christian phenomenon as "competitive abjection," explaining that "since the condition of being more-sinful-than-thou, and thus more-abject-than-thou, signals the potentiating likelihood of being more-saved-than-thou, and ascending to greater heights of ultimate grace" (Heng, *Invention of Race*, 42).

63. Heng, 118.



Western Christians to aid their Eastern brethren. The peoples whose spiritual leaders had recently excommunicated each other were now reimagined as Christians again and as friends: "I [Pope Urban II], or rather the Lord, beseech you as Christ's heralds to publish this everywhere and persuade all people of whatever rank, footsoldiers and knights, poor and rich, to carry aid promptly to those [Eastern] Christians and to destroy that vile race [of Arab Muslims and Seljuk Turks] from the lands of our friends."<sup>64</sup> Independently, Robert the Monk and Baldric of Dol record that Urban's speech urged an immediate cessation of intra-Christian strife, redirecting all acts of war and aggression toward those who unjustly hold the Holy Land.<sup>65</sup> In Guilbert of Nogent's account of Urban's speech, the multiethnic adherents of Islam are homogenized as "Saracens" and simultaneously demonized as the manifestation of the Antichrist, who has come to do battle with the Christians. He records the conclusion of the speech as an investiture ceremony: "He [Urban II] instituted a sign well suited to so honorable a profession by making the figure of the cross, the stigma of the Lord's passion, the emblem of the soldiery, or rather, of what was to be the soldiery of God."<sup>66</sup> Pope Urban's II preaching of the First Crusade thus reterritorializes the fractured political landscape by envisioning a unified Christendom that would obliterate non-Christian foes. The resultant military assemblage is imagined as a force backed by religion and righteousness and physically manifested through a sewn image of the cross. In historical reality, the Christian assemblage was never a stable one, with these pan-Christian alliances always on the brink of collapse due to internal strife.

All pretense of Christian unity ended in 1204, when an army of

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64. "Fulcher of Chartres," trans. O. J. Thatcher and E. H. McNeal, in *A Source Book for Medieval History: Selected Documents Illustrating the History of Europe in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 514, 516-21, repr. in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 34-35.

65. "Robert the Monk," trans. Thatcher and McNeal, in *A Source Book for Medieval History*, repr. in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 36; Baldric of Dol, trans. A. C. Krey, in *The First Crusade: Accounts of Eye-witnesses and Participants* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1921), 33-40, repr. in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 39.

66. Guilbert of Nogent, trans. A. C. Krey, in *The First Crusade*, repr. in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 41-42.

Western European Crusaders turned on their Eastern Christian allies and sacked their capital at Constantinople.<sup>67</sup> In fact, by the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century, Christian imperial holdings in the Outremer had long since collapsed. But imaginative literature—including, we argue, *Emaré*—continued the project of this unified faith-based identity that had propelled Crusading ambitions as if that devastating defeat had not occurred. These literary texts collectively attest to a willing and purposeful cultural forgetting and reinscription, replacing history with a reterritorializing imaginative pan-Christian landscape. This imaginative crusading assemblage is directly activated in *Emaré* and given as the primary reason why her husband departs from their marital home for a duration of seven years, leaving his pregnant wife vulnerable to the effects of slander and the evil machinations of the wicked mother-in-law. As the King of Galys, he responds to the call from the King of France to join forces in battle against a monolithic “Saracen” enemy:

The kyng of France yn that tyme  
Was besette wyth many a Sarezyne,  
And cumbered all in tene;  
And sente aftur the kyng of Galys,  
And othur lordys of myche prys,  
That semely were to sene.  
(481-86)

This gathering of Christian allies from across various Christian polities under the leadership of Frankish rulers against a common enemy, deliberately misrepresented and homogenized as “Sarezyne” or “Saracen,”

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67. Megan Moore makes an argument for the centrality of women in the political and economic project of “refashioning empire” following the sack of Constantinople. In describing the looting that occurred, Moore establishes an economic equivalency between the high-value objects plundered from city treasuries, churches, and homes and the Byzantine aristocratic women, whose value as brides would forge cross-cultural alliances. Megan Moore, *Exchanges in Exoticism: Cross-Cultural Marriage and the Making of the Mediterranean in Old French Romance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 4, 6.

is in itself a crusading assemblage, harkening back to the First Crusade, and visually and symbolically represented in individual knights who take up the cross. Quite tellingly, Muslim chroniclers of the Crusades homogenize the multiethnic Christian invading forces as “the Franks” or “Ifrañj/ Firañj” in Arabic, thus demonstrating that reterritorialization was happening on both sides of the conflict.<sup>68</sup>

Working in tandem with the militant Christians who sew crosses on their garments, Emaré’s female Christian identity is expressed verbally and corporeally, serving to reterritorialize through the sartorial: the reworking of the symbolic meaning of the cloth-assemblage. On her two journeys in the rudderless boat, Emaré prays to God for protection, and her prayers are answered both times. The text explicitly tells us that she survives only through God’s grace and providence. On her first journey, her prayers are directed to God and the Virgin Mary: “To God of heven she made her mone, / And to Hys modyr also” (314-15). She assumes the posture of a penitent sinner, lying prostrate on the bottom of her small boat, leaving her fate entirely to God’s will:

Wyth carefull herte and sykyng sore,  
Such sorow was here yarked yore,  
And ever lay she styll.  
She was dryven ynto a lond,  
Thorow the grace of Goddes sond,  
That all thyng may fulfyll.  
(328-33)

Her bodily suffering and physical gestures serve as performative aspects of corporeal prayer, following the conventions of late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century affective piety.<sup>69</sup> Her Christian prayer brings her

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68. “The name Franks (in Arabic, Ifrañj or Firañj) was quickly adopted as a blanket term for all the Christian peoples of continental Europe and the British Isles, much in the same way that medieval Christian observers referred to Muslims of many different backgrounds simply as Saracens.” Paul M. Cobb, *The Race for Paradise: An Islamic History of the Crusades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16.

69. Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

to the shores of Galys, the site of the shrine of Santiago de Compostela, and to an eventual marital union with a crusading king. In her second journey, Emaré assumes the posture of Virgin Mary with the Christ Child. Like the Virgin in the Annunciation, she unquestioningly accepts her lot. Emaré steps into the rudderless boat, this time with a nursing infant in her arms, reminiscent of Christian iconography of *virgo lactans* (or the Nursing Madonna):

The lady that was meke and mylde,  
In her arme she bar her chylde  
. . . And when the chyld gan to wepe,  
Wyth sory herte she songe hyt aslepe,  
And putte the pappe yn hys mowth.  
(640-41, 661-63)

Lying down on the bottom of the boat, with her baby at her breast, she comforts her child and prays to God and Mary for their safekeeping: "Then she made her prayer / To Jhesu and Hys modur dere, / In all that she kowthe" (670-72). Performing once again her piety through bodily prostration and full submission (676-79), Emaré is saved yet again, and through God's will the young mother and her newborn son are brought to Rome, the political center of Western Christianity. Yet, while Emaré's piety appears feminized and submissive, her expression of Christianity is implicated in the very same rhetorical strategy of the crusading assemblage. In reaffirming her Christian belief while wearing the Islamic cloth, Emaré deterritorializes and then reterritorializes it, thereby changing its meaning in support of the Christian imperial project; her very survival at sea serves as a testament to the efficacy of Christian prayer. Christian imperial reterritorialization is the process through which Emaré moves from victim to agent.

This point can be illuminated through the work of Reina Lewis. Working within the context of nineteenth-century British colonial expansion, Lewis brings to the surface "the contribution [white] women made to the negotiation and naturalization of . . . colonialist norms."<sup>70</sup>

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70. Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation*

Although Lewis does not make use of assemblage theory, she nevertheless explores similar cultural processes. Her methodology teases apart the various systems of power within which female subjects participate and to which they are subjected. Lewis argues that:

We need a theory of subjectivity and agency that acknowledges the contradictions, gaps and internal splits that structure the paradoxical but necessary notion of a collective identity as women; that is not divorced from the racialized, classed and gendered experience of the social but that can recognize the “impermanence” of all those various social collective identities.<sup>71</sup>

Reading this call to action through the lens of assemblage theory, we recognize that white Christian women as medieval cultural producers operate within systems of race, gender, and class relations, and as such they contribute as active agents to the reproduction and perpetuation of racial and colonial systems from which they benefit. As we read Emaré, both the character and the text, Lewis reminds us that “we cannot read a text without allowing for its productive role in the encoding of social difference.”<sup>72</sup> In revealing how the cloth-assemblage is deterritorialized by Emaré and recoded to, ultimately, concretize difference between Emaré as an active agent and the Emir’s daughter as a nameless and silent image, we recognize the complicity of the heroine as a white female Christian colonial subject.

As we noted earlier, throughout her peregrinations within the bounds of Christendom Emaré is praised for her exceptional skills at silkwork, linking her with the Islamic cloth that she wears. Echoing the praise of the cloth as “So ryche a jwell ys ther non / In all Crystyanté” (107-8), Emaré is likewise praised for her singular, or unparalleled, talents. Sir Kadore describes her as the cleverest, most skillful woman in all Christendom: “She ys the konnyngest wommon, / I trowe, that be yn Crystendom, / Of werke that y have sene” (427-29). This is a skill that Emaré is invited to disseminate. Recognizing her skills, Sir Kadore hires

(New York: Routledge, 1996), 27.

71. Lewis, 27.

72. Lewis, 28.

Emaré to teach his daughters “to sewe and marke / All maner of sylky[n] werke” (376-77). In teaching others to sew, Emaré reconstitutes the idea of clothwork, which to this point in the narrative has been associated with Islamic material culture, as a worthy occupation for pious Christian women. Ultimately, Emaré is engaged in negative deterritorialization, resignifying the Islamic skill as part of an established Christian practice. In taking up the active role of teaching, Emaré becomes a cultural producer, who not only creates new textile works of art but also reproduces her skills through her female apprentices. Thus, the heroine who has been framed as the most abject—twice calumniated and twice expelled—is more than just a tacit victim of the licentious and jealous gazes of powerful people. Robson agrees, arguing that “Emaré can be read *not* as the passive plaything of the tale (and of men), but as its prime mover: events are shaped to her desired end, and that is shaped by her desires, which are projected on to the other characters in the story.”<sup>73</sup> In reconstituting a new assemblage of Christian women practicing a skill they have collectively appropriated from the Islamic world, Emaré deterritorializes the cloth and reterritorializes it as a new faith-based totality that excludes the Emir’s daughter. Emaré is thus an active agent in the project of Christian imperial expansion.

However, Lewis also notes that imperialism positioned European women as simultaneously agencied and powerless.<sup>74</sup> Emaré’s recoding of the cloth-assemblage might position her as an active agent, but the romance’s focus on her son, Segramour, similarly shaped and recoded by Emaré, emphasizes her simultaneous lack of agency. In a confirmation of how patriarchal forces underpin the project of empire-building, Emaré’s ultimate contribution to Christian imperialism is the production of a male heir, indicating how the imagined assemblage of Christian completeness is structured hierarchically, or vertically. This is a notable shift from the horizontal alliance between Emaré and the Emir’s daughter evident in the cloth-assemblage. Segramour is also readable in the same material terms as the cloth-assemblage. He is presented as a singular offspring of Christian blood: “Grete well my lord fro me, / So gentyll

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73. Robson, “Cloaking Desire,” 66, our emphasis.

74. Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*, 4-5.

of blode yn Cristyanté, / Gete he nevir more!" (634-36). Through such hyperbolic and superlative epithets, Emaré's son is presented in similar terms to both Emaré and the cloth as a uniquely singular wonder of Christendom. Just as Emaré's labor recodes the cloth in support of Christian Empire, so too does she recode her son, nourishing and protecting her child in his infancy during their joint expulsion and while in exile. She undertakes his courtly education to prepare him for his eventual role as king and emperor (841-61), thus grooming him in the same Christian imperial contexts as the reterritorialized cloth-assemblage.

Amy Vines addresses this form of female labor in her reading of the romance within the context of late medieval conduct literature. Vines reminds us that Emaré is single-handedly responsible for shaping this young man: "the narrative's eponymous heroine is a mother raising her child alone; all the lessons in courtesy and patience, which ultimately lead to her own and her child's reinstatement, are taught by her."<sup>75</sup> Emaré's son's ability to perform this courtliness in front of his estranged father becomes the key to their eventual reintegration into the royal household of Galys and a reconstitution of the fragmented family assemblage. Moreover, Emaré's father's covetousness in this scene—his exclamation of "Syr, yf hyt be thy wyll, / Yyf me thys lytyll body!" (896-97)—echoes his initial greedy response to the cloth-assemblage. This moment is also implicated in the romance's imperial project as Emaré's son facilitates the reconciliation between Emaré and her repentant father, and in doing so the boy assumes a new role as the heir-apparent to the title of Christian Emperor. Emaré's son, like the cloth-assemblage, carries the ability to reconstitute social relations: to reterritorialize. Thus, lines of succession in the patriarchal society make use of female labor while recognizing sons and grandsons as rightful claimants to power. In this Christian imperial assemblage, which Emaré actively upholds through demonstrations of piety, skill, parenting, and teaching, Emaré herself is nevertheless denied any real political power. While the romance itself as a project of empire building is very much concerned with lines of descent and maintaining hereditary transition of power, that very project

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75. Vines, "Who-so wyll of nurtur lere," 84.

skips Emaré, transferring imperial title from grandfather to grandson. In that sense, Emaré as a significant but nevertheless missing link finds a horizontal alliance once again with the Emir's daughter through the cloth-assemblage, whose physical presence is elided as well.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that assemblage theory, as defined by Deleuze, Guattari, and DeLanda, can be a productive way to think about the religious and cultural politics of the romance of *Emaré*. Considering the cloth as an assemblage makes visible the ways in which the heterogeneous elements that constitute it, materially and expressively, are connected and can combine to form a whole. This way of reading the cloth simultaneously offers a perspective from which to observe the virtual effect of the cloth-assemblage as well as the way in which Emaré can recode its material and expressive qualities in support of a separate assemblage of imperial, crusader culture. Bringing together, for the first time, research on medieval articulations of empire with critical work on nineteenth-century imperialism strengthens the conviction that the Middle Ages are key to a full understanding of Western imperial and colonial culture in later centuries. Furthermore, it points to the importance of studying women's material culture as part of such a project.

On the political level, Emaré as a wife of a Crusader king and the mother of a future Emperor facilitates the project of Christian imperialism. On the level of cultural production, Emaré as a white Christian silkworker participates in the appropriation and dissemination of the skill, thereby becoming an active agent in imperial expansion. Using materials imported from an undefined East, Emaré capitalizes on the skills she shares with the Muslim princess, silenced like the subaltern. These skills generate new relationships of hospitality, a lucrative form of employment, and eventual marriage to a Christian crusader king. Sir Kadore employs Emaré to teach his daughters to work silk, thus interpolating a new generation of white Christian women into a cultural production that is based on appropriative techniques and materials. While the cloth she wears is a testament to the skills of another—a



silenced Muslim princess—Emaré is the one who receives praise and remuneration for the performance, practice, and teaching of that same skill. In teaching a new generation of Christian women to work silk, Emaré reconfigures the assemblage that once sealed the powers of an Emir and a Sultan into a new Christian female assemblage.

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