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On the European Question

for Obrad Savić

Abstract: Over the course of its history, Europe has posed a number
of famous questions. It has had, or confronted, a number of problems.
Or has it? Were these answers Europe was looking for or solutions it
sought to bring about? Attending to the "Jewish Question," in contrast
to which he claims all the others fade, Jean-Claude Milner has argued
that the translation of a question into a problem, and the subsequent
search for a solution, an infamous "final solution," reveals a massive
historical, and enduring, failure. In attending to his work, I examine
some of the other solutions offered by Europe in its questions (the co-
lonial question, the eastern question, the woman question, etc.) in order
to propose that Europe itself might have to be treated as a question, but
also, and finally, that by virtue of its singular capacity to constitute the
other -- numerous others -- as "questions" Europe constitutes, finally, a
problem of its own.

Keywords: Europe, 'Jewish Question', questions and answers, problems
and solutions, enemies, self-criticism.

A problem, Jean-Claude Milner recalles in his disconcerting medita-
tions on Europe, calls for a solution.[1] A question, on the other hand,
calls for a response. Whereas a question implies a subject, an ad-
dressee or interlocutor summoned to answer it, a problem exists (or is said to
exist) objectively; it is the case, in other words, whether stated by anyone or
not. Taking stock of these distinctions, and of the need to interrogate them,
toward a proper understanding of "the criminal inclinations of democratic
Europe [les penchants criminels de l'Europe démocratique]" and of its most
notorious "question," Milner fashionably advocates a form of integration.
He proposes to integrate and unify a vision and a perspective that otherwise

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1   Jean-Claude Milner, *Les penchants criminels de l'Europe démocratique*
         (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2003)

persist in strictly distinguishing between problem and question, response and solution. According to Milner, what operates here and elsewhere in Europe is a series of tactical, perhaps even spurious, distinctions, as well as an un-remitting attempt to eradicate all distinctions. And as he strives to negotiate between the two, Milner argues that we must confront the fact that although a question may indeed call for a response, more often than not, it is treated as a problem that requires a solution. Such is the case at least, and most famously, with the "Jewish Question," which was repeatedly referred to as a question indeed, but was ultimately followed by an infamous and "final" solution.

Milner obviously recognizes that Europe -- in which he makes a point of in-cluding, in their difference, both "Old Europe" and "the New World" -- has had a number of problems, or questions (I too will use the terms interchange-ably and cumulatively), over the course of its history.[2] And Europe has been quite generous in offering solutions to others, or unto them, at times going so far as to promote the practice of extermination as its preferred solution -- an-other way to abolish all distinctions. But the Jewish question is unique, Mil-ner insists, because it ultimately occasioned the invention of a new technol-ogy. This is a technology that aimed exclusively at cleansing Europe of that alterity, which the Jews were or were imagined to be. The gas chamber, in this perspective, is the singular technology that demonstrates the singularity of the Jewish question. What is this singularity? Milner describes it at once as a structure of illimitability and as a name, as a structure that conspires to produce that name (the name 'Jew') as a problem.[3] Thus, although there may be many problems, there is only one name.

One might wish to remark that, as he distinguishes between them, Milner is here attending less to Europe's problems than to Europe itself as a problem. It is not that the name 'Jew' is the name of a recurring, persistent problem

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2   Aside from the "parallel" repeatedly evoked, or denied, between the "Jewish question" and the "Muslim question," which will occupy me in the later part of this paper, there is the "Roma question," and of course the "Woman question" (see Wendy Brown, "Tolerance as Supplement: the 'Jewish Question' and the 'Woman Question'" in her *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006] 48-77). But one could also speak here of the "race question" and the "colonial question" or indeed, of what the French call simply "la question," namely, torture.

3   Milner uses the phrase "le nom juif" which might be translated with equal accuracy as "the name 'Jew'" or "the Jewish name."

then, but rather that that name, along with others, points to Europe. Based on the very title of his book, the bulk of his erudite argument, and his own description of post-1945 Europe, Milner himself would be unlikely to disagree. In fact, he explicitly suggests something quite close to this interpretation. "For the first time in its modern history," he writes, "Europe no longer had the Jewish problem [le problème juif] to resolve. It could finally pose, in realistic terms, the problem of its unity [le problème de son unité]."[4] Clearly Europe has, or has had, a problem. But because this problem is the problem of its own unity (which it addressed in construing a number of -- external or exteriorized, subjective or objective -- problems and subsequent solutions), it does not seem too farfetched to extend the claim and argue that Europe itself emerges as a problem, that Europe is a problem. Still, rather than linger on this more precise or felicitous formulation, and on the distinction upon which Europe ultimately founders, between (internal) problem and (external) question, Milner insists on identifying a privileged question for Europe, one question in the midst of lesser others, as if that question and that question alone were asked of Europe, rather than speaking, broadly and together with others, of Europe as such. Locating the singularity of the Jewish question, and of the Jewish name, at the center of Europe, while occluding, or at least deferring the undoing of that which he otherwise interrogates (namely the distinction between question and problem, between subjective and objective), Milner maintains a distinction between the Jewish question and other so-called questions. He separates Europe from its (different and divided, different because divided) problems and thereby avoids Europe, rendering more distant the urgent task he otherwise sets for himself and for us, the task of understanding Europe as a question and a problem.

The Art of Separation

Arguably, if perhaps unintentionally, Milner's position constitutes an intervention in the troubled field of victim competition (or even, in the current context, victim compensation). From this perspective, it can be used to illustrates an argument made a few years ago by Talal Asad with regard to the operations of political power, and specifically, in its relation to those it construes and constitutes as "problems," the different recipients of its multifarious technologies. Power, according to Asad, does not merely, nor always, seek homogenization, for it "works effectively through institutional-

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4   Milner, *Penchants criminels*, 63.

ized differences."[5] Distinguishing between victims, "disaggregating subject populations in order better to administer them," is after all an essential instrument of rule. Not so long ago, Michael Walzer attributed this particular instrumental skill to "liberalism" and called it "the art of separation."[6] Rephrased in Milner's terms, one could say that Europe has all along sought its own integrity, its unity or identity, but that it has done so through different, at times exclusive, at times inclusive, technologies, the institutionalization of others as "problems." Since "the formation of a persecuting society," at least, Europe has also persisted in distinguishing between these different problems, producing hierarchies, and geographies, of alterity among and between distinct groups and collectives or populations.[7] Much remains to be understood here, but one could venture that at bottom there is little that is particularly mysterious at work, little more, that is, than the ancient and venerable technology of "divide and rule" -- with a distinctive style. As Talal Asad reminds us, there is no gainsaying "the frequent hesitations and qualifications the European moral conscience has displayed when confronted with its own cruelties." Yet such "a 'bad conscience' is no bar to further immoral action, it merely gives such action a distinctive style."[8]

But Milner is not merely attending to technologies of rule (nor, for that matter, is Asad). He is also evoking the eradication of all rule by way of extermination. This is objectively important, obviously, and deserving of careful consideration. Yet we would do well to recall once again that Milner himself describes the difference between a problem and a question in the precise terms of objectivity and subjectivity. Whereas a problem calls for an objective solution, we have said, a question posits a subject apt to answer it. Whereas the latter is analogous to a mode of rule where the ruled are interlocutors of sorts, the former articulates a relation in which they are no longer so. The comparison could be extended to a situation of (internal) order

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5   Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 264.

6   Michael Walzer, "Liberalism and the Art of Separation," *Political Theory* 12: 3 (August 1984) 315-330.

7   R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

8   Talal Asad, "Responses" in *Powers of the Secular Modern : Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*, David Scott and Charles Hirschkind, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 230.

and one of (external) conflict. Interestingly, one of Milner's own examples is the patriotism of modern Jews (a devotion to the nation of their choice) and their anti-Semitism vis-à-vis other Jews, outside Jews (the Ostjuden, for example).[9] Be that as it may, in order to understand Europe's "criminal inclinations," in order to understand Europe, it is these very distinctions or set of distinctions (between problem and question, between objective and subjective, between internal and external) that we must attempt to reconsider. In this spirit, I would want to contend that, from the perspective of Europe, extermination and administration, integration and disaggregation, are part of the same art of separation, the same apparatus of power which names many names and consistently divides and rules, distinguishing between problem and question, between objective and subjective, between internal and external. I will soon return to an argument I have made at some length elsewhere around this precise point, namely, that the distinction between an internal enemy and an external enemy has been constitutive of (the unity of) Europe.

For now, I merely intend to underscore the fact that one could argue endlessly over the status of victims, the hierarchy of significance of their suffering, and the technologies (novel or ancient, exclusive or indiscriminate) deployed to attend to them. It is of course essential to recognize the difference between victims, the different instruments and kinds of administration, domination, oppression and eradication to which multifarious groups have been subjected over the course of time. Yet, the task of understanding, as Milner defines it, directs us first and foremost toward the subject of Europe, toward Europe as a subject, and specifically as a subject of power. It directs us toward the unity and homogeneity that Europe has sought and continues to seek, as well as to the unity it has achieved, however relatively and however unwittingly. It requires that we attend to the differences Europe has produced, as well as the difference it itself makes between objective problems and subjective questions, between internal others and external others, between assimilation and extermination. Surely, Milner is correct in striving to understand that which he singularizes, namely, the Jewish question. But as I have already suggested, he is really attending to Europe "itself." It is therefore this Europe, the unity of which is a problem for itself, and for which alterity is a problem and a question, that Milner ultimately scrutinizes and criticizes. He is after the Europe that seeks unity and integration simultaneously in the eradication of difference and in the institutionalization of differences. As I see it then, the issue is therefore not whether the Jewish question is singular, whether it can

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9   Milner, *Penchants criminels*, 50.

be isolated in relative or absolute terms from the other problems that Europe has made or invented for itself. The core of the matter is rather found in Europe as the articulation of a number of questions, each deserving of attention but never hermetically sealed from the other. The core of the matter is in this relative integrity -- one might refer to it as the transcendental unity of European reason --, in Europe as a problem and a question.

One could of course object here that Europe has long been understood, has long understood itself, as a question. Perhaps even too much so. Rodolphe Gasché, for instance, writes that "Europe's practice of critically putting itself into question is . . . a regular subject of lament" and that "self-criticism is something quite unique that sets Europe apart."[10] This perception is not void of justification. It may even be philosophically rigorous. But, notwithstanding the fact that, by the very philosophical standards here invoked, self-criticism, indeed, self-knowledge may not even be possible, and keeping in mind that we found our point of departure in Europe's "criminal inclinations," the often self-congratulatory nature of its assertion, whereby Europe is the privileged site of self-interrogation and reflexive criticism, risks overlooking an important dimension suggested again by Milner's meditation. As a question, Europe may indeed call for an answer. But if Europe is a problem, does it not call as well for a solution? Minimally, as it divides itself and reflects upon itself, formulating subjective questions and objective problems, as it identifies internal strangers and external enemies, Europe seems to divide itself from itself and thereby occludes that which in itself and in excess of itself poses the very problem it is.[11] Internal division is the result (perhaps also the cause) of a reflective practice (Rodolphe Gasché elsewhere called it, after Hegel,

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10   Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) 7.

11   Recalling "the characterization of black people as a Problem" in the United Kingdom, Salman Rushdie once wrote the following, which provides more than a mere corrective for the argument Milner makes : "You talk about the Race Problem, the Immigration Problem, all sorts of problems. If you are liberal, you say that black people have problems. If you aren't, you say they are the problem. But the members of the new colony have only one, real problem, and that problem is white people. British racism, of course, is not our problem. It's yours. We simply suffer from the effects of your problem" (S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* [London: Granta / Penguin, 1991] 138). I am grateful to Mayanthi Fernando for this reference and for her attentive reading of this essay.

"the philosophy of reflection"), of a repeated attempt to turn upon oneself, to return to oneself after having departed, taken one's distance, from oneself.[12]

Emmanuel Levinas, from whom Milner draws much inspiration, famously suggested that in contrast to Abraham, who departs never to return, Ulysses is he whose distant journeys always signal that he has remained proximate to himself. This ability to turn onto oneself by staying with oneself, the making of self into an unwavering object of attachment and of consideration, would be what distinguishes Europe (since that is what Ulysses stands for), which thus appears to be endowed, as Gasché asserted, with a rare attribute and perhaps a unique quality, the ability to engage in critical, self-critical and philosophical interrogation, the ability, finally, to know itself. "If 'know thyself' has become the fundamental precept of all Western philosophy," writes Levinas, "this is because ultimately the West discovers the universe within itself. As with Ulysses, its journey is merely the accident of a return."[13] Much as a question that invites no real answer but only a solution, the journey would be a mere incident, an incidental detour, that, in Levinas' indictment at least, remains profoundly solipsistic.[14] Jacques Derrida says as much, in his account of Levinas, stating that "those who look into the possibility of philosophy . . . are already engaged in, already overtaken by the dialogue of the question about itself and with itself; they always act in remembrance of philosophy, as part of the correspondence of the question with itself. Essential to the destiny of this correspondence, then, is that it comes to speculate, to reflect, and to question about itself within itself. This is where the

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12   Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

13   Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 10.

14   Zygmunt Bauman, invoking Ulysses' Greek name, asserts the exact obverse, though with a comparable result as to Europe's identity. In this version, Europe is that which must discover, invent, or conjure itself. Hence, the tales are numerous in which "Europe was invariably a site of adventure. Adventures like the interminable travels undertaken to discover it, invent it or conjure it up; travels like those which filled the life of Odysseus, who was reluctant to return to the dull safety of his native Ithaca since he was drawn by the excitement of untasted hazards more than by the comforts of familiar routine, and who was acclaimed (perhaps for that reason) as the precursor, or the forefather, or the prototype, of the European" (Z. Bauman, *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure* [Cambridge: Polity, 2004] 3).

objectification, secondary interpretation, and determination of the question's own history in the world all begin"[15] Whereas the question should turn to an interlocutor, the kind of objectification here described only turns to and upon itself, incessantly returning to itself. The journey is thus a mere incident. And the interlocutor is of no consequence. It should therefore be clear why, for Levinas at least, history is "a blinding to the other" and "the laborious procession of the same."[16]

Still, Derrida rightly asks "whether history can be history, if there is history, when negativity is enclosed within the circle of the same, and when work does not truly meet alterity, providing itself with its own resistance. One wonders whether history itself does not begin with this relationship to the other which Levinas places beyond history" (94). What Derrida points to, in other words, are the operations of a division within the self. Keeping to Levinas' terms, the imperative to know is after all directed at a self that is lacking in knowledge, for whom the object of knowledge is at once contained in the self (albeit unbeknownst to it) and in radical excess of the self as well ("the West discovers the universe within itself"). What, then, is the self, and what the other? Or, to recall Milner's formulation, what is the question, and what the problem? The subjective and the objective? The divisions that we have been seeking to undo, and which may even be said to undo themselves, nonetheless persist in their reiterations, beginning with the gap between the subject and the object of knowledge. Is the self here a subject or is it its objects? Is it not rather "the medium of reflection"?[17] Divided from itself, yet unknown to itself -- for what, or which, is the self it should know? -- Europe may finally appear as an increasingly fragile subject of (self-)knowledge.[18]

Furthermore, whether we are attending to an originary division of self and other and to its reiterations, or to iterations of multiple divisions (self/other, subject/object, inside/outside, and so forth) matters less here than the urgency of attuning ourselves to the faltering nature of Europe, to its questions and to the distinctions it makes between, the hierarchies it produces among, its

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15   Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 80-81.

16   Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 94.

17   Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 62.

18   See Talal Asad, James W. Fernandez, Michael Herzfeld, Andrew Lass, Susan Carol Rogers, Jane Schneider, Katherine Verdery, "Provocations of European Ethnology" in *American Anthropologist* N.S., 99: 4. (December 1997) 713-730.

problems. For although it has sometimes been treated, as we saw, as a question in certain contexts (mostly philosophical or juridico-political contexts), Europe has yet to be singled out as a problem in need of a solution. Nor has the question of Europe been quite formulated in terms of who the interlocutors might be that are likely to answer it. Indeed, upon whom is it incumbent to answer the European question?

The approach I wish to take here and the divisions to which I will be attending have everything to do with the European question, understood along the lines of Milner's meditation (no one knows what the stronger "name" is, Milner points out, whether it is the name "Jew," or the name "Arab" or "Muslim." Only Europe seems to know).[19] Underscoring as well the fact of a question which has failed to be asked, I have said that Europe fails to emerge as a question, as a problem. This is so precisely because of the questions or problems it construes within itself and in distinction from itself. Instead of "asking" the Jewish question again and seeking to resolve it, then, instead of performing that division anew and isolating it still from other problems -- and most urgently an allegedly novel "Muslim question" -- as if these were derivative or secondary, I seek to reflect on the European question. And I begin from the premise that therein lies Europe's long sought unity ("unity is already here," as Milner writes): the different, famous or infamous questions and problems that have occupied Europe, that continue to occupy it in fact, are best understood as iterations of one European question.[20] Again, there is nothing particularly mysterious here, for another way to formulate all this would simply be to assert that, for all its self-criticism, and perhaps because of it, Europe is that for which others are a problem. It is in this way that Europe is itself a problem, a problem for itself, and indeed a lingering question.

The Enemy's Two Bodies

Recall that, according to Talal Asad, power does not merely, nor always, seek homogenization, for it "works effectively through institutionalized differences."[21] "Disaggregating subject populations in order better to administer them" was one of the forms the institutionalization of difference has taken in Europe and, of course, elsewhere as well. What is rather more par-

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19   Milner, *Penchants criminels*, 78.
20   Milner, *Penchants criminels*, 81.
21   Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 264.

ticular about Europe is the way in which institutionalization has marked and distinguished power itself. The distinction of spheres (diagnosed by Max Weber) and the explicit separation of powers (claimed by liberal democracy) into executive, legislative, and judiciary are illustrative of this tendency or inclination. And one could linger here on the analytic and, again, institutional distinction between, say, economics and politics, whereby the political ideal of equality is somehow seen as immune to the assaults of economic inequalities fostered by a particular regime of property. No less foundational, and perhaps even more so, is the so-called separation of Church and state, the "secular" premise whereby religion and politics must be kept apart. Here too Europe has claimed a Sonderweg, one which I do not think needs to be fundamentally questioned. For what has happened in Europe is something quite different from an iteration of the king/prophet distinction found in some older traditions. The ongoing division of the world that distributes assets between the Emperor and the Pope, the Church and the State, and later religion and politics, is not only a singular contribution of Europe, one it has articulated for itself and inflicted on others through a variety of missionary and colonial practices. It is also constitutive of Europe's unity, a unity Europe has sought but failed to find at its very core.

To take but one more example. It is well known that sovereignty, though a principle of adamant unity (it is "indivisible and nontransferable"), has in fact been divided in the figure of the king's two bodies.[22] I shall not try to settle the matter of this figure's persistence nor indeed that of its historical reach. I would however suggests that it prefigures or simply installs another divide that separates between sovereignty and democracy, the "incoherent splitting of sovereignty between the people and the state in liberal democracy" which constitutes "the contradiction at the heart of this political form."[23] Such contradictions and divisions make it important to identify the structural poles toward which sovereignty and rule are directed, and particularly so when their lingering effects remain with us to this day. The questions, or problems, that have been occupying us throughout thus become constitutive elements, as well as indicators of internal splits at the heart of Europe. Thus, whereas Michel Fou-

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22   Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010) 51; and see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

23   Brown, *Walled States*, ibid.; Brown here relies on Marx's famous text "On the Jewish Question."

cault posited the criminal as the obverse of the sovereign, I have suggested that we attend as well to the "enemy's two bodies," the division of a dual figure that, constituted by and constitutive of the theologico-political that defines Western Christendom, splits into a theological enemy and a political enemy.[24]

The question of Europe, in this perspective, the European question lingers quite precisely as the division Europe "itself" construes between a Jewish question and a Muslim question. Not only does Europe divide itself between these questions (complex hierarchies and geographies of alterity), it also occludes the profound belonging -- from Cordoba to Sarajevo, or from London to Venice and Palermo -- of both Muslim and Jew in Europe and as Europe.[25] It ignores the unity of these questions in the location of their emergence. What I am arguing, therefore, is simply that the two questions are one. Not because we could easily collapse the two into one "Semitic" question (although there are some fruitful paths to explore therein), but rather because our focus should remain on the subject of the question, the subject of power, as it were, which constitutes itself upon the distinction between the "body mystical" and the "body politic," between the theological and the political, between Shylock and Othello.

Consider that, true to the lines along which Milner traces the (objective) problem and the (subjective) question, the enemy is divided into the internal and external enemy. For most of its history, Europe produced gradations of alterity, and of hostility, whereby the Jew was the internal and theological enemy, whereas the Muslim was its external and political enemy.[26] The pattern had been in place at least since Abelard and Aquinas, who conceived of

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24   Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977); Gil Anidjar, "Terror Right" in *CR: The New Centennial Review* 4:3 (Winter 2004) 35-69.

25   See e.g., María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, *Bosnia the Good: Tolerance and Tradition* (Budapest: Central European University, 2000) and *Sarajevo Essays: Politics, Ideology, and Tradition* Albany: State University of New York, 2003).

26   What follows is a summary of the argument I make in *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

the Muslim enemy as void of theological reasoning. But it will here suffice to recall that, although Shylock and Othello are both strangers to the city of Venice, their foreignness registers in a different, asymmetric manner. The Merchant of Venice, in fact, constantly reminds us of Shylock's religion, and though he is also said to belong to a tribe of remote origins, his association is with Venice: Shylock belongs to Venice and in Venice he stays. Othello, on the other hand, is defined by his political associations, his military leadership, and ultimately, by his proximity to the Turk whom he has fought and with whom, as a Moor, he is ultimately identified. He is "The Moor of Venice" (as the play used to be called). And while it would not be quite accurate to argue that Shylock is defined by religion and Othello by race, these vectors nonetheless illuminate the difference between the two characters across the numerous similarities of the plays. Indeed, the acknowledgment that Shylock and Othello have much in common begins with Shakespeare himself, making the two plays highly susceptible to comparison.

However, if this comparability has been noted, it is remarkable that the wealth of Shakespeare studies has dedicated very little to attend to it in any substantive way. The questions raised by the proximity between the two enemies have yet to be noted, let alone answered. Equally important, if not more so in our context, is the significance of a dramatic association between Jew and Muslim, which was repeatedly raised as a threatening specter throughout the history of Christendom. From early Christian reactions to Islam as a new form of Judaism, by way of the association of Jew and Muslim as undermining Christendom, and all the way to what Hegel called "the religions of the sublime" (namely, Judaism and Islam), there have been countless instances -- but no sustained consideration -- of anxieties about Jews and Muslims, or of the subsequent will to dissociate between them, in the Christian imaginary and in Christian political practice.

We know well that the possibility of an alliance between Jews and Muslims raised anxieties within Europe, indeed, within Christendom at large. We also know that the possibility of such an alliance was simultaneously conjured and denied. Thus again Shakespeare, who makes the comparison between Jew and Moor; who depicted Shylock as black ("jet" in contrast to "ivory," his daughter, "fair Jessica"), and has Othello cast himself "Judean" (in one version at least); and who returns to similar themes of fathers and daughters, marriage outside the fold, anxieties of foreignness, and the exercise of violence as opposed to the virtues of justice. Yet despite these proximities, Shakespeare did write two distinct plays, plays which have been received as distant and remote from each other, and hardly worthy of comparative study. As Shaul Bassi sum-

marizes the situation, "the common theme of the stranger in Venice appears to have been considered less compelling than a series of powerful critical categories that have traditionally set The Merchant of Venice and The Moor of Venice apart: comedy vs. tragedy, religion vs. race, theology vs. politics, and, crucially, Jew vs. Muslim," and "while an unprecedented number of studies have accordingly made of Shylock and Othello Shakespeare's most topical characters, it remains unquestionably difficult to analyze them in the same breath."[27] Everything is therefore as if there were two questions, two distinct problems which do not reflect on the subject who seeks their "solution," here Shakespeare, there Europe. And the enduring controversies surrounding the staging of Shylock, the paradoxical frequency of such staging notwithstanding, have only confirmed that even hatred -- or opposition to it -- is not distributed equally. In the space of these inequalities, in the persistence of these asymmetric questions, it is once again Europe that emerges as a problem.

The Muslim Question

Is there, then, a Muslim question? It should be clear that the least of my intentions is to minimize the presence of Islamophobia, much less to deny the plights and challenges that confront Muslim communities in Europe. But rather than single out a "Muslim question," I have tried to argue that the succession of "questions" allegedly raised in Europe should not lead us to isolate each as if it were the site of an objective problem (Europe is, after all, notorious for dispensing "solutions"), or the occasion for analogies and comparisons that suggest either history's constant returns or produce doubtful reductions. We should first recognize that the identification of a question as such already partakes of an uninterrogated assumption, an earlier distinction whereby "Europe" and, in this case, "Muslims" are thought of as distinct and separate. There is no reason to concede such distinction. In fact, there are numerous historical reasons to refuse and refute it. Finally, there are philosophical and political reasons to turn each of these questions back onto Europe, and more precisely, to argue that they all partake of the European question.

Judaism, Christianity, Islam -- to preserve for now these "religious" labels -- have been a part of Europe since the latter began to emerge in the Middle

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27   Shaul Bassi, "Barefoot to Palestine: The Failed Meetings of Shylock and Othello" in *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare*, Laura Tosi and Shaul Bassi, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011) 232-33.

Ages (some might argue that Europe as such appeared even later on the historical scene, which further underscores the formative role played by the actors or factors that have been construed as questions or problems). There are a number of short-hand headings or sub-headings to illustrate the matter, beginning with the "Jewish-Christian dispute" and the Crusades to the Holy Land, the Arabic translations of Greek science, the conversions, expulsions, or emancipation of the Jews, the real and/or fantasmatic presence of the Ottoman Empire at the heart of Europe, and all the way to the colonial incursions on the Islamic world (and obviously beyond), which include the particularly charged importance of the Holy Land, now Israel/Palestine. And then there were the Muslims (Muselmänner) in Auschwitz. None of these are mere accidents of Europe, or markers of alterity. They constitute Europe as what it is and has been. They testify to the co-presence of the "Jewish question" and the "Muslim question" at the heart of Europe. More important, they make clear that Europe itself -- starting from the fact that it treats these questions as if they were entirely discrete and extraneous in relation to each other and to Europe -- is a problem, or indeed a question. Whichever it is, and whether it calls thereby for an interlocutor (shall we call it a "true partner for peace"?) or for a solution, it is no doubt looming still. And particularly so when considering what Milner reminds us of, namely, the criminal inclinations of democratic Europe.

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