
The Age of Questions: Or, a First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions Over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond, by Holly Case, 2018.

Growing out of her consideration of the Transylvanian Question as being pivotal to modern European diplomacy in *Between States*,¹ Holly Case's second monograph *The Age of Questions* is a daring work of intellectual history that addresses the set of public questions in the nineteenth century defining that age. Case introduces the topic historically by asserting that the age of questions began in the 1820s and 1830s, with the increased reach of the press, the expansion of the franchise in Britain, and trends such as the consolidation of popular sovereignty in France and the Great Powers' perpetual reflection on the effects of the Ottoman Empire on Europe's balance of power.² The models of expressing a question also changed, from an enclosed mathematical certainty to a recurring illness, the historical evolution of which is particularly relevant for making sense of nebulous queries such as the 'Eastern Question.' Case then remarks on the broad spectrum of querists who sought to bring these questions into the public sphere, projecting their interests and proclaimed solutions onto the very formulation of the questions.³ Case suggests to the reader that the drama and tragedy of the 'cottage industry' of questions had been amplified by the bundling of questions, such that the solutions became grandiose, and sparked the political imagination of many in conflictual ways.⁴ She thus emphasizes that "the age of questions made the Great War *thinkable*."⁵ For a prologue, her focus is on the genealogy

¹ Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Holly Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, a First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions Over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 223n2-3, 227n11.

² Holly Case, *The Age of Questions*, 3, 80.

³ Case, *The Age of Questions*, 4-5.

⁴ Case, 5-7.

⁵ Case, 6.

and etymology of question-making, the limitations of correlating particular problematic queries to the age of questions and the threat of universal war, and an explanation of her methodological survey of patterns among questions rather than providing specific history for each one. The source base of the book is vast, making use of a plethora of pamphlets, diaries, diplomatic documents, literary works, and more.

Given the importance of the nation as the primary unit of analysis in previous eras of historiography, Case begins the categorization of questions with the transition between the age of empires to nation-states and the dialogue between the two forms of polity. Case adeptly explains the relationship of the public sphere to international questions articulated by querists in newspapers, such as the anti-slavery question. Meanwhile, the content of questions in the international public sphere became distinctly national, due to the salience of diplomacy in the wake of the Napoleonic Era, proceedings of government bodies in the press, the rise of activism of national liberation, and how these factors shaped emergent public opinion.⁶ The schema of questions for “outsiders” featured the dual vantage points of wanting out (e.g. of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, servitude or ghettos) and wanting in (enslaved people, women, and Jews with regards to basic rights), both perspectives disseminated through the public sphere beyond the particular nation-state for a given minority.⁷ Likewise, the discourse of emancipation was a key undercurrent of this age, characterized by a “moralizing tone” and querists’ competencies in multiple categories of question.⁸ Given the breadth of querists’ analysis, it is not surprising that they bundled emancipatory questions together, for example,

⁶ Case, 43-50.

⁷ Case, 46.

⁸ Case, 73.

the Polish, Belgian, and Greek questions in the French press of 1830.⁹ Likewise, Case also remarks on the ‘West India’ and anti-slavery questions as being bundled around that eventful time.¹⁰

Chapter 3, which describes how certain questions veered politicians and publics towards war, also addresses the genealogy of the genocidal term ‘Final Solution.’ It interrupts the whiggish sensibility of the previous two chapters by explaining ‘the dark side of emancipation,’ especially through the Russian Empire’s patronage in Southeastern Europe, ‘the dark side of bundling’ through an explanation of how querists saw the possibility of international conflict in the Greek and Polish Questions, and ‘the dark side of equilibrium’ linking the geopolitical questions in Eastern Europe with social tension in the West.¹¹ The questions opened up by the Nazis encouraged the irredentism of their allies, bundling different minority questions with their genocidal policy towards Jews, and the involvement of these satellite states in the war against the Soviet Union.¹² The subsequent chapter on grand plans of federation continues a thread of comparing and contrasting the ideas of diplomat Adam Czartoryski with those of warmonger Emil Hammacher, noting that both imply the erasure of national borders.¹³ Case then charts the course of questions evolving from indefinite to definite, and from a national to a pan-European scale. Federative questions were also weaponized against the Ottoman Empire to solve the ‘Eastern Question’ of 1876-1878, proposing that a Balkan Federation reach Istanbul, or that this city be ruled by a council of European nations – as proposed by a counterfactual pamphlet.¹⁴ Federalism was an answer to a range of long nineteenth-century national questions, thereby gesturing at complex notions of sovereignty while simplifying them. Such solutions were proposed by

⁹ Case, 75-80.

¹⁰ Case, 42-43.

¹¹ Case, 101-115.

¹² Case, 130-133.

¹³ Case, 136.

¹⁴ Case, 143-144, cf. 147-148.

figures as ideologically diverse as Lajos Kossuth, Gyula Andrassy, Jr., Joseph Conrad, and Leon Trotsky.¹⁵

Next up is the argument about farce, which shifts the epistemology of questioning, given that the discourse of ‘questions as politically salient personal truths for public consumption, whether actualized or not’ is cast into doubt. Along with the contrasting case of Jacob Toury’s honest misattribution of the origins of the ‘Jewish Question,’ Case shows that many querists purposefully misdated the historical appearance of their queries. The main pattern here is that historical events and their formulation into questions decades later are conflated, and therefore much of the context is absent for relevant audiences.¹⁶ This marketing paradigm of big questions is not unlike Benedict Anderson’s introduction to nationalism in *Imagined Communities*, in which he emphasizes the stark contrast between “the objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.”¹⁷ This transitions into the *Bad Faith* subheading, in which Oswald Spengler and Karl May are invoked to assert that many of these questions are considered exclamatory, and implicitly pre-empt themselves.¹⁸ With attention to the materiality of her sources, Case observed one book pertaining to the Polish Question that had pages raggedly ripped out from it, and others with polemical marginalia.¹⁹ The passion of the debates around such questions tended to ironically led to a backlash of boredom. Similarly, Arnold Toynbee remarked on the gap between this passion conveyed among journalists and parliamentarians, and indifference felt by ordinary people.²⁰

¹⁵ Case, 146, 150.

¹⁶ Case, 154-157.

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 5; cf. Case, *The Age of Questions*, 156.

¹⁸ Case, 157-159.

¹⁹ Case, 161-162, 294n52-53.

²⁰ Case, 177.

As the angle for Chapter 6, Case proposes a wider framing of the mania of questions through temporal variation. She remarks on the common trend of querists' bad timing in the nineteenth century, with the contrast of urgent questions such as that of anti-slavery. The ongoing anxiety regarding the 'Eastern Question,' among others, can be construed as a periodic urgency. Case illuminates this periodicity particularly well with the Transylvanian and Hungarian questions, which were 'chronically redefined' from their Habsburg contexts in the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century flashpoints of the 1940 Second Vienna Award and the speculation around the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.²¹ Case has demonstrated through extensive database research that some questions, e.g. Polish, featured 'mountains and valleys' of interest throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.²² Case begins to go full circle in the broad queristic ambit of her text, referring to the counterfactual 'Balkan Federation' pamphlet of Chapter 3, and relating it to a futuristic vision initially contextualized by Mary Gluck's work on fin-de-siècle Budapest.²³ Although such pamphlets may not quite fit into the realm of history proper or plausible public policy, there were still operative boundaries of genre for these questions insofar that poetry and novels rarely addressed such questions head-on.²⁴ Presumably 'timeless' philosophy and literature were similarly considered separate from the public relations, sociological and historical fields in which querists could be categorized.²⁵

In the final chapter, Case employs Ludwig Wittgenstein's remark about suspension of disbelief, an analogy of crossing a bridge from past to future, and doubt to faith²⁶ in conjunction with a similar analogy of querists' shoes spanning from past to future²⁷ to address the contradictions of the

²¹ Case, 184.

²² Case, 186-187, 305-306n36-38, 307-308n50.

²³ Case, 190-192, 309n64. Also see Mary Gluck, *The Invisible Jewish Budapest: Metropolitan Culture at the Fin De Siècle* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 35.

²⁴ Case, 193-195.

²⁵ Case, 204-206.

²⁶ Case, 209, 292n31.

²⁷ Case, 211-212.

age. She brings up the concept of automatism to give a sense that publicists and querists felt that certain questions would naturally push nations towards a large-scale war, which were ironically bundled with proclamations of peace emerging in the aftermath of such a conflagration.²⁸ “The suspension-bridge argument” finds an apogee with the political opponents Anton Szécsen and József Eötvös overcoming the contradictions of understanding the French Revolution and its motto on the same terms.²⁹ Although they disagreed on the “ruling principles” of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and 1789 French Revolution, their shared queristic idiom of the *Zeitgeist* ‘overcame’ their contradictions in the minds of many.³⁰

Case’s work is unique in its wide range and skilful appraisal of journalistic and other sources to reveal patterns and contradictions in recurring questions of the long nineteenth century. *The Age of Questions* is not only an eloquently written intellectual history but is also one that charts new ground in refusing to consider such questions at face value, especially in her appraisal of the contradictions and paradoxically formulated warmongering wrought by many of these publicists’ queries. Furthermore, her meta-level analysis of the discursive landscape of these large-scale (and smaller-scale) questions offers an intriguing approach to consider the spirit of the “extremely long nineteenth century.”³¹ Her work is a pioneering opening into the systematic study of these ‘question dynamics,’³² and paves the way for future work on the topic, similar to what Anderson did for nationalism in his *Imagined Communities*.

Sean Remz

Concordia University

²⁸ Case, 211-216, cf. 105.

²⁹ Case, 218-220.

³⁰ Case, 219.

³¹ Case, xiv.

³² Case, 10.