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REVIEW ARTICLE

An Age of Ages: Nation, Empires and their Discontents

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Mark Mazower, *What You Did Not Tell: A Russian Past and the Journey Home* (New York: Other Press, 2017), 365pp. (hp), \$25.95, ISBN: 9781590519073

Holly Case, *The Age of Questions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 360pp. (hb), \$30, ISBN: 9780691131153

Matthew Frank, *Making Minorities History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 464pp (hb), 90£, ISBN: 9780199639441

Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, eds., *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Pasts of the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 365pp. (hb), €103,99, ISBN: 9783319606927

Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 372pp. (pb), £22.99, ISBN: 9781107645080

Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers, *The Human Body in the Age of Catastrophe: Brittleness, Integration, Science and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 416pp. (pb), \$35, ISBN: 9780226556451

Leonard Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 204pp. (pb), £36.99, ISBN: 9780199677177

In August 1902 the British Conservative MP for East London, William Evans-Gordon, spent two months in Eastern Europe surveying the living conditions of Jewish populations across the Russian Pale of Settlement. His reflections – and photographs – morphed into a booklet published the following year in London, entitled *The Alien Immigrant*.¹ Abstracts from the manuscript were read in the commission hearings that led to the adoption of the Aliens Act in 1905, a milestone in the introduction of immigration controls across the United Kingdom and the codification of the legal right to asylum.² Among the places that Evans-Gordon visited was Vilna, also known in Polish as Wilno – today's Vilnius. The city was 'one of the most congested cities of the Jewish pale'; it lay in 'the centre of the great Jewish drama'.³ Facing the misery of the Jewish ghetto Evans-Gordon ruminated on the conditions of life in the slums of

¹ Major W. Evans-Gordon, *The Alien Immigrant* (London: Heinemann, 1903).

² Caroline Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 211–7. See also Alison Bashford and Jane McAdam, 'The Right to Asylum: Britain's 1905 Aliens Act and the Evolution of Refugee Law', *Law and History Review*, 32, 2 (2014), 309–50.

³ Evans-Gordon, *The Alien Immigrant*, 47, 108.

east London which were populated by Jewish families during the period of the 'Great Departure'.⁴ Eerily anticipating present-day debates across Europe, *The Alien Immigrant* framed the migration crisis as a 'national question' and warned prospective migrants that the United Kingdom could not offer them a better future. Evans-Gordon's arguments gave popular anti-Semitism a progressive veneer. 'When altruism towards aliens leaves some of our poorest folk without homes and without work', he noted, 'it is time to say that the burden of solving the problems of Eastern Europe is not to be laid on them'.⁵

Yet it would be a mistake to reduce *fin de siècle* Vilna simply to a place of human misery. The city was a polyglot urban centre of commerce, with a sizeable working-class population and an openness to radical ideas. It attracted residents of neighbouring towns and villages in the Pale of Settlement that were unable or unwilling to leave Russia. One of the numerous young men migrating to Vilna in search of a better future was Markus Osipovich Mazower, previously known as Mordkhel, from Grodno, and latterly known as Max Mazower. Max was the grandfather of Mark Mazower, now one of the best-known living historians of modern Europe.

Max is one of the key characters in Mark Mazower's historical reconstruction of his family history, entitled *What You Did Not Tell*. Vilna transformed Max's life. In Vilna, he joined the nascent Bund, the first internationalist association of socialist political groups operating across the Russian empire fighting for social and national-cultural emancipation. It is highly unlikely that Evans-Gordon met Max in Vilna for, by 1902, Max's political activities had him detained and displaced across Russia. The aftermath of the 1905 revolution prompted him to search for another home. In 1909, at the age of thirty-five, Max put his radical past behind him and moved to north London, where he hoped to settle and build a new life. Britain became his new home. Max's London was worlds apart from the London described in the *Alien Immigrant*. Max was neither a refugee nor was he forced to emigrate to London. His internationalist activities – anathema to conservatives like Evans-Gordon who feared the spread of subversive ideas – were consigned to the past. However, Max continued to enjoy a mobile life; during the Great War he would return to Russia 'not as a revolutionary, but as a kind of glorified salesman'.⁶ There he met his future wife, Frouma, who would eventually settle with him in London and together they would start a family. A decade later, during the mid-1930s, Max, Frouma and their young son Bill became British citizens. Shortly thereafter their secular Jewish household in north London would offer refuge to persecuted émigrés fleeing Central and Eastern Europe.

Building on Max and Bill's life, *What You Did Not Tell* sketches the microcosm of a diasporic family moving between the United Kingdom, France, Russia and Spain. The dialectic of memory and belonging reaches a poetic climax in the mobilisation, and decoding, of a parallel register of visual sources in the form of family photographs. In a move similar to Sebald's *The Emigrants (Die Ausgewanderten)*, Mazower utilises a number of photographs as sources in their own right.⁷ He stages the tale of a family in flux, implicated in the contradictory features of Europe's late nineteenth and twentieth century, an age of imperial transitions, nationalist agitations and internationalist aspirations. These broad themes have long preoccupied Mazower's own historical writing and topical studies on the rise of authoritarianism and the devastating impact of Nazism in South Eastern Europe. The book features autobiographical snippets of the author's upbringing in post-war Britain, the social tensions of the Thatcherite era, his studies at St Antony's College and his encounter with the anthropologist, and expert on Modern Greece, John Campbell.⁸ The fragments pertaining to the history of area studies in post-war Britain, and the centrality of Oxford's intellectual milieu, merit further

⁴ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016). See also David Feldman, 'Jews and the British Empire c.1900', *History Workshop Journal* 63, 1 (2007), 70–89.

⁵ Evans-Gordon, *The Alien Immigrant*, 46, 295.

⁶ Mark Mazower, *What You Did Not Tell: A Russian Past and the Journey Home* (New York: Other Press, 2017), 55.

⁷ W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants* (New York: New Directions, 2016).

⁸ Mark Mazower, ed., *Networks of Power in Modern Greece: Essays in Honour of John Campbell* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

exploration and are useful in unpacking the continuing impact that British historians and regional studies experts have exerted across Europe, and the world.⁹

The story of Max's life, and of so many others like Max, shows how the forces of nationalism, the political languages of internationalism and the dynamics of imperialism have shaped much of modern European history. The range of his activities touch on many of the key issues covered by the broad spectrum of the books considered in this review essay: the voluntary and coercive movement of populations across disputed territorial boundaries, the making of national states, the unravelling of imperial spaces and the impact of such events in European international thought and practice. As we will see, Mazower's book is only one of many recent publications in the field of modern European history that recover a thick web of ideas and practices produced at the crossroads of nation and empire in the early decades of the twentieth century.

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Max lived in a period of transitions – from the long nineteenth century to the short twentieth century, and from the age of empire to the age of extremes. The reference here to Eric Hobsbawm's periodisation is no accident for it is precisely this framework that gives meaning to the title of Holly Case's latest book, *Age of Questions*. The playfulness of the book's subtitle ('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') evokes the irony of the Borghesian reference to the Chinese encyclopaedia which Michel Foucault employed in the preface of his *Order of Things*.¹⁰ The book is a kaleidoscopic reflection on the modalities of thinking in terms of (national, imperial, social) *questions*. Case argues that in the early nineteenth century a set of events revolving around the expansion of the Anglophone press, the enlargement of the franchise in the United Kingdom and a sequence of international treaties ending the liberal-nationalist uprisings in Europe and gave rise to an international public sphere privileging debate in the form of 'questions', as problems in need of solutions, or ills to be ameliorated. British public intellectuals and parliamentarians became the protagonists of this new age of questions – and its arc gradually extended beyond the Anglophone sphere. Indeed, Evans-Gordon's earlier references to the migration crisis as a 'national question' and to the British inability to 'solve' the problems of Eastern Europe offers one small example of this tendency to think in questions.

The *Age of Questions* is not a comparative story about singular problems. Case is not interested in the *content* of the questions she addresses; rather, she focuses on the syntax of the question-*form*. She sheds light on the hinges that hold together questions as different as the 'women question', the 'negro question', the 'social question', the 'bullion question', the 'Eastern question' or the 'Vilnius question', to name but a few. She uses the term 'querists' to describe those thinking and writing in terms of questions, judging and critiquing the action and inaction of governments. She convincingly makes the point that the language of questions was a key feature of the domestic and international vocabulary of progressive reformers and racists, as well as nationalists and internationalists. The age of questions therefore can be seen as an age of nationalism *and* of cosmopolitanism, imperialism *and* anti-imperialism, emancipation *and* servitude, progress *and* decline, tolerance *and* genocide. In other words, the view of the world through the prism of 'questions', Case argues, holds together insoluble contradictions.

The age of questions derived its coherence from the incoherent way questions were broached. Querists propounded the need for definitive solutions to the questions they were interested in, and at the same time asserted the impossibility of such solutions. In Case's words, 'querists wanted to *span contradictions* between reality and ideal . . . timeliness and timelessness . . . the universal and the particular. Their questions were a way of being in two places at one'.¹¹ The aggregation of

⁹ See also Richard J. Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders: British Historians and the European Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), x.

¹¹ Case, *The Age of Questions*, 2.

domestic, national and international questions prompted pacifist warnings that the failure to solve them would result in war and, at the same time, accommodated views that only a universal war could solve them. From this perspective, the advent of Nazism, the author asserts, was ‘the logical culmination of a rampant querism that could neither formulate a clear objective nor admit defeat’.¹² Nevertheless, the coming of Hitler, who was a himself a ‘question bundler’, did not bring the age of questions to an end. Conceptualising international or domestic challenges in problem-solving terms constitutes a valid frame of thinking to this day. References to the ‘Brexit question’, the ‘Crimea Question’, the refugee and migration ‘question’, among others, abound in current political debates.

Case’s metahistorical survey offers useful comparative tools for a deeper and more creative understanding of the logic of problem solving and the querist tendency in modern international history and historiography. The rhetoric of ‘questions’ is to this day a widely used trope in historical scholarship. Another dimension of the *Age of Questions* which merits further attention concerns the debate on ‘national questions’. References to ‘national questions’ have framed discussions on international politics since the nineteenth century. The so-called ‘nationality question’ has preoccupied European thinkers and activists across the political spectrum, from Mazzini and JS Mill to Lord Acton and Renan, and from Otto Bauer to Lenin, Rosa Luxembourg and Stalin.¹³ In the British context, the ‘national question’ became a means by which Victorian thinkers related to Europe and the world and a rhetorical vehicle expressing conflicting nationalist, internationalist and imperialist world-views.¹⁴ Scholars have shown how in the Victorian and Edwardian period the debate on ‘national questions’ conveyed a range of views about democracy, liberty, patriotism and society.¹⁵

The Eastern Question weighs heavily in the *Age of Questions*. Although the term became a synonym for the decline of the Ottoman empire, the author traces its first appearance in early nineteenth-century parliamentary debates about British India. In the course of the nineteenth century the Eastern Question acquired a polysemy of meanings, which has led some historians of modern Turkey to characterise it as a ‘chameleon changing its colours with the environment’.¹⁶ Its very definition framed the horizon for its proposed solution; to use Case’s words, the Eastern Question functioned as ‘an umbrella concept covering various aspects of political debate rooted in the expectation of the imminent reconfiguration of the state system in the region’.¹⁷ In the Western metropolises, the debate on the Ottoman state system, as Jennifer Pitts has argued most recently, laid bare the Eurocentric boundaries of international legal thinking.¹⁸ Case, too, shows convincingly how debates on the

¹² Ibid., 97.

¹³ For primary sources see Stefano Recchia and Nadia Urbinati, eds., *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations: Giuseppe Mazzini’s Writings on Democracy, Nation Building, and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); JS Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), Ch. XVI; Lord Acton, ‘Nationality,’ *The Home and the Foreign Review* (July 1862); Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* (Sorbonne, 1882); Friedrich Meinecke, *Cosmopolitanism and the National State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970 [1907]); Otto Bauer, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1907]); Rosa Luxembourg, *The National Question* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976 [1909]); V.I. Lenin, *Theses on the National Question in Lenin collected Works*, Vol. 19 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977 [1913]), 243–51; Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (1913).

¹⁴ See, for instance, Georgios Giannakopoulos, ‘Internationalism between National Questions and Imperial Considerations: Henry Noel Brailsford and the Transformations of Central and Eastern Europe (1898–1919)’, *History of European Ideas*, 44, 2 (2018), 244–59.

¹⁵ Eugenio Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 206.

¹⁷ Case, *The Age of Questions*. See also Balász Trencsényi, et al., *A History of Modern Political Thought in East and Central Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 291.

¹⁸ Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2018). See also Davide Rodogno, ‘European Legal Doctrines on Intervention and the Status of the Ottoman Empire within the “Family of Nations” throughout the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of the History of International Law* 18 (2016), 5–41;

Eastern Question as a problem of sovereign order in the East bundled up domestic socio-political issues in the West.

A closer examination of the debates on the Eastern Question as a problem of international order offers another confirmation of the deeply paradoxical nature of thinking in terms of questions. Federative thinking – such as ideas for the creation of Balkan federations – constituted a commonplace ‘solution’ to the problem of the perceived Ottoman decline. Federations came to be regarded as ‘very nearly a consensus solution to Europe’s questions. . . both the defenders of empires and their most vociferous critics. . . posited competing federalist schemes’.¹⁹ Federal projects addressed crises of imperial rule in most European settings. The nature of the federal projects depended on the ideological principles framing each scheme, and on the geopolitical challenges on the ground. In the main, federal plans allowed varied degrees of pluralism and employed conflicting national and imperial principles to determine the shape of ethnically mixed territories. In many cases promoters of federative schemes and advocates of the principle of national toleration did not hesitate to propound more radical ‘solutions’ to protect minority populations. One such ‘solution’ was population transfer.

In *Making Minorities History* Matthew Frank traces the emergence of the modern concept of population transfer, articulated as a ‘solution’ to the question of Ottoman decline, in the European pamphlet literature on the Eastern Question. Frank claims to have detected ‘the foundational document on modern population transfer’ in a pamphlet by Siegfried Lichtenstädter, a self-styled German expert on the Near East, Turcophile and ardent nationalist, titled *Die Zukunft der Türkei* (1898).²⁰ In a nutshell, Lichtenstädter’s ‘solution’, albeit vague in the particulars, was based on the principle that the (forcible or voluntary) dislocation of Christians from Anatolia would create a stable homogenised modern Turkish state and bring about peace and security in the region.

Although Frank is correct to assert that coherent plans for the disaggregation of populations were not widely debated until the outbreak of the Great War, the argument that population transfer emerged in the pamphlet literature on the Eastern Question is misleading. Fantasies about ethnic unmixing can be traced back to 1848 in the Prusso-German and Russian imperial context.²¹ Furthermore, with regard to the Ottoman space, population transfers as ‘solutions’ to minority ‘questions’ are discernible in the *practice* of European interventions during the long nineteenth century and in proposals drafted by consuls, administrators and journalists operating across the eastern Mediterranean.²² By the turn of the century, therefore, the forcible displacement of populations featured in the repertoire of the European imperial states and in the vernacular of international lawyers.²³

The decade starting with the Balkan Wars and ending with the emergence of modern Turkey legitimised the practice of population transfer as a means to restore order and provide security to dislocated populations.²⁴ The forcible displacement of populations between Greece and Turkey in

Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32–100.

¹⁹ Case, *The Age of Questions*, 143–7.

²⁰ Frank, *Making Minorities History*, 18.

²¹ Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States: Ethnic cleansing in Modern Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), 17, 22–3.

²² Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire 1815–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 113–4.

²³ Mara Kozelsky, ‘Casualties of Conflict: Crimean Tartars during the Crimean War’, *Slavic Review*, 67, 4 (2008), 866–91; Umut Örsz, *Formalizing Displacement: International Law and Population Transfers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3; Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁴ For context see Robert Gewarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

the aftermath of the Greco–Turkish war in Anatolia was proposed as a solution designed to restore order, manage a refugee crisis and protect minority populations.²⁵ It bore the stamp of interwar liberalism. *Making Minorities History* offers a spirited critical assessment of the protagonists of this transformation – respected liberal statesmen such as the Greek and Czech premiers (Eleftherios Venizelos, Edvard Beneš) and internationalist humanitarians (Fridjof Nansen). The author applies somewhat ironically the term ‘Good Doctors’ to describe the League of Nations’ involvement in managing population transfers. He convincingly notes that Nansen’s involvement with the population exchange in Anatolia ‘not only helped give what was regarded an illiberal measure a legitimacy in international politics, but also lent to it a humanitarian character with a progressive dimension’.²⁶

The Greco–Turkish population exchange exemplifies a paradox inherent in the interwar international system, and one of the core features of the ‘age of questions’: the idea that the protection of minorities in some cases necessitated their elimination.²⁷ One of the key contributions of *Making Minorities History* is that it shows how population exchange was recast in the 1930s as a success story. It became ‘a bold and courageous act taken by wise and visionary statesmen’ and legitimising the Nazi ethnic cleansing projects in Europe and the partition plans of contested multi-ethnic territories, such as Palestine.²⁸ Much like the ‘age of questions’, the notion of population transfer as a ‘solution’ to (inter)national questions retained its resilience during the Second World War; in particular, it survived in federalist projects and human rights-based discourses. Frank shows how the idea grew in the minds of League internationalists, exiled central European liberals and Jewish émigrés alike. Even those such as Pablo de Azcárate who rejected references to the ‘question’ or ‘problem’ of national minorities because it ‘implied an answer . . . as susceptible of solution as those of physics or mathematics’, supported the expediency of small-scale population transfers.²⁹

Although the aftermath of the Second World War marked the formal end of mass population transfer as an instrument of international politics, the practice had an afterlife in the era of decolonisation. The global fame of the Greek–Turkish solution to the ‘minority question’ reached the shores of India and Palestine and framed the management of their respective partitions.³⁰ Always construed as an option of last resort, this particular, ‘solution’ is still with us and frames current efforts to tackle ‘seemingly insolvable disputes involving minorities’ from Cyprus and Northern Ireland, to Bosnia and Kosovo.³¹ The recent Turkish intervention in the Kurdish regions of Syria is yet another reminder of the contemporary significance of the politics of ethnic cleansing and population transfer. *Making Minorities History* offers a much needed reconstruction of the liberal beginnings of a practice in international politics that has become a symbol of intolerance and illiberalism.

The European history of population transfers points to the complicated relation between nationalist claims, imperial interests and internationalist commitments. These concepts have recently been the subject of renewed attention by international historians and historians of international relations. Scholars are beginning to excavate new forms of internationalism, moving beyond the great divide

²⁵ See also Umut Ösü, *Formalizing Displacement*; Ösü, ‘“A Thoroughly Bad and Vicious Solution”: Humanitarianism, the World Court, and the Modern Origins of Population Transfer’, *London Review of International Law* 1, 1 (2013), 99–127.

²⁶ Frank, *Making Minorities History*, 89.

²⁷ See also Eric D. Weitz, ‘From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations and Civilizing Missions’, *American Historical Review* (Dec. 2008), 1313–43; ‘Self-Determination: How a German Enlightenment Idea became the Slogan of National Liberation and a Human Right’, *American Historical Review* (Apr. 2015), 462–96. See also Eric D. Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation States* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019).

²⁸ Frank, *Making Minorities History*, 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

³⁰ See also Laura Robson and Arie Dubnov, eds. *Partitions: A Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Territorial Separatism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

³¹ Frank, *Making Minorities History*, 378.

set by the political ideologies of the nineteenth century, namely liberal and socialist internationalism.³² The two volumes reviewed here – the first edited by Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, and the second by Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin – set an ambitious agenda for this new international history. Can this shift give rise to a new field, that of ‘internationalism studies’ as Sluga and Clavin claim, gesturing towards the disciplinisation of the study of nationalism and imperialism? How is the international to be theorised in light of current planetary challenges? What is the relationship between the national, the imperial, the global and the international? To be sure, as Sluga and Clavin argue, a first move towards the study of the international requires the ‘critical appraisal of the still-persistent manifestations of epistemological and methodological nationalisms that have dominated the writing of the *national*, *international*, and *imperial* histories for years’.³³ In this vein, the volumes make a convincing case for the need to uncover the effects of the symbiosis of nationalism and internationalism in an age of formal and informal imperial rule. They cover an impressive thematic range featuring case studies on issues of development, health, law, human and social rights, capitalism and religion.

Many of the chapters featured in the two edited volumes recover neglected episodes from the life of international organisations which are increasingly viewed, to use Sandrine Kott’s words, as ‘sites of internationalisation’.³⁴ Historians are beginning to rediscover sites of cooperation and contestation relating to a host of socio-political, cultural and economic challenges such as trafficking, labour, health and minority rights.³⁵ Nothing exemplifies this turn to the history of international cooperation better than the resurgence of the interest in the League of Nations. The space created by the League also enabled the recognition of new political subjectivities. Reflecting on what she calls the ‘woman question’ in international thought, Glenda Sluga argues that, despite its rigid cultural and racial hierarchies, the ‘new spirit of Geneva’ functioned as an entry point for women in the management of world politics and facilitated the creation of feminist networks across Europe.³⁶ Sluga’s intervention is part of a wider and timely systematic effort to write the contribution of women back into the canon of international thought.³⁷

Both edited volumes also address a worrying side effect of the resurgence of interest in the history of internationalism, and interwar internationalism more specifically: the tendency to idealise the ‘Geneva spirit’ (*l’esprit de Genève*) and to overemphasise the stories of international cooperation emanating from the sites of international exchange. The dynamics of internationalisation associated with the League of Nations could move in diametrically opposed directions, from anti-imperialism to authoritarianism.³⁸ As several contributions to these two volumes show, the exclusive emphasis on the merits of collaboration and interchange tends to underplay the degree of colonial violence and the misery inherent in experiments administered by the guardians of the new liberal-imperial order

³² David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, eds., *Nationalism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations* (New York: SUNY University Press, 2006); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Jessica Reinich, ed., ‘Special Issue: Agents of Internationalism’, *Contemporary European History*, 25, 2 (2016); Philippa Hetherington and Glenda Sluga eds., ‘Liberal and Illiberal Internationalisms’, *Journal of World History*, 31, 1 (2020).

³³ Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History*, 7.

³⁴ Sandrine Kott, ‘Towards a Social History of International Organisations: The ILO and the Internationalisation of Western Social Expertise (1919–1949)’, in Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, eds., *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Pasts of the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2018), 33–57, at 34. See also Pedersen, *The Guardians*.

³⁵ Magaly Rodriguez Garcia, Davide Rodogno and Liat Kozma, eds., *The League of Nations Work on Social Issues: Visions, Endeavours and Experiments* (New York: United Nations Publications Office, 2016).

³⁶ Glenda Sluga, ‘Women, Feminisms and Twentieth Century Internationalisms’, in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 61–84, at 69–76.

³⁷ V. Huber, T. Pietsch and K. Rietzler, ‘Women’s International Thought and the New Professions, 1900–1940’, *Modern Intellectual History* (published online May 2019); Patricia Owens, ‘Women and the History of International Thought’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 62, 3 (2018), 467–81.

³⁸ Madeleine Herren, ‘Fascist Internationalism’, in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2017, 191–212; Michel L. Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

associated with the League of Nations such as partitions, population exchanges and other normative regimes of exclusion.³⁹

The decade of war and conflict which started with the Balkan Wars was a pivotal moment for the emergence of the subjecthood of the modern refugee, as well as for the consolidation of modern humanitarianism.⁴⁰ As the ‘age of questions’ morphed into an ‘age of catastrophe’, a deluge of (national, social, imperial, international) questions demanded solutions. Alongside the brute force of war, international associations came into being to address these questions. The vocabulary of biology and medicine heavily influenced the language of problem solving.⁴¹ Nationalists and patriots fought wars, internationalists and pacifists organised peace, humanitarians offered relief and physiologists studied the human body. The Great War became a milestone in the evolution of medical practice. The large-scale destruction of the war affected the human body on an unprecedented scale. The theatres of war produced a living laboratory of limbs and wounded bodies in the hands of physiologists, scientists and caretakers. The recovery of the medical practice and expertise is one aspect of the broader mobilisation of the intellect brought about by the war.

In their co-authored volume, *The Human Body in the Age of Catastrophe*, Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers track the shift from the physiologist’s laboratory to the ‘hospital’ as a site of experimental knowledge, a move with considerable implications both for the future of medical practice and the theorisation of human ‘individuality’. The authors argue that the Great War ‘operationalised’ individual cases, turning the human bodies into ‘new theatres of subjectivity’.⁴² One of the most original and provocative arguments of the book is the claim that the recovery of the medical thought and practice regarding shock, aphasia, anxiety and histamine subverted the concept of ‘individuality’ – a move traditionally associated with the philosophical thinking of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud.⁴³ This alternative history of individuality relies on the recovery of the debates and practices that invented modern physiology and allows the authors to reconstruct the muted dialogue between Freudian psychoanalysis and physiology. Focusing on the emergence of the Freudian death drive, the authors argue that key advances of post-war psychoanalysis may be read as a ‘careful response to contemporary physiological and neurophysiological turns’.⁴⁴

The reconstitution of the human body in the age of catastrophe ‘inflected political metaphors and economic, technological, and anthropological theory in ways that intellectual history and the history of political thought have ignored’.⁴⁵ As Geroulanos and Meyers argue, taking the physiology of the human body and medical concepts like ‘integration’ seriously explains the abundance of physiological and biological metaphors in the social, political and international thought of the period. Physiological metaphors structured the vocabulary of internationalist thought or, as the authors put it, ‘internationalism had an easy time carving similes and structures from the sciences of the body and mapping them onto advocacies of integration’.⁴⁶ The employment of the language of integration ‘averted the dilemmas of both nationalists and communists, generally providing the rationale for an organisation that allowed the extension of liberal hope’.⁴⁷ In this spirit the authors point out the affinities between

³⁹ Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, ‘A League of Empires: Imperial Political Imagination and Interwar Internationalisms’, in Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, eds. *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Pasts of the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 87–126, at 90.

⁴⁰ Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴¹ Case, *The Age of Questions*, 169–70.

⁴² Geroulanos and Meyers, *The Human Body*, 88.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 260–1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

Leonard Woolf's *International Government* (1916) and the physiology of hormonal regulation, as well as between Jan Smuts' scientific holism and the concept of integration. They also note that Alfred Zimmern's post-war writings 'literalized states into wounded, exhausted, neurasthenic bodies'.⁴⁸ This claim that the foundations of the international order in the 1920s 'relied on parallel registers of bodily and biological metaphors for the meaningfulness of the relations it described' is convincing and ought to be further explored. Historians tend to neglect the implications of the medical metaphors permeating the political and cultural vocabulary of the period.⁴⁹ A way towards addressing this shortcoming would entail a reappraisal of the concept of sovereignty.⁵⁰ The centenary of the Paris Peace conference – a symbolic moment of world making which defined the interwar international order – offers an opportunity to rethink questions of sovereignty and international order.

Leonard Smith's long overdue history of the Paris Peace Conference, entitled *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference*, centres on the notion of sovereignty defined as 'the right or the authority to set the parameters of political society'.⁵¹ The book has an ambitious scope that sets it apart from previous ceremonial histories focusing on the deeds of the so-called 'peacemakers' and their acolytes.⁵² To the extent that the Great War was a 'deluge of questions', to use Case's words, the Paris Peace Conference constituted a testing ground for 'solutions', which in many cases were pursued in locations far from Paris.⁵³ Smith correctly emphasises that the deliberations at the conference gave birth to institutions that were designed to thwart communist internationalism, neutralise the rise of anti-colonial sentiment and reconcile labour with the workings of global capitalism. In Smith's account the 'age of questions' and the 'age of catastrophe' converge. Central to Smith's historical reconstruction is the medical and scientific metaphor of the 'laboratory', a metaphor he borrows from TG Masaryk's description of the Paris Peace Conference as a 'laboratory built over a vast cemetery'.⁵⁴ Paris therefore became the site where 'sovereignty . . . evolve[d] not as a solved problem, but as responses to a set of riddles . . . questions without self-evident answers'.⁵⁵

How did the Paris Peace Conference become a 'laboratory' of experimentations about sovereignty? To answer this question, Smith relies on the conventional narrative about the conference and its objectives. He begins by discussing the intellectual origins of 'Wilsonianism'. Drawing from a nineteenth-century tradition of thinking about liberty as the attribute of rational and autonomous individuals as self-sovereign citizens, the Wilsonian vision of the state, Smith argues, envisioned a 'transnational community of liberal citizens' sustained by covenants between states.⁵⁶ From this perspective, the Paris Peace Conference is seen as a 'world sovereign' erected to mark the transition from 'self-determination' to 'national-self-determination'.⁵⁷ Channelling recent debates on the racialised foundations of the Wilsonian liberal order, Smith also highlights the hierarchies and exclusionary strategies at play in the global citizenry

⁴⁸ Ibid., 258. On Zimmern and Smuts see Jeanne Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

⁵⁰ See, among others, Laureen Benton, *A Search For Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Svi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos and Nicole Jerr, eds., *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

⁵¹ Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference*, 2.

⁵² Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: Six Months that Changed the World* (London: J. Murray, 2001).

⁵³ Marcus M. Paik and Roberta Pegher, eds., *Beyond Versailles: Sovereignty, Legitimacy and the Formation of New Politics after the Great War* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019).

⁵⁴ Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference*, 13.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 7–8.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 38.

envisaged by the rhetoric of self-determination.⁵⁸ What should not be neglected, however, is the counterrevolutionary pedigree of the Wilsonian moment which, as Adom Getachew has argued, turned self-determination into ‘a racially differentiated principle, which was fully compatible with imperial rule’.⁵⁹

The bulk of Smith’s analysis revolves around three core themes. First, the different forms of statehood that emerged in response to the collapse of imperial authority in Central, Eastern Europe and the Middle East: ‘successor state’ and the ‘mandates’. The new territorial settlements offered the most extensive ‘experiment’ with sovereignty. The ‘successor state’ was structured ‘by an *impossibility* – a unitary, sovereign state that combined “national” and “historic” boundaries’.⁶⁰ This impossibility governed the decisions on the ‘mixing of Lands’ and the ‘unmixing of peoples’, for the conference, as Smith succinctly notes, ‘adjusted boundaries to suit people’ and then proceeded to ‘adjust people to suit the [envisaged] boundaries’.⁶¹ The mandates system, on the other hand, offered a more productive alternative to earlier annexation policies applied to imperial domains.⁶²

The most ‘sophisticated’ debates on sovereignty, Smith argues, were held at the ‘Commission of Responsibilities’ populated by international lawyers entrusted with the task of deciphering the degree of culpability of individuals and heads of state. This is the second core theme explored in the volume. Smith analyses the traditions of legal positivism and natural law that reflected British, French and American viewpoints. Although the commission produced a report breaking ‘new if vague legal ground by asserting personal criminal liability on the part of those leading the defeated powers, including heads of state’, the prevailing consensus required sovereigns to be held accountable to the domestic legal order of their national entity.⁶³ Proposals about the setting up of international tribunals were careful not to invent new legal norms.

The third theme covered by the book centres on the foundation of the League of Nations and its assorted institutions – a story which exceeds the narrow confines of Paris. Although the League of Nations, Smith argues, continued the ‘laboratory of sovereignty established at the conference itself’, the prevalence of state interests rendered the assumption of some form of supranational legal personhood impossible.⁶⁴ This impossibility, however, did not negate the fact that the League constituted a testing ground for practices in international government and a stage enabling the articulation of demands and the recognition of alternative political projects.

Although Smith rightly criticises the ‘realist’ and ‘idealist’ readings of the League that have defined the field of international relations, as well as the decline and fall narrative which for decades was the dominant paradigm in the international history of the period, his account fails to grapple with the extent of the question he proposes. How was sovereignty imagined, crafted and *performed* in Paris? Did the League of Nations constitute the only (or even the principle) site for the remaking of the world? Why have scholars recently started to underplay the significance of Paris and focus instead on the longer-term processes of imperial transformation to explain the reconfigurations of international order?⁶⁵ How do the

⁵⁸ See Erez Manela’s classic *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For recent monographs on Wilson and self-determination see Thygve Throntveit, *Power Without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017); Larry Woolf, *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).

⁵⁹ Adom Getachew, *World-Making After Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 40. See also Jeanne Morefield *Empires without Imperialism*.

⁶⁰ Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference*, 38.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶² Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). For a recent appraisal of the mandates system see ‘AHR Reflections: The League of Nations Mandates and the Temporality of Deferral’, *American Historical Review* 124, 5 (Dec. 2019).

⁶³ Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference*, 78.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 225

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Jonathan Wrytzen, *Reimagining the Middle East: Jihads, Empires and the Long Great War* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

‘experiments’ with sovereignty and the so-called ‘expansion of the international society’ map onto a broader nineteenth-century story of colonial exploitation and of global inequality?⁶⁶

To be sure, the League of Nations and its assorted institutions became sites in which, as Natasha Wheatley has argued, ‘a host of sub-, supra- and trans-state subjects disputed the state’s exclusive status in international law and order’.⁶⁷ The mandates system and the minority protection regime structured new political and inter/trans/national subjectivities that transcended the territorial national state; they constituted stages for the (sometimes violent) performance of sovereignty by non-state actors, and, as Antony Anghie has shown, they were part of a much longer story of global inequalities.

These issues, and questions, have been at the forefront of recent scholarly interest in the League of Nations, and Smith’s book could have benefitted from a more systematic consideration of these alternative perspectives. The capaciousness of the volume makes these omissions all the more regrettable.

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In the 1920s, around the time of the ‘solution’ of the Greek-Turkish ‘question’ – and two decades after Evans-Gordon’s visit – Vilna still had its reputation as a vibrant centre for Jewish cultural life. Uncomfortably located in the borderlands of the new Eastern Europe, the city soon became a ‘question’ in its own right. Polish and Lithuanian nationalism clashed over the ‘Vilnius’ or ‘Wilno’ question – one of the countless ‘questions’ debated in Geneva in the shadow of the communist international threat. Max Mazower returned to Vilna in this period and visited Grodno, his hometown, now a city in Belarus, to obtain a birth certificate, ‘a wide and necessary precaution in an era in which statelessness meant vulnerability’.⁶⁸ The question was eventually ‘solved’ by occupation and civil war on the backs of the city’s Jewish population. With the Final Solution and the readjustment of the region’s frontiers, in Timothy Snyder’s words, ‘the historical sense of ‘Lithuania’ wore away. Wilno became, in a famous post-war poem, ‘The City Without a Name’. Its name became . . . Vilnius’.⁶⁹ The ‘Vilnius question’ has not withered away; much like the ‘age of questions’ it continues to cast its shadow in the region, challenging historical assumptions and testing the political realities on the ground. The changes of the city’s name serve as a reminder of the transformations and the contradictory features of an age of ages: a period giving rise to a multitude of temporal horizons and accommodating interlocking national, imperial and international imaginaries.

Taken together, the cluster of books discussed in this piece do not constitute interventions in a clearly articulated field of research. The themes they tackle address key features of an era marking the medicalisation of the human body, the constitution of international political bodies and the rise and fall of international cooperation. Yet the ideas and practices discussed in these books, which are commonly treated separately by historians, affected the lives of individuals in interlocking ways as they went through processes of ‘mixing’ and ‘unmixing’ across Europe and the world.

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⁶⁶ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*, 32–194.

⁶⁷ Natasha Wheatley, ‘New Subjects of International Law and Order’, in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). See also Mira Siegelberg, *Statelessness: A Modern History* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2020).

⁶⁸ Mazower, *What You Did Not Tell*, 82.

⁶⁹ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus 1569–1999* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 52–73, at 73.