

anti-Communist propaganda, as was the Vatican. In the end, the Christian Democrats won with 48.5 percent of the vote—the communists gathering only 31 percent (145). Stalin was not happy with the moderate communist leader Palmiro Togliatti about the outcome: Italians had chosen the path of democracy. The chapter about the Berlin blockade deals with the division of Germany in 1948/49. Stalin did not want war over Berlin and did not mobilize the Red Army at home, nor did he reinforce troops in the Soviet zone (159). The blockade made Berliners turn to the West just like West Germany turned to the West after 1949 (159). The outcome of the crisis was that “both Berlin and Germany were divided even more than before the crisis had started” (192).

Moscow wanted a “friendly” and “democratic” Poland after the war, which meant that “the rulers in Moscow would determine the character of Poland’s postwar government as well as its political leadership” (196). The Polish communists who had stayed in Moscow during the war were subservient to Stalin and came to dominate the party leadership after the war. Those like Władysław Gomułka, who remained in Poland and fought in the underground, favoured a “Polish road to socialism.” An independently-minded communist leader like Tito in Yugoslavia, Gomułka frequently crossed swords with Stalin and with the fractious party leadership, consequently leading to his ouster as party chief in 1948 (230). Naimark stresses how such independence among satellites was not appreciated in the Kremlin.

Naimark is to be lauded for including a chapter on Austria, which in much Anglo-American literature is normally subsumed under Germany. He shows a sure hand in postwar Austrian affairs, having served as the co-editor of a volume of important Soviet documents published by the Academy of Sciences in the anniversary year 2005. Based on documents from this collection, Naimark is as critical of Austrian communists, who wanted to divide the country in 1948 on Tito’s advice, as the Kremlin leaders were after the war (245). Unlike much of the country, the Austrian communists did not want the occupation to end. Zhdanov chided the Austrian communist leaders: “We believe in your strength. You don’t. That’s the main difference between us” (261). That leaves us with the question: Were the Kremlin leaders more Austrian than the Austrian communists? There is one correction to be made in the Austrian section: Karl Renner was not the “first president of the Austrian Republic (1918)” (235) but the first chancellor. In the Second Republic, he would serve as the first chancellor of the provisional government, set up by Stalin and the Soviets, and then as the first president.

Naimark concludes the book with some observations on “memory politics” in Europe related to World War II, indeed a very contemporary topic. He could not foresee that the war against Ukraine, unleashed by Vladimir Putin in 2022, would change the geopolitical landscape of Europe, with Finland joining NATO in 2023 and Austria discussing the utility of its neutral status.

doi:10.1017/S0067237823000681

## **Nigrin, Tomáš. *The Rise and Decline of Communist Czechoslovakia’s Railway Sector***

**Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022. Pp. 256.**

Zdeněk Tomeš

Masaryk University  
[tomes@econ.muni.cz](mailto:tomes@econ.muni.cz)

This book analyzes the development of Czechoslovak socialist railways, representing an original and deep study of the railways functioning in the socialist economy. The author does not limit himself to the analysis of national realities but tries to put them into a broader context by comparing them

with the development of railway systems in other communist countries. Using a variety of original resources and an interdisciplinary approach to the topic, the author hypothesizes that the dominance of rail transport was dictated by inflexible, long-term planning that limited the ability of railways to adapt toward higher efficiency. An alternative hypothesis could be formulated based on the observation that the central plans were determined by the economic possibilities of the command economy. If we accept this view, then the development of the rail system in Czechoslovakia was determined by the limits of the command economy, and central planning only reflected these limits.

The author's work is evidence-based, and I appreciate the inclusion of many economic statistics that allow intertemporal and sometimes international comparison, giving the analysis a sound quantitative basis. I also appreciate that the analysis includes an economic framework, which is not always the rule in historical works. The growth of road transport is a key factor in the development of rail transport in the period under review. While the author addresses this issue in several places, it may have been worthwhile to include a more comprehensive (sub)chapter documenting the changing importance and perception of passenger and freight road transport in the socialist economy.

Nigrin begins by historicizing the development of the railway system. I have two comments on the conclusions presented here. First, I question whether it was indeed an advantage that the railway system in Czechoslovakia, unlike some other countries, avoided significant damage during the war. Many countries with destroyed railway infrastructure proceeded to significantly modernize it, which improved its parameters and fundamentally affected its competitiveness in the future. Second, when analysing the different historical periods, it would be useful to emphasize that the railways operated in very different economic systems (market economy, war economy, socialist economy), which significantly determined their opportunities and achievements.

The author provides a very interesting (and readable) analysis of the functioning of the federal Ministry of Transport. He also offers a very realistic description of the motives, actions, and consequences of the actions of the various actors in railway policy, showing that in many cases, socialist transportation policy makers cannot be generalized into mindless implementers of plans or forged partisans, but that the economic games in the socialist economy were far more varied and many of the actors had, even from today's perspective, a very honest and rational approach to transportation needs. However, Nigrin's analysis shows that even these well-intentioned efforts were doomed to failure in a socialist economic system because of the priority given to planned or ideological factors.

The author explains the stagnation of socialist railways in the 1980s by the gradual neglect of rail transport by the plan and the authorities of the time. In contrast to this interpretation, however, an alternative economic interpretation can also be offered, which argues that in the 1970s (and perhaps as early as the late 1960s), rail transport in the socialist economy hit the limits of its potential development, due not only to investment constraints but also to the very limits of the centrally planned economy.

I appreciate that the author's analysis has been contextualized internationally. Rather surprisingly, this reveals that the mutual relations between the countries of the socialist camp were not nearly as idyllic as one might have expected. Nigrin gives a very lively account of the quarrel over the level of railway tariffs that Czechoslovakia and Poland had with each other, as well as the reasons that led to this quarrel. Other international comparative passages present interesting and factual probes into the workings of the socialist camps, their economies, and their railway systems.

To me, the overall thrust of the book suggests an alternative hypothesis to the author's regarding the dominant role of the plan on the development of the railway industry, namely, the influence of economic factors. In my view, it can be argued that the railroad industry, after a period of dramatic growth in the first five years, entered a period of stagnation not only due to neglect by the plan but also because the centrally planned economy had already hit the limits of its extensive development and it was simply no longer possible to grow at the same rates as in the 1950s. The plundering of mineral resources and the emphasis on quantitative parameters had hit the limits of economic performance within the Czechoslovak economy. It is true that there were a number of bottlenecks within the infrastructure that blocked further development. It is also true that the needs of the railway sector were not high on the investment priorities of central planning. Yet it is possible to speculate that even with more

support from central planning, the stagnation of the railways in the 1980s could not have been reversed.

The main contribution of the work is a thorough and in-depth analysis of the historical, economic, and political contexts of the development of socialist railways in Czechoslovakia. It presents a unique probe into the workings of this sector and enables an understanding of the historical development of the railway in the context of the political and economic development of socialist Czechoslovakia.

doi:10.1017/S0067237823000942

## Parvulescu, Anca, and Manuela Boatcă. *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires*

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022. Pp. 270.

Andrew Behrendt 

Department of Political Science, Missouri University of Science and Technology, Rolla, MO, USA  
E-mail: [behrendta@mst.edu](mailto:behrendta@mst.edu)

Innovative, boldly interdisciplinary, and conceptually ambitious, Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă's *Creolizing the Modern* defies easy classification. But that's only fitting for a book all about fracturing categories and dissolving borders. It fuses literary/critical theory, sociology, and history to bring Transylvania—and, by implication, East Central Europe—into methodological realms well explored by scholars of Latin American, Caribbean, and Asian post- and de-colonialism, but less familiar (in my experience) to Habsburg-area specialists. Taking as their analytical lodestar Laura Doyle's concept of inter-imperiality, Parvulescu and Boatcă present Transylvania as a European case study in a larger global history of coloniality and capitalism: a zone forged by the contestation of multiple empires and economic systems, which generated an intricate creolization of ethnicity, language, confession, and exploitation.

Though the book's aims are many, they coalesce around the deep reading of a single text, Liviu Rebreanu's novel *Ion* (1920). Regarded as a landmark work in the Romanian canon, it is scarcely known to outsiders. The novel takes place in a Transylvanian village in the early twentieth century and centers on the travails of its ethnically Romanian title character. Parvulescu and Boatcă summon from the novel a stunning galaxy of thematic investigations, and every chapter is its own constellation. Chapter 1 teases from *Ion*'s land-lust the contemporaneous politics of nationalism and the agrarian question in a globalized context. Chapter 2, propelled by Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, assesses Transylvania's integration into global capitalism and uses that frame, linked to *Ion*'s Jewish publican, to make sense of antisemitism. Chapter 3 argues for the overdue recognition of Romani music in labor history, tying it both to specific characters in the novel and the long but glossed-over record of slavery in the region. For chapter 4, the authors coin the term *interglottism*—essentially “multilingualism” with a critique of imperial power relations baked in—to parse the politics of language use in *Ion*, as well as to illuminate Transylvania's status as the birthplace of the comparative literature discipline. Chapter 5 examines the intensely gendered nature of nationalism, landownership, and the family through the plight of *Ion*'s oppressed, battered wife Ana. This flows compellingly into chapter 6, in which Parvulescu and Boatcă deftly evince the tension between nationalism and women's liberation in the late Habsburg Empire out of the novel's demonization of feminism as “poison” (139). The book terminates in chapter 7, where the authors knot all its thematic strands around that of religion, which likewise circumscribes *Ion* itself.