

aal maar ook als historische bron en als propagandamiddel van nationalisten (p. 43). Deze essentialistische kaart staat immers haaks op het constructivistische paradigma dat de auteurs huldigen – het constructivisme gaat ervan uit dat naties mentale constructies zijn, het essentialisme dat naties essentiële *givens* zijn van het menselijke samenleven. Bovendien neigt de kaart naar het anachronisme. België, bijvoorbeeld, in deze periode voorstellen als bestaande uit twee etnieën is een terugprojectie van de huidige situatie.

Deze kritiek neemt niet weg dat dit boek een absolute aanrader is en verplichte kost voor wie zich wil inlezen over de geschiedenis van naties en nationalisme in Europa.

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Irene Anastasiadou, *Constructing iron Europe. Transnationalism and railways in the Interbellum* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2011) 288 p. ISBN 978 90 5260 392 6.

With her dissertation *Constructing Iron Europe. Transnationalism and Railways in the interwar period*, Irene Anastasiadou positions herself in the young historiographical tradition of the internationalization of railways. From the late 19th century nation-states made a strong effort to leave their mark on railway developments. Nevertheless, the evolution of local private railways into both nationally and internationally active (state) railways did not take place in national isolation. Anastasiadou's attempt, therefore, to offer some counterweight to the strongly nationally oriented railway historiography by employing a 'transnational' perspective is to be welcomed. Nevertheless, such a perspective demands a well-defined and framed research goal. The dissertation succeeds only partially in meeting this requirement.

The study focuses on the question of which factors and motivations influenced the internationalization of railways in Europe in the interwar period. Anastasiadou concentrates on the interwar period, since it was at that time, according to her, that the internationalization of the railways became part of "a discussion about the construction of an international society" (p. 24). Her second, more specific goal, therefore, is to verify whether a generally shared 'European idea' might have been a motivation and formative factor in the internationalization of the railways (p. 13). Anastasiadou structured her dissertation thematically. The first core chapter focuses on plans and visions in interwar Europe regarding the internationalization of railways. Chapter three then gives an account of international organizations, such as the Transit Organisation of the League of Nations, the Union Internationale des Chemins de fer and the International Labor Office. These organisations actually shaped the international regime of railways. In chapter four Anastasiadou evaluates the degree of internationalization of European railways in the interwar period, while the practical difficulties of technological standardization in such an integration process are noted. The fifth chapter deals with a national case (Greece), and describes how national interests and the internationalization of railways may be in line with each other. In the final, recapitulating chapter Anastasiadou concludes that national interests determined the form and degree of integration of the European rail network. Moreover, she states (in contrast to what is suggested on the back cover) that no shared 'European idea' existed with regard to the railways in the interwar period.

Interesting as all the individual chapters may be, as a whole, they tend to be out of balance. This is mainly due to the poorly defined research question and the issue of the 'European idea'. Because in the period under research no international railways were actually constructed on the European continent (p. 94), the concept of 'internationalization' in the main question seems to refer to standardization processes within the technological, legal and administrative field. However, already in the first core chapter internationalization ideas that have never been put into practice are extensively presented. These "grandiose ideas" (p. 243) are fascinating, but Anastasiadou does not demonstrate their actual influence on the internationalization of European railways. Nor does it become clear what the historical importance of these ideas in the interwar period was. Did such internationalist ideas not occur in the 19th century? (p. 245). Or did they create a theoretical framework for internationalization processes after the Second World War? What is more, there is a chance that the main question diverts the attention too much to national politics. As Anastasiadou mentions in her introduction consensus on the fact that national interests played a formative role in the internationalization of the railways already exists (p. 18). It is thus a pity that she devotes an entire chapter to confirm this view once again with the case of Greece (Chapter 5).

Moreover, by putting the issue of the 'European idea' at the heart of the research, Anastasiadou risks pushing the greatest contribution of her study into the background: namely not only the fact that in the interwar period international organizations were active in the field of railways, but also that they were driven by other than national interests. The interwar period is known as a period in which nation-states were more prominent actors than ever before; that national borders were closed and international exchange of goods, people and capital was limited. Instead of focusing on the link between railway internationalization and the economic and political integration of Europe, Anastasiadou could have chosen to focus more consistently on these organisations and on their room for manoeuvre, perhaps in an 1870-1940 timeframe. A focus on the interests of international organizations would not only shed light on the functioning of those organizations in the rail sector in Europe, but also provide more insight into the importance of transnational actors in the formation of international railway regimes even in times of strong national governance like the interwar period. By doing so, the transnational perspective is anchored in the analysis and that is something the historiographical tradition of railways can only benefit from.

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Arlette Kouwenhoven, *De Fehrs. Kroniek van een Nederlandse mennonietenfamilie* (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: Atlas, 2011) 248 p. ISBN 978 90 450 2001 3.

Sommige onderwerpen dienen zich vanzelf aan, al wordt de kans daarop wel geringer in een tijd waarin steeds meer onderzoek planmatig wordt opgezet. Publicist Arlette Kouwenhoven, die eerder boeken schreef over Madagaskar en de Duits-Nederlandse arts Philipp Franz von Siebold, werd gegrepen door de aanwezigheid van afstammelingen van Nederlandse doopsgezinden in Noord-Mexico. Door toeval hoorde ze van hun bestaan, en nam de geschiedenis van deze opmerkelijke loot aan de Nederlandse