

Discourse, Hegemony, and Populism in the Visegrád Four. By Seongcheol Kim. Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. 2022. xviii, 316 pp. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. Bibliography. Index. \$160.00, hard bound; \$48.95, ebook. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.314

Seongcheol Kim has written an extraordinary book on central European populism. While the book claims to be the first full-length book on populism in the Visegrád countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), what distinguishes it from others is its theoretical approach rather than its country coverage. While most current debate on European populism utilizes the definition proposed by Cas Mudde, who identifies populism as a thin-centered ideology that poses an opposition between the people and an elite, Kim employs the post-Marxist, “post-foundational” framework of Ernesto Laclau. Kim spends the first chapter of this book explaining Laclau’s theory to the uninitiated and the second discussing how he applies it.

In essence, this “post-foundational discursive perspective” (43) takes discourse seriously. Discourses may not have much behind them, no pre-existing social structure or “foundation.” They may just be words or ideas or conceptualizations about politics. But they are constitutive, in the sense that the divisions they propose can organize politics, creating a teleology of good and evil that can reinvent political life. Populism discourse works in democracies because it posits a popular outgroup working against an entitled elite.

What makes this book exceptional is that Kim finds a way to operationalize Laclau’s theory as an empirical research strategy, applying it meticulously to every single populist party in the Visegrád region. The result is a magnificent analysis of the discourse of central European populisms that readers can apply regardless of whether they agree with the underlying theoretical perspective or not. Kim identifies equivalencies and oppositions in the rhetoric of every single populist party in the region, displaying significant and minute differences between the ways that they identify the oppressed majority and the privileged elite. For instance, the Czech ANO party reflects a centrist entrepreneur populism dedicated to fighting “parties” = “politicians” = “stealing” = “incompetence,” while supporting “hard work” = “people” = “businessman” = “state as a firm.” By contrast, the Czech Dawn party posits a neoliberal nativism in which “work” = “citizens” = “direct democracy” and opposes “unadaptables” = “immigrants” = “godfather party mafias.”

Populist scholarship on the region will never be the same, now that we have a database of the precise villains and saviors identified by every party from 1989 to its 2022 publication. Kim constructs this database of key words from programmatic documents, speeches, and in some cases interviews with populist leaders as his sources, all of which are helpfully displayed in tabular form at the end of each country chapter. What emerges from this exercise is a picture of populist discourses competing with one another to structure politics in particular ways, with different approaches to key concepts such as the nation and hegemonic projects like neoliberal economic reform.

The problem with post-foundationalism, of course, is that without a foundational theory, we have no way of knowing which of these ideational formations will be more or less powerful or successful. Rhetoric is everything. Other sources of power seem to exist in the background, but may or may not have any derivative outcome. Hence, Kim neatly catalogs populist political rhetoric much as a collector might array a butterfly collection, beautiful to behold. Yet without a theoretical framework, like Darwinism, that might explain why differences occur.

Instead, Kim relies on Grigori Pop-Eleches’ distinction between three “generations” of populism in the Visegrád countries, based on path dependency. In this

framework, particular issues and formations organize politics in a progression from movement- to party-based politics, each of which creates different opportunity sets for parties to exploit. Kim usefully shows that central European populism does evolve over time, more or less in step with Pop-Eleches' political periodization.

However, Kim's post-foundationalism leaves one wondering why. Post-foundationalism leaves the scholar unmoored, able to measure and categorize the waves, but unable to perceive the deeper patterns that animate them. Whether or not one finds this theoretical approach fulfilling, the results of Kim's study are impressive: a careful analysis of the rhetoric of every significant populist party in the region over thirty years. It makes an important scientific contribution and will become required reading for students of European populism. It could also usefully be replicated for all other countries in the world.

MITCHELL A. ORENSTEIN
University of Pennsylvania

The Post-Socialist Internet: How Labor, Geopolitics and Critique Produce the Internet in Lithuania. By Miglė Bareikytė. Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2022. 250 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Photographs. Figures. Tables. \$47.00, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.315

This focused, substantive book is a welcomed breath of fresh air in network historiography. *The Post-Socialist Internet* corrects the common narrative of internet development, including my own, which abstracts out to transnational spaces of sweeping connection and interoperability; instead, it attends to a bottom-up grounded case of Lithuanian internet as infrastructure. Without this book in hand, an alien reading the headlines about computer networks might mistake computer networks as mattering only in the US, China, the Soviet Union, France, Germany, and maybe a few others. Onto this stage enters Lithuania, a small country of less than three million inhabitants (twice that of Estonia) hugging the southeast Baltic Sea. Lithuania, once a neglected and often historically dependent county, now appears firmly on the proverbial map of network scholarship. *The Post-Socialist Internet* aims "to situate and complicate the global narrative of media technology development" (17) by planting internet infrastructure on the firm ground of Baumannian "strange" practice. Bareikytė stirringly calls for "a new critique of infrastructures that comprises the study of different regions and places and does not desire to consume their differences, messiness, and complexities into one all-explanatory story" (229).

Built atop over 1600 pages of author-gathered documentation, *The Post-Socialist Internet* chronicles the uneasy development of internet infrastructure in Lithuanian telecoms beginning with the first internet connection on the roof of the Parliament building in Vilnius in October 1991 through workplace and labor ethnography, semi-structured (often sparkling with *stio*) expert interviews, archival resources, and photograph-rich field observations of the supporting telecom industry. That only one of three dozen expert interviews was with a woman suggests feminist labor is a direction for future research.

Perhaps the book's distinctive accomplishment lies in astute observations amassed atop Bareikytė's eye for detail: for example, an apartment is described in passing as that of "a diplomat in Vilnius's old town: it had a high ceiling, walls painted. A stylish shade of grey, oil paintings, and several visible bottles of whisky" (100). The prose, ever zooming in on the complex messiness of grounded practice, remains welcoming, clear, and readable throughout. Clear style leavens complex