

Name of the student:	Mackenzie Baldinger
Title of the thesis:	Neo-feudalism and Neo-traditionalism: the Intersection of Cultural Discourse and Economic Policies in Fidesz's Hungary
Reviewer:	Brian Shaev (Leiden University)

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

This thesis clearly defines an appropriate set of research questions (with the partial exception of the final research question). The research objective sets the excellent task of transcending the existing dichotomy of cultural vs economic factors in the study of populist discourses by examining how these factors intersect in Hungary's Fidesz party and government. The literature review is quite well done on populism and draws in the scholarly concepts of neo-feudalism, neo-traditionalism and delayed transformational fatigue in a skillful manner to construct a clear and convincing research design.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The thesis rests on a wide and appropriate base of scholarly and journalistic sources. It is very well structured in a logical and productive manner. It systematically investigates through empirical examinations how the concept neo-traditionalism captures Fidesz's cultural policies and neo-feudalism captures Fidesz's economic policies. The real strength of the thesis is that it goes the next step to explore how Fidesz' neo-feudal economic policies and neo-traditionalist cultural policies reinforce and contribute to one another. In other words, instead of placing economics and culture in competition with each other as explanatory factors, it presents a more sophisticated design that demonstrates that the most fruitful approach is to investigate them together.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The conclusions are very clear and convincing at the individual and collective levels: first neotraditionalism, second neofeudalism, and third how neofeudalism helps finance the party's neotraditionalist cultural policies and how these cultural policies help create privileged constituencies where the conservative (or reactionary) cultural visions are economically privileged in the specific Hungarian variant of Orban-directed 'crony capitalism'.

The last research question is rather out of step I thought with the ones that precede it and opens the door a bit much to conjecture. The last content section on what economists think, etc., of the sustainability of Orban's policies does not gibe well with the overall focus of the paper. It is not clear to me why we should care what these economists think within the framework of a paper focused on the development of populist discourses and policies. The tone suggests that the economists are somehow intrinsically correct by virtue of being economists, a dubious premise (and one that ironically a bit could be read as reinforcing populist arguments about elites).

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The writing is of excellent quality. The sentence flow and overall structure are excellent. There are a few minor typos, and one issue I would like to raise:

'decreed himself,' not 'decried himself' (p. 55)

'It is hardly surprising that a system of national works that pays far below the minimum wage, criminalizes homelessness, and the introduction of measures like a flat tax have done little to promote wealth redistribution.'—This phrasing rather reproduces generally mistaken political narratives that 'wealth redistribution' is only an objective of those seeking to reduce economic inequality, generally therefore a leftist connotation. But the entire concept of neo-feudalism is very much premised on

wealth redistribution, just not from rich to poor, so it seems a case of the author being trapped by the prejudices associated with the term.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

A tight, focused, well-conceived, well-written and well-executed thesis examining how the cultural and economic policies of Fidesz reinforce each other in contemporary discourses and policies of Hungary's illiberal governing project, with relevance for Hungarian culture, politics, and society, as well as broader literatures on populism and democratic backsliding, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Well done!

Grade (A-F):	A
Date:	Signature:
16 January 2021	Brian Shaev

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
A (91-100)	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.