



Student Mobilisation in Kosovo: 1968, 1981 and 1997

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Abstract

This article is a review of *Student Movements for the Republic of Kosovo: 1968, 1981 and 1997*, by Atdhe Hetemi, Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements; Cham: Springer International Publishing; Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan: 1st ed. 2020 ISBN 978-3-030-54951-0

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Atdhe Hetemi's monograph *Student Movements for the Republic of Kosovo* analyses three crucial periods of student mobilisation in Kosovo – 1968, 1981 and 1997 – in order to historicise the role of student movements in the development of the Republic. Published as part of the Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements, the book is an extremely valuable contribution in the fields of contemporary and social history of Kosovo. While the focus is historical rather than social science, Hetemi demonstrates an engagement with

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the broader literature on social movements. He makes the forceful argument that the work of historians can help inform contemporary social movement research: “[B]y exposing aspects of the process, context, sequence, and timing, the examination of a social movement with historical methodologies can make important contributions to the kind of data collection that is vital to theory building and hypothesis testing” (Hetemi, 2020, p. 13).

The key goal of the study is to assess the impact of the University of Prishtina (UP) and its student body on mobilising society to protest for the status of republic for Kosovo (first as a unit within the Yugoslav federal state and later as an independent republic). The study represents part of a new direction in historical research on Kosovo (e.g. Ströhle, 2017; Troch, 2019, 2020) which problematises Kosovo’s state and society beyond international intervention, military history and state-building (the dominant frames for English-language research on the country). Hetemi hones in on one particular group – student protestors and other relevant actors who supported or opposed them. Its level of detail thus far surpasses existing work on student protests and mass demonstrations in Kosovo. It is also an institutional study of higher education in Kosovo, complementing earlier work by Kostovicova (2005) on parallel Albanian and Serbian education.

The first (introductory) chapter outlines the approach and nicely positions it within the broader literature on contemporary and political history of Kosovo and social movements. The focus on the University of Prishtina is further justified by drawing on the perspective of historical institutionalism. The author also stresses the important links between Kosovo student activists and the contemporary political landscape. Many former student protestors are active in public life, including the current Prime Minister. The methodological approach is outlined in considerable detail and Hetemi commendably combines the analysis of documents from archives in Kosovo, Serbia and Albania (in Serbian as well as Albanian language), print media and oral history interviews with 33 protagonists and observers. He is not only striving for balance in a polarised field but also academic rigour. For each of the three “generations” of student demonstrations, three temporal frames and levels of analysis are employed to add a further degree of parsimony to the empirical chapters (Chapters 3–6). The second chapter contextualises Albanian and South Slav mutual perceptions of living in Yugoslavia through the lenses of Balkanism and orientalism. Here, race and biopolitics are conspicuous by their absence and the discussion on mutual perceptions would have benefited from their inclusion.

Chapter 3 explores the development of demands for Albanian-language higher education in Kosovo and the student protest movement in the late 1960s in Kosovo, which was influenced by the 1968 events in Belgrade University, in terms of organisation if not ideology. In Kosovo the 1968 protests were motivated by what the author terms a “nationalist slant”, namely demands for the status of a republic for Kosovo. Hetemi’s reading of the documents suggests that even though it was students who embraced and publicly called for both the foundation of Prishtina University and the status of republic, the impetus came from Kosovar Albanian political and academic elites who instrumen-

talised students in this process. This was a part of a two-pronged approach with the Kosovo Albanian elites also channelling the idea for a Republic of Kosovo into Yugoslav society at the federal level as well as through popular protest. Although republican status was not achieved, Prishtina University was founded, and the devolution of political power saw Kosovo gain wide-ranging competencies by the 1970s.

Chapter 4 unpacks the foundation of Prishtina University as a predominantly Albanian-language institution “between politics and academia” and the way in which the institution became a focal point for a resurgence of nationalism, particularly among humanities students who were disproportionately enrolled in Albanian history and literature programmes. The 1970s can be considered to be a golden age for Kosovo as the Albanian majority began to enjoy the fruits of socialist modernity through improved living standards coupled with meaningful political representation. Higher education and academic institutions also flourished.

Following the establishment of the UP, other scholarly institutions such as the Institute of History and Institute of Albanian Studies were re-established. The Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts was founded in 1975. These milestones also fueled Albanian ambitions to promote further their national identity in the SFRY. Simultaneously, they triggered wider cultural developments, offering Albanians a sense of pride and confidence. (Hetemi, 2020, p. 116)

The period also saw an improvement in Yugoslav-Albanian affairs with diplomatic relations being re-established in 1970 and a degree of educational and cultural exchange occurring. Consequently, the University became a site for two visions of “Albanianness”. Although it formally operated on the Titoist platform of Yugoslav “brotherhood and unity”, the Republic of Albania agitated for national emancipation among Yugoslav Albanians “trying to expand nationalist ideas about a ‘perfect’ Albania and ‘Enverism’” (Hetemi, 2020, p. 124).

The chapter then details the political and economic circumstances in the lead up to the 1981 protests such as the empowerment of “illegal groups” marking the centenary of the League of Prizren in 1978, and economic crisis that coincided with the death of Tito. Hetemi provides a detailed and multi-perspective account of the student demonstrations of March and April 1981. While at the macro level the story may be one of Serbo-Albanian enmity and political demands directed to the federal centre of Belgrade, the micro-historical account also highlights *intra*-Albanian divisions between “progressives” (working within the Yugoslav system) and “illegals”, which often led to violence being committed by the (Albanian) political establishment against the “illegals” (as the oral history accounts detail). The last part of the chapter also attempts to attribute agency beyond the students and pupils who began the demonstrations: “Who Was Behind the Demonstrations of 1981?” (Hetemi, 2020, p. 152). For this reviewer, it is unclear as to why the demonstrations might not be understood as a grassroots social movement that was not necessarily orchestrated by foreign interests (Albanian Sigurimi or KGB). By disputing the possibility that the demonstrations arose spontaneously without foreign interference, Hetemi inadvertently divests the students of agency.

Chapter 5 traces the responses to the 1981 demonstrations following the Yugoslav identification of Prishtina University as a hotbed of Albanian nationalism and dilemmas facing the Kosovar Albanian political elite. After 1981, the “progressives” working within the Yugoslav system found themselves consistently accused by the Serbian and Yugoslav authorities of tolerating or fomenting “counterrevolutionary” and “irredentist” attitudes. As anti-Albanian propaganda flourished in Serbia, the Kosovo crisis also became internationalised with the deteriorating of human rights in the province. The final empirical chapter (Chapter 6) unpacks the unfolding crisis of the late 1980s and 1990s. By 1988, the Kosovo Assembly reported that almost a third of the Kosovar population had passed through its police and court system. Hetemi treats the development of the parallel Kosovar state following the collapse of Yugoslavia and the strategy of non-violent resistance. By this stage, the former camps of “progressives” and “illegals” were unified under the umbrella of Rugova’s Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The University of Prishtina again became a focal point of resistance, now largely run with the support of Kosovo’s government in exile. Oral history narrators recall the circulation of an ideological mix of civil rights and anti-colonial figures (e.g. Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi) as well as Albanian nationalism. By 1997, student protests represented the first large-scale protests since 1992 (something to which foreign diplomats paid heed) and sensitised an embattled population for larger stirrings against the Serbian state which would take place under the banner of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) the following year.

In the conclusion, Hetemi stresses that “[t]he issue of education in Kosovo had been closely tied to questions of political domination ever since its inception. This is why, historically, schools as well universities (in Kosovo, specifically the UP) stood for much more than just a place of learning” (Hetemi, 2020, p. 236) but rather zero-sum ideas of control of Kosovo. Each dominant political ideology affecting Kosovo (socialist Yugoslavia and Albania and later Milošević’s Serbia and post-socialist Albania) “closely equated the role of higher education with their own objectives for political domination” (Hetemi, 2020, p. 238).

At some points the questions posed by the author are unnecessarily dichotomous. For example, “were the students ‘real heroes’ or simply ‘manipulated puppets’ of local, federal, regional, and international political interests struggling for dominance?” (Hetemi, 2020, p. 5) and “[w]as the UP an institution of academic enlightenment or a fortress of ideological and nationalist indoctrination?” (Hetemi, 2020, pp. 15–16). In fact, the responses which are then elaborated by Hetemi are far more nuanced – individual or collective agency coalesced with manipulation by elites. Clearly Prishtina University was both a centre for education *and* often a key site of Albanian nationalist agitation. Covering a lot of historical ground with shifting actors and contexts, Hetemi succeeds in demonstrating how each moment of protest provided a reference point for the next and presents the findings in an engaging way with the voices of protagonists in dialogue with an impressive array of archival documents and secondary literature.

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Abstrakt

Tekst jest recenzją publikacji *Student Movements for the Republic of Kosovo: 1968, 1981 and 1997* autorstwa Atdhe Hetemiego, opublikowanej w 2020 roku w serii „Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements”, wydawnictwa Palgrave Macmillan.

Słowa kluczowe: Kosowo; ruchy społeczne; ruchy studenckie; Uniwersytet w Prisztinie; wykluczenie

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