BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas Schmidinger, *Kosovo. Geschichte und Gegenwart eines Parastaates*, Vienna, Pristina: Bahoe Books, 2019. 202 pp., ISBN 978-3-903290-01-3, € 17.00

Twenty years after NATO intervention brought an end to the war in Kosovo, an analysis of the past and present of the Kosovo 'parastate' appears timely indeed. However, Thomas Schmidinger's book does not live up to its promise.

The first part of the book is divided into four chapters. After an introduction to Kosovo's geography and population, the second, third, and fourth chapters cover its history until the 1980s. They deal with the limited reach of the state and the peripheral position of Kosovo in the Ottoman Empire and both Yugoslavias. In addition, the author addresses issues such as the fluidity and irrelevance of ethnicity for large parts of the population, ethnicity's intersection with religion and class, the widespread violence during the 20th century, and the colonial nature of Serbian/Yugoslav rule. This part of the book recapitulates the main findings of recent overviews of Kosovar history, most importantly those by Oliver Jens Schmitt, Noel Malcolm, and Miranda Vickers. For readers slightly familiar with Kosovo, the book therefore provides few, if any additional insights or novel analytical approaches.

In a long fifth chapter, Schmidinger describes the dissolution of Yugoslavia from the 1980s until the end of the 1990s. He briefly refers to the processes of ethnicization accompanying the political and economic decentralization that characterized

socialist Yugoslavia's political economy, and the unrest in Kosovo in the 1980s. For this he relies on journalistic accounts and little known studies by the Austrian Institute for East and Southeastern Europe (*Österreichisches Ost- und Südosteuropa-Institut*), an institution which ceased to exist in 2006. The chapter moves on to explore the development of Kosovo Albanian parallel state structures, civil resistance, and the rise of guerrilla warfare. The author critically notes the links with organized crime and the shadow economy, the tactics of the Kosovo Liberation Army to provoke an international military intervention without taking into consideration the possibility that this would result in civilian suffering, and the harmful consequences of the NATO bombardments of 1999 without the use of ground forces. The chapter succeeds in outlining the most important elements of this complex period, but would have benefitted from a more in-depth analysis—a criticism that applies to the entire book.

The second part of the book, which comprises chapters six to nine, begins in a more promising manner. The author covers the period after the Kosovo war of 1999, where the 'parastate' mentioned in the title comes into play. To date, this period has not been analyzed systematically, and as such presents a research desideratum. Schmidinger relies on field research conducted during the years 2008, 2012 and 2018-2019, including interviews. Scrutinizing the international protectorate, in place until 2008, the book critically notes that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in fact consolidated and insti-

tutionalized ethnic boundaries in Kosovo, contributed to the discrimination of non-Serb and non-Albanian population groups, and also had limited success in dissolving parallel Serbian state structures. In terms of the period after Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008, the author focusses on the ambiguous role of the European Union (EU), which has been actively involved in state-building processes in the domain of rule of law through the deployment of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). However, Kosovo's road to EU membership will continue to remain uncertain as long as the EU does not take a clear position on its status. In addition, Schmidinger highlights the threat of salafist and jihadist alternatives in the context of limited socio-economic and political prospects, as well as the difficult state-building process, which the author explains using the example of the state boundaries and the military.

In the tenth and final chapter the author identifies four main challenges faced by the 'parastate': economy, organized crime, territorial integrity, and issues pertaining to minorities. He then describes potential future paths for Kosovo: a return to Serbia, a land swap between Serbia and Kosovo, inclusion in a Greater Albania, a European future, a neo-Ottoman empire under Turkish leadership, or an Islamic ummah.

The second part of the book reveals its shortcomings most clearly. Given that the potential value of the book lies in its analysis of the recent postwar period, its failure to mention some crucial developments is fundamental. The Brussels Agreement on the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo is mentioned in passing, but not analyzed. The Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities is described 'as a form of counterparliament' (174), without any fur-

ther exploration substantiating this claim. The *Srpska lista* (Serb List), the dominant and Belgrade-based Serb party, is not discussed in detail. Political dynamics between the main Kosovo Albanian parties are ignored. The Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the difficult legacy of the Kosovo war are not covered at all. The omission of these crucial trends and the dates of the interviews suggest that the author did most of his field research in 2008, but failed to take into consideration developments after Kosovo's declaration of independence. For his interviews, the author relies disproportionately on interviewees who are members of *Vetëvendosje* (Self-determination) or *Samostalna liberalna stranka* (the Independent Liberal Party, SLS). Both parties are critical of the role of the international community in Kosovo and the dominant political elites on both sides. Both have a strong voice among critical international audiences because they say what the latter want to hear, but they only tell part of the story. A final point of criticism concerns the writing of names. The author uses Serbian—sometimes in the Latin, sometimes in the Cyrillic alphabet—and Albanian writing of names interchangeably. In principle, I have nothing against such a practice, but the mechanism behind it should be explained.

All in all, this book does not represent a meaningful contribution to the literature. For detailed analyses of the historical developments leading to the war in Kosovo, readers will benefit more from the secondary literature on which this book relies. The part on the Kosovo 'parastate' is inconsistent, patchy, and inaccurate. Unfortunately, the book is far from a consistent overview of Kosovo's postwar politics and society.

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