

Atdhe Hetemi. 2020. *Student Movements for the Republic of Kosovo. 1968, 1981 and 1997*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan (Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements). XV + 273 pp., ISBN 978-3-030-54951-0 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-3-030-54954-1 (Softcover), ISBN 978-3-030-54952-7 (eBook), € 94.94/€ 68.56/€ 74.89

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Student Movements for the Republic of Kosovo is the first volume of the Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements series that focuses on Southeastern Europe. The series aims to “revitalise the conversation between historians and historical sociologists” on what Charles Tilly called the “dynamics of contention” and on social movements in “the broadest possible sense” (vii). According to the series editors, *Atdhe Hetemi*’s monograph, based on his doctoral thesis (University of Ghent, 2020), published articles (2018, 2021), and a book chapter (2019),¹ “sits at the intersection of research on social movements and nationalism” (vii). Hetemi’s main thesis is that the Kosovo-Albanian student movements of 1968, 1981, and 1997 contributed significantly to building an independent state of Kosovo. Hetemi describes his methodological approach as historical institutionalism, focusing on how educational institutions shaped the social movements organized by students and on the role the University of Prishtinë/Priština played in the political emancipation of students and more generally in the political awareness of Kosovo-Albanians (14).

In two introductory chapters, the author links the fact that Albanian-language education at university level was established comparatively late in Kosovo to the tense relations between Albanians and Serbs and to negative stereotypes about (Kosovo-)Albanians, which were mainly circulated by academic and political institutions of the Socialist Republic of Serbia (SRS). Drawing on the theories of Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser, and on Denisa Kostovicova’s research on education in Kosovo (2005), Hetemi points out how education there has

1 Hetemi, A. 2018. “Student Movements in Kosova (1981): Academic or Nationalist?” *Nationalities Papers* 46 (4): 685–703; Hetemi, A. 2019. “Seeing Each Other: Nesting Orientalisms and Internal Balkanism among the Albanians and South Slavs in the Former Yugoslavia” In *Rethinking Serbian-Albanian Relations: Figuring Out the Enemy*, edited by A. Pavlović, G. P. Draško, and R. Halili, 79–99. London, New York: Routledge; Hetemi, A. 2021. “The Political and National Character of Institutions of Higher Education and the University of Prishtina in Kosovo (1958–1980).” *History of Education* 50 (2): 199–219.

always been linked to power and nation-building (14, 64). More specifically, he hypothesizes that the University of Prishtinë/Priština was “(mis)used” by competing actors—from Kosovo, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), Serbia, Albania—who exercised their power within the educational system (14). Hetemi combines historical with ethnographic research. On the one hand, he draws on archive materials from the Central Archive of the Republic of Albania, the Archive of Albania’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Archive of Kosovo, the Archive of Serbia, and the Archive of Yugoslavia. On the other, he draws on a total of 33 interviews with contemporary witnesses. To this, he adds other sources, such as newspapers (17–8).

The author shows how student-specific grievances triggered the three demonstrations he analyses in chronological order in Chapters Three to Six. In 1968, the students demanded Albanian-language instruction; in 1981, they called for better living conditions; in 1997, they demanded access to the university premises from which they had been excluded since 1991. However, these grievances revealed larger sociopolitical issues. Although the movements of 1968, 1981, and 1997 took place in different political contexts, in all three cases the student demonstrations became Kosovo-wide movements and received support from a wide range of actors: from “illegal” groups (in 1968 and 1981), that is “national Albanian movements in Kosovo formed after the Second World War, which were outlawed in the SFRY” (80); from the Republic of Albania (1968 and 1997)—which was considered an “arch enemy” by the leadership of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY)—from some members of Kosovo’s intellectual elites (1968 and 1997); and from international actors such as the United States (1997). Hetemi aims to fill a research gap on student movements in Kosovo between 1968 and 1997. Indeed, few academic works are dedicated to the subject, and the authors of those that exist seem to either exaggerate the “patriotic” contribution of students or (largely) underestimate the role students played in promoting self-determination (7–9). One of the main contributions of this book is that it provides novel and detailed behind-the-scenes insights into the preparation, organization, context, and consequences of the demonstrations. For each demonstration, the author explores the temporal phases “before,” “during,” and “after.” The reader witnesses how the drama unfolded, while exploring how different actors were pulling the strings: the students, the divided Kosovar political and academic elites, the SFRY, the Republic of Albania, the SRS, and international actors. As Hetemi observes, his research is a work in progress, as archives are being opened gradually and not all the relevant materials are accessible yet (9). It is thus “likely that the ‘real’ organizers of these movements [of 1981] will only be found after the opening of top-secret materials in the archives of the SFRY, the SRS, the Soviet Union, and the Republic of Albania” (160–1).

Another strength of this book is the diversity of its sources. Crossing oral history with archival research proves to be a very fruitful method of illustrating how actors appropriated—and transformed—strategies and plans which can be found in archival materials. For example, Hetemi points to the fact that the students organizing the 1968 demonstrations were advised by “illegal” groups who were themselves instructed by the Republic of Albania to chant for self-determination, and not for a “Republic of Kosovo.” In the end, however, students and citizens called for a “Republic” (90–1). Crossing different sources, the author also shows how, when it came to the response to the 1981 demonstrations, there was a clear lack of coordination between the SFRY and SRS presidencies and the Kosovo League of Communists.

One of the limitations of the monograph is its focus on institutional structures and groups rather than on individuals: although the author conducted interviews with a considerable number of former students, “the students” are evoked as a large, generic category of actors. In fact, the Kosovo-Albanian students of the 1960s–1990s came from heterogeneous family and socio-economic backgrounds. The author actually gives a sense of this when he refers to the new *katunar* (Albanian for rustic, uncultured) leadership of the Independent Student Union of the University of Prishtinë/Priština elected in early 1997 (214). It is regrettable that Hetemi’s interviews with students and other stakeholders are quoted so rarely and are not included in the annex, which may have been due to a page number limit.

Although his analysis is generally nuanced, and although the author carefully weighs evidence and counter-evidence when discussing the role of students and other actors in the demonstrations, his conclusions lack some subtlety. While his research does show that Kosovo-Albanian student movements contributed to the state-building process and that the three different generations of students involved in these movements played “a crucial role in preserving and passing on from one generation to another the vision of a ‘Republic’” (244), his conclusion that “without this vision [passed on from one student generation to the other], Kosovo would not be a state today” (244) does appear a little overambitious. While on the one hand, Hetemi cautions the reader that many of the Kosovo-Albanian students involved in the demonstrations later became active in politics and hoped to reap benefits from their claims of having been (co-)organizers (152), on the other, he himself adopts a pathos-filled rhetoric when describing the students as “actors and icons of ongoing resistance and protest” (17), as the “first line of resistance”, “making sacrifices for basic freedoms and human rights” (243). Other far from nuanced expressions include the author’s description of Albania in the 1970s–1980s as “a giant concentration camp” (134) or of the University of Prishtinë/Priština as “a fortress of ideological and nationalist indoctrination” (16).

Despite these shortcomings, the volume clearly fills a gap. The author combines deep insights into the student movements with well-documented research on Albanian-language (higher) education in Kosovo, in particular on the (tumultuous) process leading to the establishment of the University of Prishtinë/Priština in 1969–1970 and the challenges it faced in the first decades of its existence. Hetemi's multidisciplinary approach, combining historical and ethnographic research, makes the publication appealing to a broad range of social scientists and historians interested in (South-)Eastern Europe.