

***Creating Kosovo: International Oversight and the Making of Ethical Institutions.***

By Elton Skendaj. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014. 217 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. \$49.95, hard bound.

Kosovo was considered a Petri Dish of the United Nations' peacebuilding enterprise in the early 2000s, with the United Nations being granted executive, legislative and judicial powers over the small territory. Similarly, it has become a prime case study for researchers around the world, due to the relative safety of its main cities and proximity to central European universities. Elton Skendaj's book, *Creating Kosovo*, stands out for its sophisticated analysis of Kosovo's early state-building process and to the author's familiarity with Kosovo and its culture. The author's main argument is that to build effective state bureaucracies, international organizations need to insulate them from political or personal influences, so that recruitment and promotion rests on merit and not on political or personal affiliations. The author offers two specific examples to support this claim: the development of the police force and the customs service in Kosovo. He uses two counter-examples to emphasise the pitfalls of "local ownership": the development of the central administration and the judiciary system. The relative effectiveness of each institution is rated through three indicators: mission fulfilment, the penalization of corruption, and bureaucratic effectiveness.

Somewhat paradoxically, the author argues simultaneously that international assistance should encourage political and societal influences to "shape, constrain, and inform democratic decision makers" (171). As such, it is not clear how, in the long term, these two processes—state building and democratization—are supposed to be reconciled. This is also a tension apparent in the wider state building literature on the "sequencing" of interventions (see: Paris, 2004, 179–211; Paris and Sisk, 2009), where the need to "insulate" structures from local culture can be interpreted as privileging a restricted notion of institution-building to the detriment of local empowerment, and where international organizations have to behave in ways that may be viewed as illiberal or even, at times, imperialistic to achieve the wider aims of building institutions first before handing them over to carefully selected local officials. *Creating Kosovo* contributes to this new, unabashed, literature on neo-trusteeship, demystifying the motto of "going local" as a way to strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of international interventions (177–91). In the words of one of the author's interviewees, "local ownership" ends up being redefined as "including and building the capacity of local employees, but not giving them the decision-making authority prematurely" (121). Considering the fact that "local ownership as capacity building" has clearly represented a growing trend in the field of state building, this is a very topical book, whether we agree with the underlying assumptions or not.

The book is primarily based on interviews with societal elites conducted by the author, as well as on survey data to evaluate the effectiveness and legitimacy of different state institutions. The author's fluency in Albanian (himself coming from Albania) has clearly opened doors for him, and allowed him to go further than the usual statements from Kosovar politicians that are reproduced ad nauseam in the recent literature on Kosovo. However, and this is my main reservation with the book, the author has presented only four interviews with Kosovar Serbs out of the 200 or so interviews with officials from government bureaucracies and international agencies (19). As such, and unfortunately, the book reads like a story of the creation of the new state of Kosovo in which the Serb enclaves are a mere footnote. Apart from this unfortunate bias, the book offers a wealth of information on different issues related to the early state building process of Kosovo, and will certainly be of interest to both students and experienced researchers working on these issues.

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