



Research Article

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The Universities and Elite Formation and Transformation in Kosovo

Bekim Baliqi

*PhD, Associate Professor,
Department of Political Science,
University of Prishtina, Kosovo*

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the relationship between the universities and political elite formation based on the case study of Kosovo. The key questions raised throughout the research are; how do the universities influence the formation of the political elites and how were the elites changed throughout time? Analysing these relationships in different periods, each with a different impact on the elite building processes, namely from the establishment of the University of Prishtina until recently. Central assumption here is that higher education institutions were the catalyst in the transformation of the political elites. Being a vital source of power, a control over it represents also a struggle for power between the rival forces with different political outcomes. Theoretical framework consists of John Higley approach on the elite formation, based in the context of post-conflict and divided society, such as Kosovo case.

Keywords: Higher education, Kosovo, elite formation, state-building

1. Introduction

The higher education system in Kosovo, notably the University of Prishtina is closely related with the political context of the country, which has been problematic and dramatic in recent decades. Sommers and Buckland in their study about the rebuilding of Kosovo's education system after the end of a conflict, state that: "Kosovo lies at or near the core of the break-up of Yugoslavia, and education lies at the center of Kosovo's conflict" (Sommers & Buckland, 2004:34).

As the only public higher education institution in Kosovo, established in the academic year 1969/1970, the University of Prishtina, for more than four decades, played a crucial role in social-economic developments of Kosovo. It was also a focal point of political mobilisation, but also the promoter of national struggle and elite formation. Initially, it was a bilingual university, serving for both the Albanian and Serb ethnic communities. From 1991 to 1999 the University of Prishtina in Albanian was functioning as part of the so-called parallel system, outside the formal academic infrastructure, whereby Serbian authorities removed students and all university staff from the university premises. This relatively extended period of parallel system damaged the educational system of the country significantly but in long-term also interethnic relations.

As in many other states in transition, the higher education system is subject of political interfering from the side of political elites, because universities are perceived as a vital source of power; therefore the control over them is also a political struggle between the different political forces. In this sense, the central question raised in this paper is how do universities, particularly University of Prishtina influence the formation and transformation of the political elites?

2. The Theoretical Framework on Elite-Formation

Universities have different functions; they can have the crucial role in expanding political stability, social prosperity and economic growth of the countries. Through critical and active citizenry they can promote democracy and strengthen tolerance between and within societies. Most of the debates on higher education, especially in Western Europe- focus on the transformation from elite to mass higher education and its impact on society. One of the pioneer researchers on this topic was Martin Trow who introduced the distinction between 'elite', 'mass' and 'universal' higher education system which is associated with different functions and missions of the universities. According to him, higher education systems have been progressively moving from elite to mass and universal systems as a result of social, political and economic changes (Trow, 1974).

In his seminal study on the elite formation, John Higley (2010) highlights the correlation between elite characteristics with regime types and political outcomes. His assumption states that only when elites are integrated (or not in conflict) the political stability within states is possible. According to him, there are two types of united elites: the ideologically united elite and the consensually united elite which thus produce different forms of political stability. Bennett (2005) elaborate on elite formation and mobility in a dualistic manner; on the one hand, there are traditional elites, based on family ties, religious and social status. Also, on the other hand, there are new elites, recruitment to which is based on academic qualification, unique managerial or cultural skills. While entry into traditional elites is challenging because of its narrowness and social closure, becoming a member of the new elites is possible and has clear patterns of recruitment for different social, religious or ethnic groups.

The role of higher education as the most reliable path to enter the new elite suggests that universities have a significant influence on the elite formation and in shaping the patterns of elite recruitment. The importance of the University in the process of elite formation also comes from its symbolic power, which Bourdieu (1993: 37) defines as symbolic capital, closely related to the economic, social and cultural capital. University, as symbolic capital, has to do with reputation and value of the persons perceived and acknowledged by others as such. This kind of capital, therefore, legitimises the access to elite circles to the other members and other social groups.

As Hartmann (2006: 61-88) in his outstanding study on the sociology of the elites explains, in most of the leading industrialised nations, prestigious higher education institutions are the main keys to assessing top positions in business, public administration and politics, and at the same time ensuring consistent elite recruitment.

3. Methodology

This article adopts qualitative methods examining past events through process tracing research. Findings are based in using of several sources, including observation and text analysis of relevant sources- including legislation, policy reports, official data and other publicly available information in Albanian, Serbian and English. Rather than relying on any specific theoretical approach, a paper adopts a framework based on relevant studies on formation and transformation of elites and implication to the higher education system.

4. Higher Education and Elite Formation in Kosovo

If political elite arises from the control and expansion of capital and knowledge resources, then the University of Prishtina has the main impact in Kosovo's political elite formation and transformation. Because of the political circumstances, in the Yugoslav past elites in Kosovo were not well consolidated and did not have real and authoritative political power. After the Second World War, political elites had less an intellectual or educational background; but were mostly recruited due to their strong ideological affinity or communist loyalty. The strong dependence of the Kosovar nomenclature from the Central Party Committee and the Yugoslav leader Tito did not leave them sufficient opportunities to gain power recourses. Lack of any University in Kosovo was another reason which did not enable occurring and expanding of elite formation. Because decision-making

and primary source of political power came from the Belgrade Central party committee, the conclusion can be drawn that during this period it is almost impossible to speak about authentic political elites of Kosovo, but instead of ideologically united elites as part of the broad Yugoslav party elites (Ott, 2013).

4.1 *University and elites during the communism*

The late 1960s mark a period of improvement of national rights for Kosovo Albanians, including the establishment of the first higher education institutions in Kosovo, such as the Higher Pedagogical School and the Faculty of Philosophy, both of which were initially branches of the Belgrade University. In 1968, student protest in Prishtina demanded to promote Kosovo's status into a Republic, as the seventh federal unit of the Yugoslav state. This demand was not fulfilled, but it influenced the further extension of political autonomy for Kosovo, leading to the foundation of the first university and later on to the improvement of the political and constitutional rights.

In the academic year 1970/1971, there were 10.368 students, and one decade later, the total number of students (both in Albanian and Serb language) increased to 40.371; however, 6.623 of them were not from Kosovo. According to Kostovicova (2005: 42) "[i]n the early 1980s, Kosovo had the highest number of students in relation to the population and to those employed as compared to the rest of Yugoslavia." Industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation of Kosovo, as well as cultural and scientific activities, advanced significantly during 1970-1980. The number of illiteracy dropped from almost 90% at the beginning of the 1950s to around 30% in 1970s, and the number of students increased rapidly (Clark, 2000:35). However, the academic quality and research potential of the university were not at the highest level, because its foundation was primarily politically motivated, as a tool to stimulate and integrate Kosovars in the Yugoslav state system (Schmitt, 2008).

In contrary, the University of Prishtina in the 1970s became a gravitational place of national mobilisation and diverse ideological (Marxist-Leninist, Maoist) movements. The relative liberalisation of the academic exchanges and the improvement of the relations with Tirana had also affected the emerging of the intellectual elites in Prishtina. The University of Prishtina, in both Albanian and Serbian, played a crucial role for both the Albanian and the Serb community in the promotion of national identities and served as a bastion of ideological manifestations. As Kostovicova (2005:45) accurately explains: "The interplay between the ideological and national components of education was most pronounced at and over the University of Prishtina. It was a site where Serbian-Albanian tensions would be played out in the open as a strong sense of national identity tested a fickle ideological concept of brotherhood and unity."

Kosovo was in terrible socio-economic and political situation that eventually led to massive political demonstrations in the year 1981, which started as a revolt of the students against poor conditions of studies and soon spread into a nationwide demonstration. Once again the University and its students were a focal point in this protest that had massive influence in the future political processes of Kosovo and to the greater control of the University from the side of the regime. This protest was brutally oppressed, and many professors and students accused of nationalistic attitude were discharged in the process of so-called 'ideological differentiation'. The University categorised as a 'fortress of nationalism', underwent broad political and ideological revisions.

During this period, the University had a limited autonomy and political influence; therefore it had limited direct impact on the political elites. However, it contributed in the creation of the intellectual elite, that despite the limited academic freedom and restriction to address national issues, had a crucial role in preserving and strengthening of national identity and so influenced immensely the political processes and elite formation in the following decade.

4.2 *University and elites during the Milošević regime*

The fall of communism in Yugoslavia has begun with political changes in Serbia through an increase of nationalist sentiments and the rise of Slobodan Milošević as the Serbian leader that imposed ethnic segregation and political discrimination in Kosovo. This regime ended the autonomy

status of Kosovo and expelled Albanians from the state and public institutions, in this process of 'institutional ethnic cleansing' is also closing of the University of Prishtina in the Albanian language. During this period, the University of Prishtina was forced to function in a parallel system outside the teaching and research infrastructure. The teaching process was continued in private places or houses and was financed mainly by Kosovar Diaspora. During the academic year 1990/1991, the number of students in the Albanian language decreased to 11.355 students, many of whom (including university staff) emigrated in the Western European countries. Nevertheless, the resistance to the Serbian regime through parallel education has its political and symbolical importance; as Clark (2000: 96) noted: "The struggle for education became a central symbol for the Albanians of Kosovo and proudest achievement of parallel system."

This period also marks the emergence of new political elites of Kosovars, around the non-violent political movement for independence formed predominantly from the political party Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and its leader Ibrahim Rugova. The University of Prishtina was a crucial factor of resistance and struggle for independence, but also an essential resource of political power and elite building. As Malcolm (1998: 347) in this context has emphasised, "[i]ts roots were to be found not so much in the old political class of functionaries in the Titoist system, as in the intellectual circles that developed round the University of Prishtina in the late 1980s." The political elites of this parallel system, or as Clark (2000: 117) defined 'state-in-embryo', were closely associated with the University of Prishtina, beginning from the president of the 'Republic of Kosovo' Ibrahim Rugova, who was a university professor, vice-president of LDK Fehmi Agani, who was a professor of sociology, and other high-ranking officials that came mostly from intellectual circles and had a respectful academic background (Ott, 2013:73). In contrary, Serbian elites continue to be the old ones and loyal to the Belgrade politics toward Kosovo, playing thus an active role in the ethnic segregation, as was the case with the Rector of the University of Prishtina in Serbian language Radivoje Papovič.

The University was, therefore, a place for political battles between ethnic groups, but also an institution faced with enormous political intervention within communities. It was again the issue concerning higher education that resulted with the students' peaceful protest march on first October 1997 (beginning of the academic year) organised by the Independent Students Union of the UP (UPSUP), calling for the release of the seized University buildings. A brutal intervention of the Serbian police forces against students repressed the protest march. This event became a catalyst for the active resistance and marked changes in the political monopoly of the LDK. The increasing opposition of the student movement to non-violent resistance and the support for the military resistance signifies the first indication of elite transformation, which came incrementally after the emerging of the Kosovo Liberation Army and particularly in the aftermath of the war in Kosovo.

4.3 *University and elites in the post-conflict Kosovo*

The University of Prishtina reopened in the academic year 1999/2000, and the students returned to their institutions immediately after the end of the conflict. The University of Prishtina in the Serbian language was relocated in the north part of Mitrovica in the year 2001 being recognised later on as the University of Mitrovica. During this period, until the establishment of the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MEST), the Kosovar higher education system was governed by the UN Administration (UNMIK), respectively its Department of Education and Science. The University of Prishtina in the Albanian language was managed until 2002 by the International Administrator Michael Daxner, who unsuccessfully tried to refuse the political control over the University. Despite the attempts - more rhetorical than practical, to reform the University following the Bologna Declaration on the higher education system, the political influence during this period continues to be very strong. These attempts lead to consistent resistance to changes. According to Bache and Taylor (2003:285) this kind of opposition to the externally driven reforms is a phenomenon which they called policy resistance, came by part of the conservative academic staff "(...) local actors had a range of interests to protect that were challenged by external pressures for change."

Changes in the political reality in Kosovo after the NATO intervention in 1999 and the time of UNMIK administration reflected in the changing of positions in the inter-ethnic relations, whereby

Kosovo- Serbs switched roles and organised their education in kind of a parallel system (Sommers & Buckland, 2005). This transition period, however, had an impact also in the (trans-) formation of the Kosovar political elites (Heath, 2009: 151-163). The political influence on the universities goes mostly in the direction of academic staff recruitment, control of university boards and the rector by political partisanship and thus influencing university itself directly. Most of the former rectors of the University of Prishtina were affiliated with political parties in Government. Another illustration of political intervention at the University autonomy in the case of the University of Mitrovica, where in the year 2004 the legal Rector full name Gojko Savič was dismissed and the extreme nationalist, Prof. Radivoje Papović was installed by the Government in Belgrade as the new 'Rector' (Woeber, 2006). On the other hand, the election of the Rectors and university management at the University of Prishtina has also been influenced by political decision-makers that usually are politically affiliated with the governing political parties.

The conversion from 'pre-war' political elites to 'post-war' elites came gradually and paralleled to the shift of the university control from one political force (around LDK) to another growing political force (to the PDK as the chief political successor of the KLA).

It is noteworthy that the vast majority of the political leadership have graduated from the University of Prishtina and the main political party leaders were either student leaders. The actual Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi was the Students Union leader in 1991, then the leader of the 'Self-determination' party Albin Kurti, who led the student movement in 1997, and as University professors - the LDK leader Isa Mustafa, who has an academic background in economics. With this in mind, it is evident that universities, and notably the University of Prishtina, played a crucial role in the political elite formation and its transformation in Kosovo.

However, it would be overly deterministic to conclude that the universities were or are the sole and the most critical factor for recruiting and building elites. It is a more complicated process which includes many other factors and recourses of power. In the case of current Kosovar political elites, it also occurs through a process of social, ideological or economic influences from the past war event. As Higley (2010: 167) brilliantly put it: "Likewise, there have been two ways in which disunited elites became consensually united historically: (1) through basic and sudden elite settlements in societies at relatively low levels of socioeconomic development; (2) through colonial home rule and independence struggles where local elites had already received or obtained in the course of their struggles experience in political bargaining and restrained competitions."

In post-conflict societies, such as that of Kosovo, where the education system became a crucial component in the construction of the national identity and political socialisation, universities are a catalyst of formation and transformation of the political elites. However, universities remain a vital source of power; therefore the control over it is also a struggle between the different political forces. From the appointment of the university boards, university rectors, and faculty deans to the critical positions in the student's unions are mainly imposed from the side of the governing political party. On the other hand, many of the current political elites took high governmental or institutional positions after completing their mandate at the management of universities. In this sense, the university often serves as a trampoline for the political elites and vice-versa. The importance of the University in the process of elite formation also comes from its symbolic power, which Bourdieu (1993:37) defines as symbolic capital, closely related to the economic, social and cultural capital. The Universities, as symbolic capital, has to do with reputation and value of the persons perceived by others and therefore legitimises the elites to the other members and other social groups. In our case study, where the universities traditionally have not only symbolic capital but are emblematic in the national struggle, it remains a means of attaining symbolic power in the elite (trans-)formation process.

5. Conclusions

The central question raised here; how has the university influenced and shaped Kosovo's political elite has no conclusive or straightforward answer because it could not be reduced to solely determinant factor. Moreover, in different periods these elites were formed in different ways and exercised influence in different levels. In the first phase, discussed above, the role of the University

of Prishtina was limited, and the elites were more 'ideologically united,' where the higher education background did not determine patterns of recruitment. Nevertheless, the University of Prishtina during this period has had an impact on the creation of the intellectual elites and education of the next political elites.

In another period, that of the Milošević regime, academic elites were perceived more appropriate to lead political resistance because of the mistrust on the former local communist leadership. Furthermore, they enjoyed political authority and credibility because of the popular perceptions of the intellectuals as national reliable and competent leaders. It marks a period of the emergence of new political elites interrelated with the University defined as the 'consensually united elites'.

In other words and to summarise, Universities continues to serve as a dominant pattern for the elite recruitment and a source of political mobilisation, because they possess a symbolic capital as a 'fortress of patriotism' for legitimising membership in the political elite.

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