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9. Conclusion and Policy Implications: Localising Local Theories in State and Peace Building

“Kosovo was a perfect little laboratory for nation building. We could have done better. We did not do too bad.” (Andreas)

The objective of this dissertation was to introduce a methodological innovation using a socio-logically inspired, post-structuralist method and tool of analysis, namely grounded theory as revealed by life stories to analyze and understand what classically were realist concepts of security, state, peace and nation. Life story interviews with individuals who have experienced themselves the peace and state building processes are used primarily in the fields of oral history, sociology and psychology and were in this research employed for the first time in the international relations domain of peace and state building as far as I know. This represents an interdisciplinary research approach. The aim was to bridge the gap between theory and practice and inform the general frameworks with more specific empirical evidence from the ground, informed by both the international and local elites and marginalized groups. The life story method was also used for the first time to present local marginalized and privileged voices and to understand the local needs and priorities, which seems to be very valuable as a methodological tool to provide new alternatives and understandings of some of the most significant processes in fragile post-conflict environments. Through this methodology, new venues might emerge for the future research in various fragile environments. In addition, using local languages seems to be very valuable for the collection of rich empirical evidence that can nourish theories of state and peace building, especially when life stories are presented on the basis of interviews which provide particularly rich data sources.

The experimental approach of using life stories proved to be insightful for a theorization of local state and peace building, local agency and local resistance. While the life stories approach had not yet been implemented in this field, it proved to deepen our understanding of the varied meanings of everyday and theoretical concepts on the ground in Kosovo. Adopting a post-structuralist approach, this work offered an in-depth description of the case study of Kosovo in order to expose the diversity of subjective accounts. The revealed social patterns and perceptions from the experiences of individuals' lives and their interactions with various actors highlight the subjective motives and meanings of post-war experiences that differ from those presented in established international relations literature. The latter has so far focused on consent, power sharing and legal mandates that is insufficient to reveal local patterns.

Life stories were collected through snowball sampling which involves referrals to find interviewees and which is frequently used in sociology and qualitative research to reach marginalized citizens in particular. It is also suitable for obtaining samples willing to comment on sensitive and suppressed topics such as state and peace building and the role of the international community as viewed by the local community in Kosovo. As has become clear, many citizens who appreciate the international community publicly will reject their policies in private. Such findings could be obtained only by employing snowball sampling as used in this research. In addition, several other criteria have been used to sample the life stories including population, accessibility, availability, personal involvement in the post-conflict reconstruction period and interactions with international actors (to ensure the possibility of an analytical comparison). Furthermore, as suggested by grounded theory, theoretical sampling was used in the selection of the presented life stories in order to add new concepts and categories to the currently existing theoretical approaches. Since the present research focused on the case study of Kosovo, generalization was less of a priority compared to deepening the contextual understanding of the case as provided in the findings chapters. Furthermore, post-structuralist theory advocates for developing a deep understanding of the data "behind" a case study. Life stories offer such rich data, even taking into account the subjectivities of the individuals which, as the study shows, have a crucial influence on the current international and local political developments of post-conflict reconstruction.

The local perspective through this sampling of life stories yielded insights that can inform theories of state and peace building and substantiated critical approaches to peace and state building, different from the institution building approaches. In short, the post-structuralist life stories approach can be successfully applied to the discipline of international relations. Theoretically, the dissertation contributes to liberal peace theory (e.g. about ineffectiveness of decentralization programs at the expense of minority integration and reconciliation) while also reaffirming arguments of post-liberal peace theorists about the disconnect of liberal peace theories with local actors. It also addressed the limitations of post-liberal peace theories and their ambiguous relationship to local agency. In addition, the research enhances the understanding of the variations in liberal and post liberal peace, especially regarding how liberal peace acquires local meanings (in spheres such as instrumental reconciliation, professionalism, respect, education) and what resistance means locally and how it is manifested. Theoretically, it suggests "localizing" local theories of state, peace and nation building. The word "localising" has in this context a double meaning. On the one hand, it refers to developing specific and concrete local theories rather than just hinting towards their possibility at the meta-theoretical level. On the other hand, it means to actually identify local theory in a place, thus "to localize" it. One of the central claims of this thesis is that this can be achieved through the life stories methodology, while both liberal peace and post-liberal peace scholarship have so

far fallen short of it. Put simply, life stories are a good way to uncover local opinions and perspectives and to thus localize local theories.

Turning to the findings, as argued in the theoretical chapters, state and peace building will continue since they are essential to preventing the spreading of international security threats from fragile zones, as argued for instance by Fukuyama. In addition, it is important to recognize that power places more importance on territory rather than in the residing community (Anderson, 1974, p. 31). This is problematic since territory is scarce and cannot be expanded, hence it will be constantly re-divided (Anderson, 1974, p. 31). Thus the issues of nation, state and peace building will remain on the local and international agenda for some more time. In fact, despite Tilly's criticism that state formation in Europe was violent, the European state structure has been imposed on fragile states (Tilly, 1975, p. 638).²⁹⁶ Upon adaptation of the European forms of governance, local responses range from acceptance to resistance, where the latter sometimes leads to state and peace failure. It is therefore important to understand the local context empirically in depth to inform the theory and practice. Questioning whether nations and states in fragile environments are at all necessary, and suitable for creating and maintaining peace falls outside the scope of the thesis, but it can be investigated later on.

Most of the international civil servants identify as main challenges to state building aspects concerning the rule of law, emphasizing corruption and impunity, politicized justice, local ownership and economic underdevelopment, which is in accordance with the mainstream theoretical models on state building. In contrast with traditional theory emphasizing institutional building, some informants point to the difficulty of identity construction in Kosovo and future challenges such as resistance, further unrest and destabilization of the region. Another finding pertains to the culture of transparency, which some suggest is lacking in locals and internationals. Furthermore, the interference of foreign actors in domestic politics and transparency is identified as a step backwards for the development of the democratic system in Kosovo. Thus, while the theory has been satisfied as state structures are in place, the implementation of legal and political standards remains very difficult from a practical viewpoint.

State building is promoted despite the fact that IOs and INGOs involved in "capacity building" sometimes strongly deny their involvement in state building tasks. The establishment of special mechanisms dealing with Kosovo's statehood, not accepted by all EU members, was promoted in global and regional platforms to overcome the barriers caused by the disputed status and also for the IOs to function easily on the ground. Both international and local actors found the post-war terrain to be challenging for similar reasons, including social, cultural and historical elements. A return to what is labeled as "*ethics*" seems very important to both groups. This refers to ethical interests and identification with the state instead of materialism,

²⁹⁶ Please consult the mainstream theory chapter for more information.

individualism, nepotism, corruption, clans and clientalism. However, there is a difference in the strategies pursued to promote ethical interests. The international community focuses on developing institutional mechanisms, while local actors emphasize the relevance of the social fabric. More concretely, they focus on bringing back practices of respect, tolerance, sharing and knowledge, which may then turn into state identification. The history of Kosovo seems to be perceived by the international community as the reason for lack of collective confidence, democratic identity and efficiency in “statebuilding”, while the local community views the time under Tito’s communism as having promoted Albanian empowerment (this changed evidently during the Rankovic and Milosevic period). Identification with democratic values, human rights and collective initiatives was very high during the subsequent period of oppression. Thus it may be difficult to consider socialism unequivocally as a reason for the democratic failures in post-war Kosovo, as often pointed out by international actors. They also note that the current dysfunctional state may be attributed to a loss of hope and the advantages that profiteering groups wish to maintain. These elements are attributed to the local culture, which the international officials seem to regard as problematic and as contributing to state building failures. Furthermore, the example of education exemplifies the challenges arising from state building in Kosovo and disconnect between the international and local actors. For instance, long-term goals are preferred over short-term goals. Local actors prioritize education rather than capacity building projects to tackle the same negative phenomena, while the international actors highlight capacity building. Political interferences by the elite, who are supported in their positions in power to maintain security, undermine education, exemplifying the problems probably faced also in other state functions. The international community seems to *resist* alternatives that challenge the current political elite or order (secular or non-secular), reinforcing a cycle of further resistance and alienation by the local community. Interventions on the ground through providing quality education at schools and universities present an alternative to mediate and negotiate the local and internationally exported values in order to promote a more sustainable social fabric, which could provide the basis of a functioning society, maintain and create healthy social interactions and may contribute to social cohesion. This in turn would support successful state building.

Although internationals have capacity and resources, they still often fail to prevent or mitigate local violence, which is why it has been suggested that it would be better to engage with the locals “to provide space [and] targeted action for peace to form locally”, though not “colored by interests, biases, or ideology because it then loses local consent and legitimacy” (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 771). Furthermore, education could serve as a way to move away from an instrumental use of locals to a type of localism which “is hardwired into conflict transformation as it emphasizes the need to address relationships between antagonists and the need to address conflict at the individual and community levels” (Mac Ginty &

Richmond, 2013, p. 771). It may decrease violence if international community would attempt to limit violence by all actors involved in the conflict. In fact, international community should refrain from supporting an actor or group on the ground and hence choose to not disarm them since these groups may become source of conflict or stagnation in the future despite the high investment in education. Both communities should refrain from introducing a political and cultural hegemony through education in schools by involving all marginalized groups in state building process, neighborhood, city, village and regional levels. Especially marginalized groups not related to the ruling elite and civil society would have to be granted a place since revitalization of the state (including the economic domain) after war depends on wider marginalized society and groups including women, retirees, war victims, veterans and children. This would allow groups to relate to each other “on an everyday, human level, rather merely through problem-solving institutional frameworks” (Richmond, 2009a, p. 565). Ideally, in such a context, interactions would be based on “empathy, respect, the recognition of difference” and a global ethic of “care” (Richmond, 2009a, p. 574). Most importantly, the elements of empathy and care in local context of Kosovo mean amongst others professionalism, respect and tolerance. In practice, the regular interactions across different groups of the society may foster the deepening of relations on human level, as Richmond suggests. However, the power interests in post conflict environments must not be neglected, in order to allow empathy, professionalism and respect to arise. Therefore strengthening law and security alongside education for the purpose of societal engineering is essential to maintain the balance between vested power interests (local and international) and locally marginalized groups. This double track intervention may function since law and security emphasize punishing individuals contributing to societal disorder whereas education emphasizes prevention of societal disorder by creating and maintaining tolerant ideas and individuals. State building focused on social engineering may contribute to a sustainable nation and peace building.

The nation building chapter shows that international and local actors differ in their perceptions of the concept of the nation. While the international community promotes a civic nation, the local community prefers a more ethnic nation while respecting the civic elements. Local resistance against the international community is, vice versa, met by international resistance to local alternatives such as Albanian empowerment and local ownership, which is framed as “nationalist”. Strong local objections can be observed regarding the multi ethnic form of the state and its symbols. This presumed containment of the Albanian ethnic identity over a regional or Kosovar civic identity may have counterproductive consequences on local empowerment, ownership and unintended consequences such as a strengthening of more radical nationalism. The containment strategy indirectly silences local actors through humiliation or the

cutting of donor funds. The international and local group supporting the civic Kosovan identity and two state solution,²⁹⁷ the establishment of Kosovo and Albania, fail to acknowledge and mitigate the resulting problems by focusing on power politics and security and civic identity rather than ethnic identity and culture. In addition, questions arise about the actual impact of high levels of foreign interference that may result in a vulnerable nation building with fragile prospects as well as the EU integration. It remains to be seen whether the EU will actually deliver in terms of the country's stabilization. As Connor argued, neglecting ethnicity may undermine the state (Connor, 1972, 1993). Instead of ignoring national identities, the better approach may be to try to reshape it, in milder forms, promoting peaceful coexistence among ethnicities as it exists between various religions in Albania. This represents a historical example. In local context of Kosovo, promoting a "balanced" nation building means to balance the inclusion of ethnic and civic elements in institutional level, such as inclusion of national elements in the symbols and constitution of Kosovo. In addition, engaging on discussions about ethnic identities without prejudice in individual level may be beneficial for all societies living in Kosovo. Furthermore, it is important to engage in historical debates to form "local histories" together with all ethnic groups. Local resistance shows that marginalization does not guarantee success. Pursuing ethnic complementary to civic nation building may thus contribute to more sustainable outcomes. Nationalism becomes negative when connotations of hate and discrimination are attached, but where it promotes tolerance, respect, culture and a shared history it may assist in nation building and peace building. Furthermore, a better social, economic and political situation may prevent the falling back into destructive patterns of nationalism. Nation and peace building could be pursued in tandem. Balanced nation building may also strengthen state building as it may contribute to a common societal engineering.

Finally, the peace building activities after conflict focus mainly on the strengthening various state functions that shows the link between state building and reconciliation agendas (Call, 2008b, p. 5; Goetze & Guzina, 2008, p. 319). Strengthening states becomes a requirement for sustainable peace, specifically when peace processes aim at security reform and human rights protection. As Call sums up, state building may reinforce peace building due to its "complementary relationship", developing "sustainable mechanisms [justice, police or service delivery] for security and conflict resolution at the national level that should carry legitimacy in the eyes of the populace and of the outside world" (Call, 2008b, p. 12). Peace building focuses on reduction of violence and securitization. The enemies presumably turn to institutions to resolve conflicts rather than other channels. Call argues that state building could "reduce the incentives to seek basic goods outside established channels or through violence" (Call, 2008b,

²⁹⁷ Despite that the term is usually used for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it also fits to describe the current state formation of Kosovo, alongside Albania.

p. 13). In addition, state building may also “accelerate” the withdrawal of international actors by “ensuring stability and popular support for an emergent regime” (Call, 2008b, p. 13).²⁹⁸

The last chapter focused specifically on reconciliation as one of the main elements contributing to peace building. Some similarities and divergences are revealed between the local and international actors. The international perspective stresses the significance of EU integration to achieve peace due to Kosovo’s geographical location, the possibility of the repatriation of migrants and regional security. Local actors seem less positive about the institutional efforts provided by the EU Agreement to further peace and reconciliation at the individual and institutional level. Both international and local actors identify reconciliation as the biggest challenge facing Kosovo but their strategies to overcome divisions differ. International officials seem to suggest an approach focusing on establishing truth, integrating perpetrators and bringing together the victims and perpetrators rather than relying on judicial mechanisms, retributive justice and material reparations despite the fact that several institutional mechanisms have been established to deal with perpetrators (that is, the War Chambers, EULEX, ICTY, and in the future a special court). This seems to stem mainly from the perception that justice mechanisms are incapable and are being politicized through American interferences. They identify further shortcomings such as tolerating the Albanian political elite to terrorize the minorities immediately after the war, leading to radicalization and hence harming reconciliation in the long-term. Furthermore, the limited access to the Northern area seems to remain a challenge for reconciliation and the bridge dividing Mitrovica seems to be perceived as unnecessary. More attention ought instead to be given to the rule of law, economic development, institutional and power sharing mechanisms. The latter suggestions refer to instrumental reconciliation on the institutional level.

Yet, the local actors also seem divided on how to achieve reconciliation. The (resistant part of the) political elite points out that the EU Brussels agreement and decentralization policies at the institutional level may harm reconciliation in long-term as they promote separate co-existence instead of bringing communities together. These policies are facilitated by local political elites providing unconditional support to the international elite, believing that this is the price to pay for humanitarian intervention or fearing the revelation of their criminal pasts. The stance taken by the political resistance group and some individuals seems to be viewed as damaging reconciliation on the long run. Furthermore, the promotion of truth commissions is viewed to correspond better to victims’ needs than judicial mechanisms due to their politicization and inability to meet victim needs. The independence of judicial mechanisms needs improvement.

²⁹⁸ This represents a relevant summary of the peacebuilding theory for the purpose of concluding. For more information see: Liberal Peace building: Democracy and Human Rights.

Life stories reveal that on the individual level, reconciliation may often be more of an instrumental rather than of a moral type, thus reconciliation is present despite all the insecurities in Kosovo. In such cases mutual respect developed gradually over several years through working on inter-ethnic projects. This contrasts to top-down approaches that promote separate co-existence through law. Instead, it is suggested to promote reconciliation based on projects targeting specific sectors (health, education, banking), marginalized group (women, children, and youth) and profitability. In the North, Serbian individuals who cooperate with Kosovo Albanians are still confronted with difficulties, as they seem to face various threats due to a lack of security, rule of law and illegal groups. The weak integration of the Serbian minority in the North poses a challenge to state, nation and peace building. The Serbian minorities in the South are integrated in Kosovo's institutional structure.

Peace building complements state building since neither of them can in the longer term be achieved separately. Peace building refers to obtaining negative or positive peace, with the latter being a long-term aspiration, while the prior can often already be found in some fragile states. Only a re-orientation to more positive and peaceful values of the nation, eventually leading to nation building, would be a prerequisite for state and peace building in the long term. It seems that there can be no state building without nation building and vice versa. If the collective identity does not support the state, then both nation and state building will be fragile, but state building policies can change through engineering the collective identity including incorporating ethnic identities on the institutional and individual level, which in turn will support state and nation building. Finally, there can be no peace without state and nation building. While this may seem counterintuitive, it has been shown in the last chapter that with instrumental reconciliation occurring in practice, peace can gradually be achieved even in contexts of high nationalism. A nation may be based on respect and tolerance towards other identities and an acknowledgment of their worth through ethnic identity, resonating with reconciliation and peace building agendas. Reconciliation requires as well mutual respect, which in turn may result in successful, sustainable and long-term peace. On the other hand, local actors challenge the power politics and interests, which seem to serve for the benefits of the current ruling elite, calling for checks and balances and accountability by the international community. Verdeja argues on reconciliation that it is

impossible to return the tree to its prior self, just as it may be impossible to reconcile fully following terrible events, but the belief in a healthy tree, strong in its foundation and confident in its branches, gives hope to the possibility of a better future (Verdeja, 2009, p. 185)

This seems to be true for state, nation and peace building as well. Thus it is necessary to build healthy social practices through better education that promote respect, tolerance, professionalism and remove the power inequalities.

Amongst other general conclusions, the international community may need to refrain from intervening without understanding local priorities. Such reconstruction of states or nations has so far resulted in a backlash by the local community, meaning that the international involvement causes alienation, when their needs are neglected or ignored. Understanding local priorities is essential as it prevents alienation from the locals, allows local actors involvement in all spheres and contributes to peace and stability. Respecting local viewpoints seems also to be the main element necessary to achieve peace. While peace requires a functioning state, the latter in turn necessitates a degree of social cohesion or “society building”. State building should also reconcile the need for a nation in both civic and ethnic terms. Of particular significance for the local population is education, which offers possibility for social mobility upwards. Chapter VII shows that the emphasis on education dates back to the pre-war period and exists until today. The focus may need to shift from an almost exclusive focus on institution building to maintaining and reconstructing the social fabric of the local communities. The social fabric can serve as a metaphor to guide internationals in state, nation and peace building processes.

Furthermore, the international community seems to have denied cooperation to groups who do not share their viewpoints. This has furthered their alienation and created a servile political class which weakens the state capacities and breeds dependency. Both the local community and the international community demand a return to ethics. In a recent article, critical theorists, Olivier Richmond *et al.*, speaks about recovering political legitimacy from the intervention by re-recognizing and de-colonizing the local agency (Richmond, Kappler, & Björkdahl, 2015). A discussion over the “field”, meaning research on the ground, of researchers or policy makers reveals its “backwardness” and conflictual practices that legitimize a need for intervention (Richmond et al., 2015). A distance is maintained between the researcher and the local whose agency is discursively stripped. Many of the challenges mentioned above follow a similar pattern since international and local communities remain removed from one another. Furthermore, less dominant interventions by the international community seem to be preferred over excessive ones, which can result in a lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the local population. Richmond and others argue that excessive power, lack of legitimacy and high authority generate cycles of securitization rather than peace or order (Richmond et al., 2015).

Policy Implications

The life stories as a methodology to understand local needs and priorities proved to be a valuable and efficient academic methodology. However, in the cases of state, nation and peace building, its contribution may go beyond the academic sphere. The same methodology could also be applied by professional agencies such as international organizations, ministries, NGOs to understand, in a tentative and explorative way, where the local priorities are and where to

intervene and how. In fact, research can follow similar paths in the academic and the policy domain which both seek to reinforce peace and security processes. More concretely, this means that international institutions could integrate life story research in fragile contexts to improve their understanding of local priorities for each country, especially in early phases of their arrival. For instance, the case of Kosovo shows that one local priority lies in the education sector, the hope being that it could promote social cohesion and harmony, which in turn could strengthen the nation, state and peace. This view differs from the international community's perspectives focusing on process such as the rebuilding of institutions, security, the judiciary and the economy. While these are also important for the locals, the argument goes that with accurate education, social cohesion would have been maintained and that the state would have more likely functioned by now, in turn supporting efforts of peace as well as nation building.

Life stories could possibly be disseminated online and through the media, with civil society organizing events to discuss further their meaning and implications. Furthermore, one could suggest creating an online platform for the international community or local governments where personal experiences of locals are told publically and are stored there in accordance to data protection and privacy laws and in consultation and with consent of interviews. If individuals prefer to share their life stories, a contact point could be developed to organize interviews and to enable digital access. Academics, historians and political scientists could assist in this process. NGOs could show the life stories as movies, organize debates around them with the aim to open up taboos and the dialogue process on societal level, break the common myths towards enemies and move towards reconciliation. The televisions and radio stations could access them and contribute similarly like NGOs. The benefits of telling, sharing and discussing the life stories are various. They could assist to understand the failures of peace, state and nation building processes, break the myths about the other, or break the local alienation towards international community and vice versa, and further the understanding of topics and challenges that are significant for the past and/or present of fragile areas.

Furthermore, organizing roundtables with stakeholders such as randomly selecting citizens, NGOs, think tanks and international organizations can benefit by reflecting on how their involvement might affect those who are regarded as beneficiaries of statebuilding and peacebuilding, in particular in the case of Kosovo. The relevant questions in this context are how to implement decentralization and reconciliation programs and how to ensure local participation and legitimacy. These could be beneficial for promoting progress in other state functions in Kosovo including security, economy, the judiciary, education, health and other services. The roundtable results could be translated to the public and across various sectors (judiciary, security, education, industry) and/or disseminated in publicly available newspapers and journals,

thereby educating a wider audience about the effects of the involvement of developed states and organisations in Kosovo and the role of local actors.

Further recommendations concern accountability and democratic governance in Kosovo in both domestic and international actors, taking into account their identity and incorporating local ownership when dealing with post-conflict situations. Furthermore, local parliamentarians may initiate parliamentary hearing with IOs, foreign representatives or NGO's to discuss their involvement in the state.

Regarding state building, the main recommendations to policy makers concern strengthening the social fabric. This necessitates negotiation with domestic and international actors in order to take into account local identity, traditions and culture while gradually incorporating liberal values in education. International donors are urged to provide the same priority to education as they do for capacity building projects and institution building since education seems essential to provide the basis for a functioning society, create healthy social interactions and the creation of social cohesion. Changes can be introduced gradually in the primary and secondary education system through school curriculums among others targeting younger generations that can facilitate positive changes in the future and overcome current obstacles. Institutionally, it is suggested to reduce the amount of actors for clarity and transparency, which are currently deficient in Kosovo's state building.

In terms of nation building, the international community, instead of marginalizing the Albanian identity, should seek to work with it and to try to reshape it. Positive lessons may be drawn from the peaceful coexistence of Albanians with different religious backgrounds. Shifting the policy focus towards peaceful ideas such as "peaceful coexistence" or "culture" may promote a more moderate understanding of "Albanianism" and mitigate the unintended consequences of the current "ethnic containment" strategy. This also moves beyond the categorizations of Albanians or Serbs during the war as "victims" and "perpetrators". In other words, nationalism is not bad per se, including important aspect such as culture, identity, tradition, language, all of which can positively contribute to nation building. Still, it becomes negative with the rise of connotations of hate and discrimination. Recent demonstrations in Macedonia drew together ethnic Macedonians and Albanians in protest against the ruling regime of Macedonia despite attempts of the government to deepen cleavages and spark violence (allegedly attacking an Albanian family in Kumanovo). In such a context, ethnic nationalism is in tune and even complementary to civic nationalism. Therefore balanced nation building is proposed where ethnic identity is incorporated in state structures through symbols, in constitution and a historical dialogue is initiated.

The main proposals concerning peace building target the European Union as the most significant actor in Kosovo. Their future projects could focus on fostering inter-ethnic cooperation

between adversaries in Kosovo in cities or villages where no cooperation exists so far. A top-down approach could encourage (and to some extent even force) different groups to work together on an every day basis, thus promoting instrumental reconciliation. Projects could focus on offering employment in civil society, banks or basic services, which in the eyes of both groups seem to provide legitimate reasons to cooperate with each other. They seem also well perceived by the less reconciliatory individuals due possible material benefits. However, this proposal should be viewed with caution as a “neutral” mediating body like the European Union may impose conditions on projects for reconciliation that may make these grassroots initiatives international rather than local. This may hinder the already ongoing reconciliation process. Working with marginalized groups such as women, youth, children and working in domains such as education, health, and/or banking-loans sectors seems promising for reconciliation purposes. This could be achieved through humanitarian organizations, NGOs or even industry. However, it remains to be seen whether such purposive or instrumental interpersonal reconciliation is durable on a societal level on longer term. It is important to also include top-bottom initiatives for reconciliation, most notably decentralization, integrative EU dialogues, less impunity and more accountability, since without those, bottom-up process will falter, and even the already made progress might be undermined, as seen in the case of Northern Mitrovica. As Dhurata wonders, “[how] to treat all neighbors, like in a normal way, if you are [a] kind of a hostage of the situation”, referring to the situation in Northern Kosovo more generally. Lastly, careful solutions need to be crafted on the institutional level to avoid furthering ethnic cleavages, which is precisely what legal frameworks developed along ethnic lines seem to be doing now. Instead, they need to promote living together rather than separation along ethnic lines. This however does not imply ignoring the ethnic identity as argued in nation building chapter. The instrumental reconciliation may promote peace, but also strengthen the state and nation building.