

Kavalski, Emilian (Hrsg.): *Stable Outside, Fragile Inside? Post-Soviet Statehood in Central Asia*. Farnham: Ashgate 2010. ISBN: 978-0-7546-7600-3; 252 S.

Rezensiert von: Kishimjan Osmonova, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

The book concerns itself mainly with dynamics of state-building in post-Soviet Central Asia. It has two objectives; first is to critically reflect on the notion of „stateness“ and how within this Western discourse Central Asian statehood can be approached. Central Asian states have been relatively stable outside while remaining fragile inside, which places the debate on the role of external actors and internal agents. While, on the one hand, these states have to accommodate the emergent complexity of global life by localization of external norms, on the other there are local and national needs that have to be addressed domestically. To address this challenge, the notion of „awkward statehood“ is suggested by Emilian Kavalski. Externally, „awkward states“ are unpredictable and unreliable partners that fall short of international rules and expectations. Internally, they violate the social contract of responsibilities between the state and its citizens. Hence, „awkward statehood“ is meant to capture both hybridity of Central Asian governance as well as their domestic and international characters.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on main analytical perspectives for understanding state-making in Central Asia, and the second part looks at individual state-making trajectories. The overview of democratization literature is placed in the Central Asian context to highlight the weak political liberalization throughout the region according to approaches that consider certain social, economic, cultural variables as preconditions for successful democratization. The book focuses mainly on political culture and elite bargaining, and not so much on economic development and national unity prioritization, which could have been more fruitful for analysing such outcomes. A chapter problematizing „clan“ politics in Central Asia, crucially deconstructs „clan“ politics models as being emphasized and illusory, while

attributing kinship relations, which are seen as a basis of informal politics, to the failure of democratization. Accordingly, it oversimplifies the complexities of everyday politics in Central Asia. International political economy (IPE) is used to explain why Central Asian states opted for super-presidentialism. In this understanding, the relative economic and military power of these states influences the choice of diplomatic balance and „staple globalism“. Rational actors of oil rich states have leverage within international trade, thus making super-presidentialism a more stable choice than in resource-poor neighbours. Importantly, a post-colonial perspective is also added to post-Soviet studies to compare post-Soviet Central Asian states to Asia and the Middle East. Such conceptual tools of post-colonial theory as hybridity, subalternity, and orientalism could also offer valuable insights in Central Asia. Thus the combination of post-socialism and post-colonialism could be fruitful for further research on the region. In the second half of the book, authors examine in separate chapters each of the Central Asian states and to what degree each have adopted external norms and how they have balanced their internal pressures.

From these chapters, one sees that after twenty years these states have developed in different directions, and although still sharing past legacies each has formed its own specific vision of statehood. The chapter on Kazakhstan by Kirill Nourzhanov focuses on the learning processes of the power elite and gradual socialization according to international norms. He argues that liberal democratic norms imitated by Kazakh elite at first for the sake of prestige and reputation, can lead through ‘role playing’, in the long run, to genuine adoption of democratic norms. Thus the best target group are young power elites in Kazakhstan who are eager to develop the country and to join the club of internationally-respected, modern and democratic states despite the current super-presidentialism. For these reasons, Nazarbaev’s path of „Kazakhstan ‘Sonderweg’“ is largely accepted by Kazakh elite. The next contribution is on Kyrgyzstan by Claire Wilkinson, who examines international agency and how, due to the lack of natural resources Kyrgyzstan, had to re-

ly on external sources of support. Initially a harbinger of big hopes for democratization, it proved a major disappointment after Western aid was poured into the country, only to result in increased authoritarianism and a near state failure during the most recent years. Kyrgyz political elite were successful in attempts to localize external norms only in so far as to adopt them to fit their short-term pragmatic goals. Their efforts were to balance and play off external actors against each other for more benefits which in the long term might leave Kyrgyzstan in a perpetual cycle of contested norms. The next three Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have experienced less economic and political reforms than Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

In the aftermath of civil war, Tajikistan was left with more damage to state-building than its neighbours, particularly its law enforcement and security agencies. Lawrence Markowitz scrutinizes the long-term commitment and effectiveness of surrounding states to help with peace-building programmes. In his opinion, regional intervention by Russia and Uzbekistan might have negatively affected peace-building in long-term promotion of the rule of law. State-building process and development of rule of law institutions were not the priorities of intervening neighbours, who were firstly concerned about containing the conflict and preserving stability. One of the problems was the inclusion of opposition militia groups into state security structures, who remained loyal to their previous warlords and leaders and not the state. Steven Sabol describes the situation in Turkmenistan, infamous for adopting „positive neutrality“, where former President Niyazov, also known as Turkmenbashi, opted for isolation and „sultanist“ rule. This meant that the president alone decided which institutional choices were in line with the history and traditions of Turkmen people and were deemed most important. Political plurality was seen as being antithetical to Turkmen’s nomadic heritage. The neutrality factor made Turkmenistan less susceptible to external pressure and critique concerning human rights violations and repressive policies. After the death of Niyazov, the new President Berdymukhammedov has been taking small steps to reconstruct the country, but the

legacy of the former president has left much destruction of the political structure, which will take long to undo. Turkmenistan, thus, was isolated not only on the international arena but also ostracised by its neighbours. The last chapter, by Alisher Ilkhamov, finishes with the analysis of Uzbekistan’s regime, which he calls neopatrimonial. It is different to past patrimonial regimes because loyalty is achieved by both formal and informal mechanisms, which in turn serves as the glue that secures the regime stability. Since coercion and intimidation cannot alone explain the regime stability, there are other mechanisms at work as well. Informal practices designated as „clannish“ and patron-client relations are still influential in state as well as everyday politics and can be traced back to pre-Soviet practice of *tanho*. Furthermore, the author utilizes the terms „mega clan“ and „clan“ formation in relation to the presidential family.

Nevertheless, the book is not without its oversights, contributors tend to, despite the critical debunking of the myth on regional and clan pacts, continue to use the concepts in their analyses. The danger is that Central Asian politics is once again wrapped into „clan“ politics that block any innovative analytical approaches that might have more explanatory relevance to the region. Otherwise the book offers an innovative and illuminating read of Central Asian trajectories of state-building that focus on the increasing role of external and global factors and how each of these states accommodate them to their own circumstances. It is an important step to include analyses of Central Asian statehood into the mainstream literature and distinguish the processes not only as deviations from the Western model but rather non-Western alternatives with their own patterns of state-making.

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