

Albanian language media in Montenegro and National Culture

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Abstract

This article is about the importance of minority media in the multiethnic and multilingual countries, such as Montenegro, in informing the minority population and preserving their national identity. It deals specifically with the media in Albanian language, which has its characteristics in relation to other media especially due to its linguistic features. They play an irreplaceable role in the presentation and preservation of culture, language and national identity of Albanians in Montenegro. The article's purpose is to analyze various aspects of the relation between the media in Albanian language and national culture, as well as their interdependence. Since in terms of today's trends, the global culture is constantly replacing the national culture, the question that arises from this issue is for how long it will survive (national culture)? As a case study is taken the newspaper "Koha Javore" as the only weekly published Albanian-language newspaper in Montenegro. One of its most important features is the creation of the Albanian common cultural space. The article defends the thesis that the Albanian language media in Montenegro are an important factor for the development of national culture, respectively national identity since the public interest in such matters is primary here.

Keywords: *minority media, Albanian language media, national identity, national culture, global culture.*

Introduction

The issues of national identity have been the main concern of the Albanian press, within and abroad, in different periods of time, especially at a time when the Albanian nation and its territorial entirety were threatened. It's well known fact that historical and political circumstances of the time have determined the path of

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development as well as the nature of the Albanian press. Due to this reason, the Albanian press was born outside Albanian borders in order to influence the growth of national consciousness. In various European and World countries, Albanian colonies started with their own publishing. Many Albanian patriots, influenced by the National Renaissance program got involved in this and in order to implement this program they took as a moral obligation engaging with the press of the time.

Even Albanian media in the former Yugoslavia, where the Albanians constituted the third population in number and had only the status of nationality, can be defined as a press in defense of the Albanian national identity.¹ Its development is closely linked to the rights of the Albanian people in former Yugoslavia. Since in Kosovo, Albanians constituted the majority population, while in Macedonia and Montenegro minority populations, it's obvious that "Albanian media in these republics were eclipsed by the Albanian media of Kosovo, which covered with information and programs the entire Albanian speaking population in the former Yugoslavia".²

In multiethnic and multilingual countries, such as Montenegro, minority media are of particular importance and not only to inform the respective minority in their mother tongue, but also to preserve their national identity. In comparison with other minority media, the media in Albanian language have its specifics, primarily because of the language that differs radically from other minority languages.

Since the article aims to analyze the relation between Albanian media in Montenegro and national culture, we will deal with some aspects that affect this relation and their interdependence.

Media and culture

The media reflects and at the same time has an impact on processes and democratic changes that occur in a society. Today no country,

¹ Hamit Boriçi & Mark Marku, "Histori e shtypit shqiptar – Nga fillimet deri në ditët tona", Tirana, SHBLU, 2010, p. 243.

² Ibid, p. 250.

regardless of its level of development, can be imagined without media. They are part of a country's culture.

German media researcher Stephan Russ-Mohl says that "media are a powerful integral part of the culture, not just a tool that enables us to learn, rest, revive and regenerate our working energy".³

Media and culture are connected with each other. "The media are serious producers of cultural goods", but at the same time they inform "for all cultural events, while with news, reviews, critics and other forms of journalistic genres inform the public on recent cultural products and as well critically evaluate them and thus influence the public opinion."⁴

Media globalization and culture

Globalization as a phenomenon of our time has included also the media and culture. This has influenced the previous relation between media and culture. Major media groups are spread throughout the world, in various forms, expanding their influence.

Even in the field of culture has happened the cultural imperialism, which attempts to impose on small countries and their population the culture produced in some Western developed countries, especially that of the US. In this battle, the national small cultures are unable to face with the culture of the masses, which today dominates the former elite culture.

This trend is also reflected in the media. In fact, it is the media that affects the spreading of this culture. As Colombo notes, "there is a tendency to create an international communication network without cultural identity and trace, covering various countries and makes different interpretations".⁵ The form of reporting about culture in the media has also changed. "... A lot has changed and displaced since the

³ Stephan Russ-Mohl & Ana Jugoslava Zagorac-Keršer, *Novinarstvo*, Beograd, Clio, 2005, p. 25.

⁴ Stjepan Malović, „Odnos masovnih medija i kulture“, *Kolo* 2, 2005, <http://www.matica.hr/kolo/299/Odnos%20masovnih%20medija%20i%20kulture/> (accessed 21/05/2015).

⁵ Furio Colombo, *Lajmet e fundit mbi gazetarinë*, Tirana, Instituti Shqiptar i Medias, p. 30.

'90s, especially from 'E' to 'Z', namely escape from elite to come toward entertaining offers. Classical cultural column, tightly linked with theater, concerts and book critic, was filled with other offers more devoted to the people's culture, lifestyle topics and especially the cult of VIP's".⁶

Everything in the media today is done in accordance with the requirements of the public. "Traditional forms of reporting on culture are replaced with new forms. 'Classic' culture on television is addressed by Pop and Talk culture, and this not only in private stations"⁷, but also in the public media.

Cultural globalization is seen today as an unstoppable phenomenon, which is difficult to combat. Therefore, in these circumstances when the global culture, which is based on purely commercial principles, is increasingly replacing national culture, the question that arises is how can the national culture survive?

Montenegrin media and Albanian culture

Montenegrin media aim to ethnically unify the entire media spectrum in Montenegro. This trend means that minorities do not have enough space in these media. As a consequence, they lack topics that deal with problems of the Albanians as a minority in Montenegro.

Albanians in Montenegro are the soundless group and are eliminated by the public sphere. This "media silence" is part of the Montenegrin media editorial policy towards them. "Those few topics which emphasize Albanians in Montenegro are mainly those related to politics and black chronicle"⁸, while Albanian culture is anathema for Montenegrin media because if you write about the culture of other people, in this case of Albanian culture, means writing positively about it. Consequently, it can be said that "in quantitative terms, the

⁶ Stephan Russ-Mohl, *Gazetaria*, Tirana, K&B, 2010, p. 223.

⁷ Ibid, p. 226.

⁸ Ismet Kallaba, "Imazhi i shqiptarëve në mediat e shkruara malazeze", in *Studime albanologjike – Diversiteti kulturor në media*, VII, pp. 19-26, Tirana, 2014, p. 23.

Albanians are underrepresented, while in qualitative terms they are misrepresented in Montenegrin media".⁹

Minority media and national culture

Minority media have multiple roles as they are intended not only to inform, educate, entertain, etc., but they are an important tool for the preservation and development of national identity of respective minority. In this context, national culture is just one element of the creation of national identity.

In the case of minority media in Montenegro, their specificity is that their contents are mono-ethnic. Most of the space in them occupies reporting about their minority, then reporting about the majority population, while the smallest space is reserved for reporting on other minorities. This also applies to the Albanian language media in Montenegro.

Albanian language media in Montenegro are concerned with the rights of Albanians in this country and they identify with their problems. Their editorial policy is determined a priori by being of Albanian the national minority in this country. Colombo's saying "national identity of journalist is very important and left the trace in his work, because it allows to find a perspective that leads the way readers or viewers"¹⁰, applies to the Albanian media in Montenegro.

The development and the role of the media in the Albanian language in Montenegro can be compared with the Albanian press of the period of National Renaissance, although in a quite different time context. A number of magazines, mainly cultural, are published from time to time, without a certain periodicity, but only when the money for its publication is provided. "The topics usually treat everyday problems of Albanians in Montenegro, activities of Albanian political parties and other important issue of the identity of the Albanians."¹¹

⁹ Ibid, p. 24.

¹⁰ Colombo, op. cit., p. 29.

¹¹ Ismet Kallaba, "Mediat në gjuhën shqipe në Mal të Zi dhe sfidat e tranzicionit", in *Studime albanologjike – Gazetari dhe shkenca komunikimi*, III, pp. 164-170, Tirana, 2010, p. 166.

But they do not report only for Albanians in Montenegro, but try to cover the whole Albanian area, viewing it as a unified area.

Albanian culture occupies the main space in these media, because it is viewed as an important element of preserving and developing the national identity of Albanians. One of the main reasons is that the majority media, not only private but also public, do not pay the right attention and space to Albanian culture. This is highlighted by the report of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights "The informing in minority languages and contents on the culture and traditions of minorities in the public service in Montenegro."¹² Consequently, Albanian language media in Montenegro are the only place for informing and promoting the culture created by Albanians in Montenegro.

Since the media are a reflection of the society in which it operates, Albanian media in Montenegro, although they first of all pay attention to the national culture, they also cover the cultures of other people that live in Montenegro.

Regarding the manifestation of cultural forms, when there is an attack of other great cultures through the media to influence the public, whether through TV series, soap operas, importing the available cultural models etc., Albanian language media in Montenegro are trying to resist these global trends nowadays.

"Koha javore"¹³ in defense of national culture

"Koha javore", the only weekly in the Albanian language in Montenegro, is a typical example of the representation of the national culture in Albanian media in Montenegro. Its selection was made purely for the convenience of study.

Despite the fact that "Koha javore" since the beginning has been funded from the state budget, its editorial policy has always aimed at

¹² Nisma e të Rinjve për të Drejtat e Njeriut, *Informimi në gjuhët e pakicave dhe përmbajtjet mbi kulturën dhe traditën e popujve pakicë në Shërbimin publik në Mal të Zi* (Monitoring of human rights in Montenegro), Podgorica, 2009.

¹³ The weekly "Koha javore" was established by decision of the Parliament of Montenegro. It's first number is published on February 2002.

protecting cultural values and national identity of Albanians. According to the editor Ali Salaj, this newspaper “follows an affirmative editorial policy and tends to orient and encourage maximally the reader toward the autochthonous culture with the wish that culture remains an eternal challenge of his intellectual activity”.¹⁴

This newspaper devotes a considerable space to national culture, seeing it “as the most important part and supporting pillar in preservation of national identity”¹⁵, but especially “supports the culture of Albanians in Montenegro, which with its own specifics is surviving in the nationwide cultural mosaic.”¹⁶ The editor Salaj says that “considering that the culture of Albanians in Montenegro is not covered in the Albanian media in the region, the role of the newspaper ‘Koha javore’ is even more important, because it turns into an archive storage and disposition of the culture of a community”.¹⁷

Although in this newspaper is understood that dominates coverage of the culture created by Albanians in Montenegro, it is viewed as an integral part of the nationwide cultural mosaic. One of its specifics is the creation of an Albanian common cultural space. “Pantheon of Albanian culture personalities that have taken place in ‘Koha javore’ is panalbanian: Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Çamëria, Romanian Albanians, Arbëreshs or diaspora in the West with a wide range of thematic such as literature, journalism, translation, Albanology, linguistics, monographs, visual arts, etc.”¹⁸

Despite the trends of the most prestigious media to provide a lot of information to the wide public, “Koha javore” remains conservative in its cultural columns. The culture that is reflected in this newspaper is more for intellectuals than the masses because the role of this single newspaper in Albanian language in Montenegro is primarily the education of Albanian readers with national elite culture.

¹⁴ Interview with Ali Salaj, the editor of weekly “Koha javore” (19.05.2015).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Valbona Karakaçi, “Çështje të identitetit të pakicave përmes shtypit shqip në Malin e Zi”. The paper is read in 7-th International Annual Meeting of the Institute Alb-Shkenca.

Conclusions

The role of national, ethnic and cultural identity is determinant for the functioning of the media in Albanian language in Montenegro. Regardless of their level and the fact that they do not constitute the first source of information for the large number of Albanians in Montenegro, who apart from the Albanian language media are informed from other sources, such as the Montenegrin media and Albanian media in the region, Albanian language media in Montenegro are an important factor for the preservation and development of national culture, respectively Albanian national identity in this country.

Through their editorial policy, they intend to form the consciousness of the public that Albanians are one nation, despite being separated in different countries. National culture is seen as one of the most important elements of national identity. For this reason, the Albanian media in Montenegro try to protect the national culture from the invasion of global culture. In this regard, one of the specifics of Albanian media in Montenegro is creating an Albanian common cultural space, where the culture of Albanians in Montenegro holds a special place.

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