

Multiculturalism and the Albanian-speaking media in Macedonia: Modern global models and local issues

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Abstract

This paper focuses on an analysis conducted on two levels. The Albanian media in the multiethnic Macedonia are analyzed in terms of its place in the pan-Albanian media market, which tends to exceed the boundaries that exist between different states and to follow the models of global media. The Albanian media market in Macedonia carries some elements that constitute a special interest for media analysis as it operates in a multicultural social environment, where the concern for the right use of the Albanian language as the second largest official language continues to occupy a good part of the Albanian-speaking media production. This media production from Macedonia is small or not at all present in the Albanian media abroad and therefore the micro-culture of the Albanians of Macedonia, is little known from the Albanian audience abroad. This phenomenon occurs while the Albanian public in Macedonia is a consumer of media production from Albania and from Kosovo. How and why is this partial exchange happening? Is this a cultural or a professional phenomenon? From the methodological point of view, this is an ethnological work based on the ethnography of communication method. This approach enables media production elements as well as elements of information and communication to be analyzed in a close relationship with the cultural context of the society in which the media operates.

Key words: *media, information, communication, culture, national, ethnography.*

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Introduction: The Albanian-speaking media in Macedonia

In Macedonia (officially recognized by international institutions as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-FYROM), after separation from the federation and the declaration of independence in 1991, we can dissociate two epochs in the history of the media in the Albanian language: before and after 2001. During the first decade of independence, the Albanian-language media, dedicated to the Albanian-speaking part of the population, was limited to only a few-hour program in the Macedonian public television (MTV), a state-funded newspaper entitled *Flaka e vllazërimit* and one independent and private newspaper entitled *Fakti*, as well as some small local TV channels and radio stations. In the second decade, after 2001, the media industry in Albanian language gained new dimensions. An informative weekly newsletter titled *Lobi* was born, some regional television channels as well as a first television channel with a national broadcast license, called *Alsat-M*.¹ During the third decade, several regional television stations have increased capacity by taking national licenses, several independent newspapers and news portals have enriched the diversity of voices in the media market.

The television remains the most popular medium in Macedonia, despite the rapid expansion of the new online media. Among the Albanian-speaking TV channels, *Alsat-M* holds the record of viewership. For this reason this medium is selected as representative of the Albanian-speaking media in Macedonia and is taken under analysis. This television also heads over the Macedonian language television channels in terms of reliability.² The reason for this success may be a classic one, such as professionalism, but can also be more particular.

¹ Aurora Ndrio Karameti, *Guerre, médias et la géopolitique: les influences réciproques. Le conflit de Macédoine sous le regard de la presse internationale et albanophone*, Saarbrücken, Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011, 89-93.

² Aurora Ndrio Karameti, "News media as a social factor for law enforcement in the Republic of Macedonia". *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 13 (5), Rome, 2014, p. 302.

It is the only television channel in Macedonia as well as in all the Albanian speaking areas in the Balkans that produces in two languages. This project started in Tirana in the 2000s, aiming to create a common pan Albanian television space that would contribute to bringing Albanians closer and to make the economic collaboration of the region faster. Furthermore, according to the part of this project in Macedonia, it aimed to produce the same television offer for both Albanian and Macedonian citizens, in order to push them to better know each-other and to consolidate peace.³ Therefore, newscasts and informative programs, which are the pillars of programming, are produced in two languages and transmitted at different times. The news content is the same, but the programs are read in the respective languages by Albanian and Macedonian news anchors. In the case of direct reports from the field, the report is translated with subtitles and the other programs are fully translated with subtitles. In case of exclusive direct programs, viewers are notified that the translation will be available during retransmission. The team of journalists and other employees is composed of Albanians, Macedonians and others.

Like the whole complex multicultural environment in Macedonia, to which Albanians have been adapted through history, the use of language is a specific experience for *Alsat-M* television. Albanians generally know the official language of the country, Macedonian, while Macedonians do not speak the Albanian language. In *Alsat-M*, the Albanian journalists speak the Macedonian language; they are able to interview and debate in this language. This is not the case with Macedonian journalists who only know their own language.⁴ In sum, these are the specific cultural conditions where operate the Albanian media in Macedonia, unlike the media in Albania and Kosovo. Furthermore, while the national media in the two Albanian states faces the everyday issues that normally belong to the media, the Albanian language media in Macedonia is facing other problems that burden its activities, such as issues of an unconsolidated multiethnic society and the status of the ethnic Albanian population within this

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Aurora Ndrio Karameti, "The role of Alsat-M as a bilingual medium for the ethnic recognition of its audience". *Vizione*, 22 (1), Skopje, 2014, p. 771.

society, which is still unresolved according to the Constitution and still remains a hot topic for media, public and political debate.⁵ One of the hottest themes of debate is the use of the Albanian language as a second official language in the country, which is denounced by *Alsat-M*.⁶

Theoretical framework and method

Research for the purposes of this paper is made possible by applying the ethnography of communication. This is a theoretical platform and a research method that deals with the study of linguistic resources in the context of their social and cultural environment, but also the study of the words' and expressions' meaning and their correlation with the context. Dell Hymes who is its founding father, in his work, dedicated to the human communication in specific socio-cultural environments, claims that "*the formal analysis of speaking is a means to the understanding of human purposes and needs, and their satisfaction*".⁷ For the purposes of our research topic, ethnography of communication allows us to inquire the elements of the Albanian media in Macedonia and the published information elements to be analyzed within the framework of the cultural context of the Albanian society in Macedonia, through Hymes's famous model of analysis, SPEAKING.⁸

This method consists in a systematic observation of the elements of communication in general and speech in particular and their description by the researcher. This method best inquires the communication process of certain communities within a particular cultural context, which, according to Hymes, "*are able to communicate with each other in a manner which is not only correct but also appropriate to*

⁵ Aurora Ndrio Karameti, *Media dhe gjeopolitika e nje konflikti etnik: Maqedonia viti 1*, Tetovë: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tetovës, 2014, p. 220-224.

⁶ *Op. cit.* Ndrio Karameti, 2014a, f. 767-772.

⁷ Dell H. Hymes, "Models of the interaction of language and social life", in J. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (eds) *Directions in sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972, p. 70.

⁸ Iffat Farah, "The Ethnography of Communication", in N. H. Hornberger and P. Corson (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Language and Education, Volume 8: Research Methods in Language and Education*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998, p. 126.

the sociocultural context. This ability involves a shared knowledge of the linguistic code as well as of the socio-cultural rules, norms and values which guide the conduct and interpretation of speech and other channels of communication in a community".⁹ Thus, for the purposes of our research paper, we observed systematically during twenty days (4 April to 24 April 2015) the production of *Alsat-M* in a detailed way: the content of the news' texts and that of the informative-debate shows, to study the language used. This observation is made in parallel with the analysis of the broadcast programming of the TV channels present on two Albanian satellite TV platforms that are viewed in Macedonia, *Digitalb* and *Tring*, in order to inquire the eventual presence of television production from Macedonia. The results of the observation are classified in three groups:

1. Expression of cultural belonging in the information broadcasted by the national Albanian media in Macedonia (*Alsat-M*),
2. Expression of linguistic identity in this information,
3. Presence of information produced in Macedonia, from TV channels, on both satellite platforms.

These three sets of data were collected from four categories of voices made public through the news media: a) journalist b) intellectuals, c) politicians, and d) ordinary people. The results of the survey are presented as following by analyzing and interpreting them at the same time.

Media, public and political discourse as part of the Albanian culture in Macedonia

Media, intellectuals and politicians as well as ordinary people in Macedonia, use in their discourses certain terms which are indicators and a direct reflection of their socio-cultural context, peoples' culture, identity and their relevant issues and preoccupations. Therefore, by monitoring the communication elements in the context of Macedonia, a very impressed appearance is the use of terms "our country" and its

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

determination. By monitoring media discourses, public and political, we observed some particularities in the use of this expression, which appear as an indicator of two elements:

- 1) The reservations (with which it is used) and
- 2) The care (with which it is used).

This expression, "our country", is rarely heard in discourses of Albanians in Macedonia. To define the territory or the country where they live, in most cases, they use substitute expressing that mean the reservation with which they use this definition, but at the same time the care for not speaking wrong nationally or politically. So, when it comes to these definitions, the phrase "our country" (in "our country", for "our country" etc.) is often replaced with «Macedonia», «this state», «this country». These substitutions are noticed to be mainly used by media, intellectuals and ordinary people. They reflect a kind of reservation to name Macedonia directly as "their own country". This phenomenon shows the sentiment of exclusion that the Albanians of Macedonia still have towards the Macedonian state; they do not feel fully involved in the country, feel marginalized in one way or another and therefore "the country" and "the state" get different meanings of belonging.

A slightly modified replacement for this definition is used by Albanian politicians. Most of them avoid defining "our country" and replace it with the definition «Republic of Macedonia». The use of this definition for the word "country" in this case carries two dimensions. The first, as described above, concerns the sense of belonging which is reflected even in the rhetoric of people who belong to the Albanian political class in Macedonia (who, even though they are often part of the legislative and executive power, cannot hide discontent about the level of involvement and a serious and appropriate representation in these bodies).

The second dimension has to do with a kind of effort to balance the first dimension. In public, Albanian politicians try to be fair in their relation with the Macedonian part of the political class, appearing as loyal to the state, its identity and name, despite the disability to emerge as true representatives of the Macedonian state. They use, almost in every possible case, the definition «Republic of Macedonia»

demonstrating this way a kind of loyalty to the state as well as a kind of solidarity against the contestation of this name from the southern neighbor, Greece. Albanians of Macedonia, since the declaration of this republic as an independent state after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, have constantly been demonstrating that they are a factor of stability and want to live in Macedonia together with Macedonians, but with equal rights.

Furthermore, with their rhetoric, the Albanian media and political class (with some exceptions) exploit every opportunity to demonstrate the opposite of the blames historically made towards them for separatism and aspirations to join the/any Albanian state. Even ordinary people, in their public communications (*vox pop*) express themselves with caution and try to show they are balanced in their views. The need to be "politically correct" has led towards the establishment of this way of expression, even for the simple man. This communication approach appears only in the discourses about ethnicity, affiliation and country. All this, in general, shows the rising of this issue to the level of a permanent anxiety, which occurs in this way even in public communication. Such a careful use of language towards the state in order to avoid offending its identity, expresses fear of it. This need to be so "in order" towards the state is also one more indicator for the sense of belonging.

The standard language and dialects in the media

Since its foundation and start *Alsat-M* television has decided to use the Albanian standard language. However, in almost all the information produced two elements of language usage caught our attention during observation: the easiness of use of dialectal linguistic forms and the emphasis. While the accent is something inevitable in the short term and gradually reclaimable, dialectal linguistic forms are, apart from easy to be used, the demonstration of a kind of conscious identity attitude.

The emphasis of some TV speakers is strongly noticed, especially in the use of the letter "rr" instead of the letter "r" and the use of the letter "q" for the letter "ç" which are pronounced with a mixed sound

between both of them. In some words, the stress is put over the wrong vowel, for example, in the words «njeriut», «veriu» etc. the stress is not put on the vowel "i" but the vowel «e» and these words are thus pronounced "njèriut" and "vèriu".

The use of unchanged forms of language dialects may be an attempt to get closer to all the audiences categories (different levels of education and, consequently, different levels of knowledge of the standard Albanian language). It may be a persistence, conscious or not, to preserve and cultivate some indigenous linguistic expressions. For example, words and phrases such as "gjegjësisht" was used to mean "respectively" / "more concretely" (in Albanian «përkatësisht» / «më saktë»). For example: they talked about young people, respectively [gjegjësisht] students), another word, "kyçje" that is used in the sense of involvement / get into a process (in Albanian "përfshirje" / "futje në proces"). For example: Albanians must be involved [kyçen] in the talks), the word "do të thotë" used in the sense "I mean" (in Albanian "domethënë"), "hedh në çelëtrë" for "comes to light" / "get public" (in Albanian "del në dritë"), etc.

Media production: "Albanian" and "Macedonian"

An ethnological comparison of media discourse, but also of those political and public, published by *Alsat-M* television in Macedonia, highlights features for which further studies, followed by definitions are needed to be set by consensus from both Albanian and Macedonian scholars in the country. It is about the use of the definition of national and civic belonging of everything that stems from Macedonia. An obstacle is encountered in this definition from Albanians in Macedonia who, in order to separate their identity from the Macedonian identity, specify the name of the country, for example: "the economy of Macedonia" instead of "the Macedonian economy", "the future of the people of Macedonia" and not "the Macedonian people". This tenacity in performance is not observed in other Albanian news media, which speak for "Kosovar youth", "Albanian immigrants", "Albanian institutions", etc. The treatment of Albanians from the Macedonian state, as a descendent of Yugoslavia,

has conducted to the development of specific feelings for Albanians towards this state. It has contributed for them to strongly capture the Albanian identity and to increase efforts for its preservation. In this effort, as well as in the Albanian society, the media has spent more energy, which has led, among others, to a stronger connection with the identity elements and therefore even a tendency of isolation from the environment.

Albanian media in Macedonia and the pan-Albanian media

From a systematic survey of broadcast programming and production of television channels that broadcast in two television platforms present in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia (*Digitalb* and *Tring*), a variety of productions from Tirana and Prishtina are detected but there is little production from Skopje, Macedonia. TV *Alsati-M* is the only one present, but it is less competitive in front of diverse products coming especially from Tirana. Those television channels, already consolidated in their local markets, follow the global media models and have already crossed the state borders. They have occupied the nationwide television space and have absorbed the audience in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia (Preshevë and Bujanovc), without excluding the Albanians who live worldwide. They dominate with their interesting production. In front of all these channels' production, the production that comes from Macedonia is minor and seems like it is not able to become a point of reference for the pan-Albanian audience. The news media from Tirana, through their offices with permanent teams in Skopje, also cover the news from Macedonia and fulfill somehow the need for information from this Albanian-inhabited region. The production of TV *Alsati-M*, has failed to strongly enter the screens of Albanians outside Macedonia.

This situation is not random. It is embedded in the Albanian micro- culture in Macedonia. Let's take an example to illustrate it: the minimal presence of the Albanian intellectuals from Macedonia in the Albanian screens in both Albania and Kosovo. Very few journalists or Albanian columnists from Skopje are present on Albanian screens in Tirana and Prishtina compared to those from Kosovo in Tirana or *vice-*

versa. Albanians from Macedonia mainly appear in cases of crisis in Macedonia but they are not part of the common panels for discussion of pan-Albanian problems.

Further research is required for this phenomenon which transcends the limits of this paper, but taking into consideration what we have analyzed in this case, the source may be found in the Albanian culture in Macedonia itself, which is reflected in the media. From here begins the emergence of this kind of media isolation. In the screen of *Alsat-M*, which is studied here, every day there are Macedonian and Albanian guests in front of each other, but there is little exchange of views with colleagues from Tirana and Prishtina. The observation of this medium gives the impression of an Albanian public space in Macedonia which is isolated and tries to handle its problems alone with support neither from the media, nor from the politics of the pan-Albanian space. At this point, it is worth to mention (without claiming to go deeper) that the public, media and intellectual circles in Macedonia have the conviction that the Albanians of Macedonia are forgotten from Tirana and Prishtina. Indeed, life for Albanians in Macedonia has historically been a step backwards, politically and culturally, from Kosovo, although the two countries have lived under the Yugoslav federation.¹⁰

Conclusions

Albanians living in Macedonia, a multi-ethnic country, have developed a sub-culture, with its peculiarities, which distinguishes them from the other Albanian-living spaces. It is the ground where the media's culture has its roots. The media produces discourses which remain only within the territorial space and do not exceed the state borders which may allow Albanians living in other territories to better know the cultural and social peculiarities of Macedonia. This turns out to be a cultural phenomenon. It strongly affects even the professional aspects in the media itself.

¹⁰ Op. cit. Ndrio Karameti, 2014c, p. 60-77.

The eventual exit of the Albanian media in Macedonia from this kind of isolation where it acts, in comparison to the rest of the media in Albania and Kosovo, could lead to a greater cultural pan-Albanian exchange. This exchange would give a great contribution to progress in several aspects of life of the Albanian society in Macedonia and the media itself.

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