

The Role of the Albanian Media as Mediator and Creator of Collective Memory

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Abstract

Media plays a crucial role in the development and preservation of collective memory. Each social group constructs a memory package from its past, emphasizing its uniqueness and passing it on to future generations. As a creator of social constructs, the media has a primary role in shaping and building collective memory. Monitoring television, online platforms, and social networks reveals that the media aims to create new perspectives on history by constructing framework packages, focusing on diagnosing the past, and building understandings of the present. Another analyzed aspect is the musealization of memory, where the media treats stories as museum objects, illustrating the values of a bygone era. Through the notion of the small screen as a historical eye, television creates its own self-memory. Analysis of memory narratives indicates that nostalgia and drama are essential tools for their marketing. The analysis of this discourse leads us to the idea of "media as part of history."

Keywords: Collective Memory, Social Constructs, Museumization, Social Interaction

I. Introduction

The events related to the collective memory of the early '90s, a time when Albania was still under the communist regime led by dictator Enver Hoxha and later by Ramiz Alia, are increasingly being published in our media, whether they are traditional or online. These stories are divided into two parts: those belonging to the leaders of the communist dictatorship who were in power, some of whom were betrayed and punished by their comrades, and the other part consists of the persecuted, mainly intellectuals and wealthy families from before 1944. These are commonly referred to as "dosje" (files), and now in Albania, there is a group of journalists who specifically write in this field [1].

Collective memory "speaks" about the individual's relationships with the social group in which they live, helping to create their identity. In this sense,

collective memory constructs social constructs. It not only sheds light on events of the past, which still have many unclear aspects but also builds new meanings for that period. New perspectives on historical issues emerge, constructing a different history, not only of a specific event but also of the history of Albania. In this way, the media plays an active role in building history, becoming a part of it [2].

The media creates frameworks to diagnose the past, evaluate it, and build understandings for the present. The role of the media as an agent in producing memory is within these parameters. Another role that the media undertakes is the "musealization" of memory. Musealization seeks stability and permanence of the past, turning them into symbolic points in the construction of frameworks through which the past is seen and analyzed. Musealization contains symbols with which we dissect the present. Media musealization usually operates through repetition, emphasis, and simplification. In this way, the media creates its own memory. While the "narrative of memory" for events belonging to the supportive social group of socialism is described with a sense of nostalgia, those of the socially persecuted group contain much drama. In both cases, among other things, nostalgia and drama are also marketing tools. Hypothesis is: The media has a role not only as a mediator in the construction of collective memory, but also as a builder of social constructs, different perspectives on this period of society [3].

Scientific questions are:

1. In classical and online media; what has influenced the creation of special columns for collective memory as well as the creation of shows and documentaries related to this topic, politics or are they requested by the audience, the public?
2. To what levels has the media taken the construction of collective memory so far?

In order to prove the hypothesis and provide answers to these questions, studies by Albanian authors and foreign studies were used, which not only show the path that the Albanian media has taken in the construction of collective memory, but also the comparison of concepts sheds light on the characteristics of this path. The first author to address this topic was Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), who tried to answer the question of how we use our mental images of the present to reconstruct our past. Subsequently, the topic of collective memory has been addressed by many scholars whose works have been used in this work, authors such as Burr, Gamson, Entman, Anderson, Bohn, Wilson, etc [4].

II. Research Methodology

In the course of the work, quantitative data obtained through media monitoring were used for both types of topics of collective memory in our country, both for the political elite before the 1990s and for the class of the persecuted in the same historical period. The theoretical concepts of the most famous Albanian and foreign researchers also helped in the interpretation of the facts. This is a multi-sectorial research, for which data has been collected by describing the variables, their incidence and interrelationships have been studied at a specific moment. This type of cross-sectional research belongs to the cross-sectional exploratory model [5].

III. Results

Media constructs new meanings and perspectives of collective memory. In this way, it influences the formation and construction of social constructs. Dealing with these issues is not an attribute of politics, but a demand of the public to know the events and personalities of the past and through them themselves. The Albanian media manage to construct the collective memory of the pre-90s on three levels, while they have not yet managed to penetrate the level of international presentation [6].

IV. Discussion

The concept of "collective memory" is based on the assumption that each social group develops its own memory. The past is a memory that emphasizes its uniqueness and allows it to be preserved and transmitted to future generations. Meanwhile, the media becomes the mediator so that these memories reach the general public. The fundamental role of mediation, the creation of social constructs, lies at the heart of these two fields and binds them together. As a result, both fields are defined and related to issues of representation, socio-cultural relations in a given social group, and the relationship of the individual to power. This fundamental connection between the two fields allows us to examine the characteristics that unite these two fields of the review. Gamson et al. (1992) state: "*we move around with images of the world created by the media and use them to construct understandings of political and social issues*" [7].

A. Collective Memory and the Construction of Social Constructs Through the Media

The first files related to the collective memory of the events before the 90s were published after 1997, written by Dashnor Kaloçin, in the Albanian Gazette. Then authors such as Ferdinand Dervishi, Roland Qafoku, Admirina Peçi, Luli Progni, etc. started to write on this topic, in the newspapers Shekulli, Koha Jonë, Gazeta Dita, Telegrafi, Tirana Observër, Tema and Standard, etc. The subjects of these files belong to the historical figures and events of the dictatorship period, where the characters were persons of the nomenclature of the time. *"The newspaper managers realized that when they had such files, they sold their entire circulation. So the newspaper Panorama opened it as a permanent column, with one or two pages of dossiers every day"*, says Admirina Peçi, (interviewed by author D.Ç) of the program "Dosier" on Report TV [8].

According to her, until 2014 it was written only about the figures of the block, shedding light on their shadows, such as Enver Hoxha, Mehmet Shehu, Kadri Hazbiu, Ramizë Alia. Newspapers were sold en masse because their readers were over 50 years old and had lived through that time. That is why these readers were called "nostalgics", because the authors of the dossiers "play" with their feelings in order to approach them and increase the circulation and sales of newspapers. This is where the frame theory comes in, the frame in which the news is reflected by the journalist. The moment the frame is defined by the journalist, the audience of the news is also defined [9].

Qing (2000: 666) explains the framing process as follows: *"News is a representation of the world mediated by the journalist. Like any discourse, it constructively models what it talks about. Differences in expression carry ideological differences and thus differences in representation. Therefore, news content represents ideas, beliefs, values, theories and ideologies. The primary function of the language of news as discourse is to provide journalistically imposed categories for the event itself"*. From time to time, these stories began to be treated and continue to be treated by television, even in its prime time programs. Personalities began to be treated as well, but those who belonged to the social group of the persecuted were treated but again through the "nostalgic" prism where you see headlines like: "This is how Mehmet Shehu saved Petro Marko from persecution" (Shqiptare newspaper 12.05. 2008) [10].

Table 1 Programmes and articles about Mehmet Shehu, author D.Ç

MEHMET SHEHU		
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MEDIA	PROGRAMMES	ARTICLES
TV Klan (Opinion)	8	
TV Klan	6	
Top Channel	5	
ABC TV	3	
ReportTV	3	
News24	4	
Channel One	3	
Shqiptarja.com		45
Dosjer.al		33
Others		36
TOTAL	32	114

Table 2 Programmes and articles about *Enver Hoxha*, author *D.Ç*

ENVER HOXHA		
MEDIA	PROGRAMMES	ARTICLES
TV Klan (Opinion)	5	
TV Klan	6	
ABC	4	
News24	2	
Channel One	1	
Vizion plus	1	
Ora news	1	

Top Channel	5	
TOTAL	25	96

Table 3 Programmes and articles about *Ramiz Alia*, author D.Ç

RAMIZ ALIA		
MEDIA	PROGRAMMES	ARTICLES
TV Klan (Opinion)	3	
Top Channel	2	
Vizion+	1	
ABCTV	1	
TV Klan	1	
OraTV	1	
ReportTV	1	
TOTAL	10	127

Table 4 Programmes and articles about *Kadri Azbiu*, author D.Ç

KADRI HAZBIU		
MEDIA	PROGRAMMES	ARTICLES
TV Klan (Opinion)	1	
TV Klan	2	
Vizion plus	3	
Abc 3	6	

RTV Ora	2	
Faxweb	1	
Gjithesej	15	95

Meanwhile, in 2014-2015, dossiers began to be written about people who belonged to the other stratum of the persecuted, writing their stories [11].

We already have shown dedicated to this social stratum, such as on Report TV or News 24. On Report TV, these shows started in March 2018 and have been running for over four years, with one file every week. So there are over 100 stories published. Stories that gain value after being exposed and published on Shqiptarja.com, or Balkanweb.com in the case of News 24 TV. The events of the persecuted class have been written regularly since 2014. Just at albania.com I had a file page where only documents are published. So, without much writing, without interviews, without archival documents, but belonging to this denied part of history, where violence, torture, persecution, imprisonment were witnessed. Thus, the unstudied part of the war, such as the crimes committed by the communists during the war, began to be treated periodically. Seeing the many clicks these stories received on the portal Shqiptarja.com after 3 years, the first stories on Report TV began to be built [12].

Media people realized that these stories also have an audience, readers. Until 2014, it was thought that only names like Enver Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu sold the newspaper, until in 2014 a full page was written for Sabiha Kasimati 2014, the title was placed on the first page. The paper sold its entire circulation. *"It seems that people read information that is interesting and they don't want to know if it is about the persecuted or the persecutors, about those who have raised their fame and career with violence or those who have been violated,"* says Admirina Peçi (Interviewed by author D.Ç), author of the show "Dossier", Report TV. First of all, we dealt with personalities belonging to this class, such as Kasimati, Mysine Kokalari, Mit'hat Frashëri, Eqerem Bej Vlora, etc [13].

These were some characters that attracted readers like magnets and as they were personalities, but there are still many mysteries about them. It is not only about the persecution of these figures, but also about the denial of their values and their work. We see a change in the frame (point of view) of the journalist, in this

way another audience is approached, as well as this audience, which is gray, looks at the events before the 90s from different angles. The multimedia nature of our media has multiplied their audience, which is no longer passive. "When these articles are posted on social networks, they have many comments, often more than 100, which shows that there is interest both from people who come from the persecuted class, but also from others who want to know about that time," says Luli Progni. (Interviewed by author D.Ç), Kujto.al journalist [14].

This made it possible to change the perspective, to make the public aware of the crimes that happened at that time, because the medal of history has two sides. Thus, an individual's perception of "truth" is a product of the social processes and interactions in which an individual engages, rather than an objective observation [15].

Table 5 Programmes and articles about *Sabiha Kasimati*, author D.Ç

SABIHA KASIMATI		
MEDIA	PROGRAMMES	ARTICLES
ABC TV	1	
Report TV	1	
Klan tv (Opinion)	1	
Total	3	109

Table 6 Programmes and articles about *Musine Kokalari*, author D.Ç

MUSINE KOKALARI		
MEDIA	PROGRAMMES	ARTICLES
EuroNews	2	
RTV	1	
TV21	1	
VOA	1	
ABCTV	1	

TV Klan	1	
Total	7	92

Table 7 Programmes and articles about *Mit'hat frasheri*, author D.Ç

MIT'HAT FRASHERI		
MEDIA	PROGRAMMES	ARTICLES
KlanTV (Opinion)	2	
Klan TV	1	
Report TV	1	
VOA	2	
TV ABC	1	
Total		87

Table 8 Programmes and articles about *Eqerem Bej Vlora*, author D.Ç

EQEREM BEJ VLORA		
MEDIA	PROGRAMMES	ARTICLES
Top Channel	1	
TVKlan	1	
Channel One	1	
RTVOra	1	
Report TV	1	
Total		97

As the above tables show, although the figures of communism have taken place in the prime time shows of our televisions, the figures of the persecuted class have not been able to enter freely. *"If we take stock of the role of the media in documenting the crimes of the communist dictatorship, I regret to say that the contribution is very small. The media's attention is more focused on the restoration of the dictator's stories (even the rosy ones) than on the story of his victims, who were shot, imprisoned and interned through no fault of their own during the communist dictatorship,"* says Luli Progni, Kujto.al journalist (Interviewed by author). However, the rehabilitation of these figures and the telling of events for intellectuals and persecuted families has become a mission. Several portals are already open, such as Kujto.al, RadiandRad, while Memorja.al has mixed articles belonging to both layers [16].

However, in many articles or broadcasts about the events of this social stratum, the insurance file is simply treated; we have not yet managed to analyze the issue of how the law was violated, because the legislation of that time was also violated, how human rights were violated. The titles are like this: Who spied on Petro Marko, who spied on Max Velo, and this simply leads to a curious public that does not think, does not reflect, does not react, but is content to extinguish curiosity about the events of that time. The journalist Elvi Fundo of City news says: *"The opening of the files of former state security agents remains hostage to the slow steps of politics. In fact, this blockage of the process shows how delicate this step is that society and politics must take"* [17].

"Collective memory" defines the relationship between the individual and the community to which he belongs, giving meaning to his existence. After this basic statement, we can summarize the main features of the concept of "collective memory" through four characteristics that illuminate its complexity. *"An important factor that is often omitted in memory work is the possibility of the memory being rewritten if the group and the participant whose memory is in question decide that this is merited. This allows a new version of the memory to be added to the discursive space around group meaning, potentially removing problematic interpretation or adding specification, which will allow the group to generate better meanings based on its content"* (Corey et.al, 2018).

Collective memory is as much about identity formation, power and authority, cultural norm and social interaction as it is about the simple act of remembering. In this process, media is as a mediator, but also a builder of collective memory, which aims to create new understandings of the representation

of reality. This phenomenon is seen in some documentaries and articles which can be taken by the audience as didactic and convincing stories about the past aiming to create the feeling that history has been realized by being objective and impartial.

Nostalgia and drama (I would add) are key points that create the framework package for the purpose of diagnosing the past, evaluating it and constructing meanings for the present. The role of the medium as an agent of memory production was found within these parameters. The representation proposed by the two programs related to different practices of remembrance on television. From here it is possible to show the dialectic between codes of representation, and certain formulations of global, national, local and self-referential intersections. At this point it would be useful to highlight various specifics. It aims to create new meanings regarding the representation of reality, is the media [18].

B. Memory Building Levels

The first level refers to the boundaries of national history. Traditionally, this level is predominant in media mnemonic practices. This concept includes examples of what can be defined as dominant: the public memory of the nation. Price (1995: 52–3) has emphasized the importance of narratives in a continuous manner in the creation and updating of national consciousness, removing the distances between elites and society in the stories told. Castelló (2007) has studied documentaries on television and their role as a nation-builder says that the Reference to national memory should then be understood as a meeting point that frames it, as well as showing the common roots of identity. Anderson says that history places itself in the coordination of national and state heritage, understood as imagined [19].

The second level works with a representation located in the cosmopolitan memory axis. The idea of cosmopolitanism refers to the existence of broad themes and global knowledge values located in differentiated social-territorial contexts (Ong, 2009). However, its implications are complex and include the dynamics of local, national internalization. Internal globalization refers to such an idea when international references to the past converge with local specificities. At this level, our media have not yet entered, because, as we have said, they still deal with these issues through the prism of breaking hunger, curiosity, without entering into the essence of the problem. While the events of the communist period have been internationalized in countries such as Poland, Slovakia or Russia, the Albanian events are still lagging behind [20].

The third level is the musealization of memory. Musealization alludes to a

redefinition of meaning, "*like objects in a museum, which have lost their utility value by becoming mere signs of previous utility values*" (Böhn 2007: 145). This concept explains the stabilization and permanence of certain moments of the past that become intensely symbolic points of remembrance in the media. Musealization must contain certain characteristics in order for the past to be understood in the present. Television musealization tends to work through repetition, emphasis, and simplification.

A final level is the self-memory of the media, based on two directions: the creation of its own archive and the possibility of reusing documents, files, as history is such as it contains a narrative transmission. In all the events shown, we are in an autobiographical discourse based on the notion of the mass media or the television screen as a historical eye. Both perspectives work because they affect the emotions of society, for the well-treated group at the time of the dictatorship, the pleasure of nostalgia, and for the second group, the persecuted, and the drama to relieve the pain. But nostalgia is also a marketing device that makes it possible to link self-memory with self-reference. The same logic applies to drama in the second case, when dealing with events from the persecuted class. Consequently, the discourse framework would introduce the idea of "*media as part of history*" (Zoch, 2001: 199).

Documentaries and shows aim to create a reconstruction of what was lived, which is outlined through the selection of historical facts and their treatment from different perspectives. The media productions that represent both social groups are linked in a broader meta-narrative, that of the representation of the past as external time, but also as accessible time, thanks to the production of memory through the power of classical and new media. Questions remain about the role of the media in the construction of collective memory. Why do the media continue to deal with these issues on a superficial level, just to satisfy the curiosity of the public? There is reluctance on the part of the media to get involved, to address these stories in terms of the psychological, moral, human damage, as well as the legal violations that were committed at the time.

Conclusions

The media plays an important role in the construction of social constructs related to the collective memory of the events before the 90s. By using two marketing elements, nostalgia for the well-treated social class during the dictatorship and the drama of the events for the persecuted class, the media

manages to increase its audience. The increase in audiences made the events of this period have their own place in the spectrum of topics that are consistently covered by the media. However, the media remains at the surface level of dealing with this period of history, without daring to go to their essence.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

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