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UNPACKING GENDER DYNAMICS IN ALBANIAN JOURNALISM: A POST-COMMUNIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This study provides evidence of the challenges faced by women journalists in Albania after the fall of communism based on a nationwide survey of 295 journalists. Despite an increase in the number of women journalists, their emancipation in journalism is not necessarily implied. Women journalists tend to be confined to reporting on "soft news" sections or cultural and social topics, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Many women journalists conform to societal expectations and adopt gender stereotypes to exert influence while facing obstacles such as a male-dominated hierarchy, self-censorship, and pressures from family and editorial supervisors. Female journalists who make a name for themselves often cover male-dominated topics, following a masculine logic to gain respect and struggling to maintain their femininity. The study sheds light on the challenges and complexities women journalists face in Albania, providing insights into the gender dynamics within the media industry.

Keywords: Soft News; Self-Censorship; Male-Dominated Hierarchy; Gender Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

Albanian journalism has traditionally been male-dominated since the early 20th century, during the communist era and afterward. The development of commercial media in the mid-1990s and the demand for "soft news" has increased the number of women in journalism, from 1% in 1990 (Boriçi 1997) to 52% in 2012 (Godole 2014). While this "gender switch" (Creedon 1989) has offered more perspectives to female journalists, here we pose the question: Do these changes tell us about the real empowerment of women in Albanian journalism? Even though they are over-represented in the production process of (soft) news, they face barriers to their careers and are under-represented in the editorial hierarchy. There are many studies on how women are discriminated against in the vertical and horizontal hierarchy of the newsroom (Djerf-Pierre and Lofgren-Nilsson 2004; Djerf-Pierre 2007; Melin 2008; Fröhlich and Lafky 2008). However, the question of how women journalists are marginalized within a "patriarchal" field of power is little researched, even less so in the case of Albania.

There have been a few studies on the coverage of social issues and women in Albanian media (Mërtiri et al. 2009, Rhode et al. 2004); women and corruption (Danaj 2008), gender equality (Fico 2007), and women trafficking (Mëniku 2007), mostly produced by non-profit organizations that deal with gender and development issues in post-communist countries. Nevertheless, the role of women journalists as content producers and their position in the Albanian media is still very little known.

The study focuses on female journalists' challenges in the newsroom based on gender. It also aims to explain the nature of the journalism field and its historical development as a contribution to the current literature on journalists' gendered relationships in the context of a post-communist society and media system. To assess the true equality of women within the profession, it is crucial to examine the cultural context in which they operate. The daily work of journalists consists of continuous negotiation of multiple identities: gender identity, professional organizational identity (de Bruin 2004a), and also cultural or territorial identity, especially when it comes to small countries (Puppis 2009) like Albania.

The analysis commences with a concise overview of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts, asserting that capital predominates as the governing force despite habitus, significantly influencing the relational framework within a social field. Subsequently, the gender structure of the journalistic field in Albania is presented to elucidate this phenomenon. Finally, the survey findings are detailed and subjected to discussion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Habitus and the Social Field

In his work "Masculine Domination", Pierre Bourdieu (2005) argues that gender plays a crucial role in the social order. Patriarchal societies have larger male power, reinforcing gender stereotypes in the media. Female journalists in Albania face obstacles due to traditional values focused on marriage and reproduction. Habitus, or habitual actions and perceptions, dominated by the male majority, influences journalism. Decision-making in media reflects gender biases in coverage, making it difficult for women to be included in topics traditionally seen as male domains.

After the dictatorship, the promotion of female journalists was seen as social emancipation (Murzaku and Dervishi 2002). Overcoming economic and social obstacles in a culture where marriage and reproduction are prioritized, women face power dynamics in journalism shaped by "hypnotic male power" (Bourdieu 2005, 9). Habitus, or cultural production, mediates power dynamics in journalism, influenced by the dominant male majority. It is determined by the dominant male majority in the newsroom, which sets the rules of the game, and female journalists have to deal with them in practice, validating gender stereotypes in media productions (Van Zoonen 1988; De Bruin 2004b). Media is managed by individuals who establish power dynamics. Distortions in decision-making at media institutions reflect gender biases in coverage (Mërtiri et al. 2009, 9). Topics such as economics, politics, and governance are often viewed as male domains, making including women difficult.

Symbolic and Cultural Capital

Symbolic and cultural capital plays a significant role in male domination in journalism. Both men and women journalists share the same habitus that oppresses them (Melin 2008, 67). Like any other social field, the journalistic field operates based on its own logic of dominating and securing resources for the most influential position (Schäfer 2004). Capital, including economic, cultural, and social capital, influences the distribution of agents in the field. Economic

capital includes material wealth, while cultural capital encompasses educational values and recognition through awards or prizes. Social capital refers to valuable social relationships within the field. Symbolic capital, in the form of reputation and fame, can be converted into economic capital. It is the authority to decide who is acknowledged as a professional member and determine professional benefits and values within the field (Smirnova 2013, 124).

Female journalists face symbolic negative value in the field due to their gender, which can be offset by professionalism, cultural, or social capital (Djerf-Pierre 2007; Melin-Higgins 2004). Gender can create lines of division within the field. Cultural capital, such as education, language proficiency, and professional assessments, and social capital, such as professional experience and connections, are important for journalists. However, the ruling power within the field greatly impacts the structure and interactions among actors of different statuses, as noted by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1996, 49-79). The gendered logic of power accumulation and benefits being in men's hands and losses for women extends beyond the economic realm (Connell 2005, 134). Masculine power can expose women's double identity as professionals and as women, posing challenges for them (Melin 2008).

Gender Structure within the Journalistic Field

In the early 20th century, journalism in Albania was traditionally a male domain, with well-educated male journalists who were often educated abroad in countries like Italy, Austria, France, or the US, establishing and directing the first Albanian newspapers and magazines (Boriçi 1997). During communism, the importance of cultural capital for journalists diminished as ideological capital became the primary selection filter. Journalists were expected to have a supportive background in the national liberation war or the communist regime for senior managerial positions (Münch and Simaku 1994). Women's involvement in journalism during this period was minimal, with only a few women working as reporters for official newspapers and mostly specializing in magazines and weekly newspapers focused on areas such as women's issues, culture, and children's literature. Women journalists were more dominant as news anchors in state-run radio and television, and this trend continued even after the political system's demise.

In communist Albania, precise data on women journalists were unavailable; nonetheless, their presence in the media market was subject to influence by diverse factors. These factors included the demand for working women being dictated by ideology rather than the labor market, women's participation in society was influenced by the high demand for labor in the socialist economy but with lower positions and incomes (Adnanes 2001), and the traditional cultural role of women as mothers in Albania being patriarchal in nature (Mërtiri et al. 2009).

After the fall of the totalitarian system, journalism in Albania was even more dominated by men. Journalism was aggressive, politicized, and operated with minimal professional standards in a chaotic and improvisational institutional/legal environment. The ideal journalist was described as a "fighter", "missionary", "active politically", "fearless", "hero", "altruist", "idealist", "critical", "advocate", and "educator", leaving little space for women in this media environment.

Only with the boom of commercial media in Albania, particularly in the late 1990s, women had more access to the journalistic field. The commercialization of media increased advertising as a source of revenue, and private televisions emerged, offering commercial and entertaining programs emulating the Italian TV model (Splichal 1994/2001; Godole 2014). The stronger legal framework and media commercialization shifted the dynamics within the journalism field, attracting women readers with sections focused on gossip, news about the private lives of young artists, and Latin American soap opera characters. These domains continue to be dominated by women journalists to this day. The mass involvement of women in journalism in the early 2000s was not a result of a struggle for emancipation but rather due to their adherence to a predefined masculine model.

The media market development dynamics in Albania reveal that changes in ownership accompanied the surge in commercial media. Many media owners have acquired other businesses, such as construction companies, and Albanian legislation does not disapprove of this practice. This has led to the media being used by political actors for economic interests, indirectly bringing the media under political control (Marku 2010; Lani 2011). Ownership problems in the media business, characterized by informality and non-transparency, have contributed to the financial struggles of many media outlets. Interestingly, new media owners have started including women in high managerial, editorial, or organizational positions, but often only if they are close family relatives such as spouses or daughters. Women's involvement in the media business after the 1990s was not necessarily based on their management skills but rather to serve as legitimizing objects for their husbands' power (Londo 2009).

METODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Research Questions

This study examines the differences between female and male journalists in Albania and how different forms of capital influence their position in the hierarchy, considering the nature of gender in Albanian society, particularly the status of women in a patriarchal context.

The first research question is: (RQ1) Does the accumulation of symbolic capital truly legitimize power within a field, regardless of gender?

Furthermore, in terms of their views on journalism, the study asks: (RQ2) Does gender make a notable difference in professionalism and institutional roles?

By measuring the journalists' perceptions of influences within the organizational structure (newsroom), we can gain insights into gender differences. Specifically: (RQ3) Do women and men perceive the same influences and constraints inside and outside the newsroom?

Methods

This study utilizes data from a survey conducted in Albania in 2021 to answer these research questions.¹ The survey involved 295 interviewed journalists who covered various subject areas, including politics and entertainment, to ensure a diverse representation of professional identities and gender distribution across different coverage areas (Hanitzsch and Hanusch 2012, 262). The journalists were selected from each news organization, representing three levels of newsroom hierarchy: general reporters (non-management level), senior editors and desk heads (middle-level management), and chief editors or directors (senior managers). Three to six journalists (depending on the newsroom size) were randomly chosen from the non-management level and one from the top-level management. News organizations were selected based on a common scheme to include a wide and inclusive representation of the Albanian media system, including national and regional outlets. Broadcast media, including public and private organizations, were selected based on ownership criteria. Entertainment media outlets, such as Radio DJs, and other formats not dealing with daily information processing were excluded. The 295 fully standardized surveys were conducted mostly face-to-face (92%), by telephone (7%), or online (1%).

To examine journalists' professional views, they were asked to rate the relative importance of 12 institutional roles using a five-point scale (Table 2). Furthermore, respondents were asked to evaluate the influence of different sources on their work using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not influential) to 5 (extremely influential) (Table 3).

The study also aimed to measure the distribution of cultural capital (education, specialization) and economic capital (income) among male and female journalists, with additional data collected on age, years of work in journalism, areas of coverage, and best production to distinguish gender differences.

RESULTS

Based on quantitative data from the survey, Albanian journalism is predominantly composed of young, mostly 31-year-old (mean) female journalists, accounting for 52% of the workforce. These female journalists hold Master's degrees (61%) and have an average monthly income of \$340 (mean). In contrast, their male counterparts, comprising 48% of the workforce, exhibit an average age of 34 years, with only 39% possessing a Master's degree. Furthermore, their average monthly income amounts to approximately \$420. Thus, the journalists in Albania are relatively young and inexperienced, with an average of 8 years of work experience for females (mean) and 10 years for males (mean).

¹The survey was conducted within the framework of the international project "Worlds of Journalism Study" (<https://worldsofjournalism.org/wjs3-2021-2023>). The author of this paper has been the coordinator for Albania since 2012.

Gender and Hierarchy

Despite being well-educated and specialized, women journalists do not receive favorable treatment regarding professionalism. While 85% of female journalists receive regular training during their employment, only 15% of male journalists undergo professional training. Women journalists have higher cultural capital due to their education and professional training, which helps them stay in the field. However, men receive higher pay and are more likely to advance in their careers, “to the detriment of women” (Djerf-Pierre 2007). Gender relations within the newsroom, including possible discrimination in the hierarchy, payment, and working conditions, are rarely discussed openly. Female journalists frequently occupy non-management positions, constituting 71% in television and 64% in print media (newspapers, magazines), whereas the distribution of males across the hierarchy demonstrates a relatively more balanced pattern. These differences are statistically significant, as shown by the Pearson-Chi-Square test ($\chi^2=12.86$; $df=2$, $N=292$, $p<.002$). Some women journalists have raised concerns about the challenges they face in a society that is not fully emancipated. Successful female journalists highlight the need for persistence, adaptability, and strength to fight an unequal battle in the Albanian media market.²

Areas of Coverage

Table 1 shows that male journalists in Albania primarily report on “hard news” topics such as politics, foreign affairs (60%), and crime (79%). In comparison, female journalists predominantly cover culture (94%), health (100%), and social topics related to current affairs (58%). Most female journalists also cover the economic sector, but male journalists mostly analyze important economic topics such as corruption in the press and TV. The chi-square distribution indicates a significant connection between gender and areas of coverage ($\chi^2=40.241$; $df=7$, $p=.000$). Female journalists in Albania are often confined to covering “womanish” areas with emotional appeal, which is seen as the commercial pole of the field. Women journalists’ pursuit of competitive roles within the media does not indicate a lack of interest or intellectual capacity. However, they may face challenges regarding the gendered nature of journalism and social exclusion.

Table 1: Areas of Coverage (Source: Godole 2014)

	Female (%)	Male (%)
News/Actuality	58.3	41.7
Politics	40.0	60.0
Foreign Policy	45.5	54.5
Domestic Policy	50.0	50.0
Economy	58.8	41.2
Crime and Justice	21.4	78.6
Culture	93.8	6.2
Sports	0.0	100.0
Health	100.0	0.0

² Interview with Ilva Tare, former moderator of “Tonight with Ilva Tare”, TV Vizion+, quoted on Godole, J. (2014).

Notably, not all male journalists hold high-status professional jobs, and the sections they cover do not necessarily guarantee high-quality reporting. Status in journalism is more of an ideology reinforced by structural dynamics, where men often hold higher positions of power and influence. Female journalists also face objectification and challenges in being interviewed, viewed, and listened to in decision-making, analysis, and politics in the media. The limited representation of women aged 40 and above in journalism highlights the challenges they face in pursuing successful careers and achieving improved gender ratios among media executives, field journalists, analysts, and decision-makers.

Professional Views

Do men and women journalists have notably different professional views? Table 2 shows that although there are differences, they are very small. Both men and women equally value “being a detached observer”. However, women value “reporting things as they are” the most. This slight difference does not automatically imply that men are less objective. Men tend to see themselves as more critical of the government, political leaders, and businesses. They also place a higher emphasis on the significance of motivating individuals to engage in political participation.

However, these differences are not significant. Women do tend to appreciate entertainment significantly more than their male counterparts ($t=4.09$; $d.f.=286$; $p<.01$; $d=.47$). They both agree on providing the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, but women attach great importance to the promotion of tolerance and cultural diversity, as well as educating the audience. Arguably, the differences are not really significant, and it is broadly agreed that gender does not really influence the way Albanian journalists think and act regarding professional roles.

Table 2: Gender Dimension of the Role Perceptions (Source: Godole 2014)

<i>Institutional Roles</i>	N	Women (mean)	Men (mean)	Total mean
Report things as they are	290	4,61	4,55	4,58
Be a detached observer	290	4.30	4.31	4.31
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	289	4,17	4,11	4,14
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	290	4,17	3,96	4,07
Let people express their views	287	4,15	3,99	4,07
Influence public opinion	287	4,15	3,90	4,03
Educate the audience	290	4,16	3,81	3,99
Provide analysis of current affairs	286	3,94	3,96	3,95
Support national development	290	3,87	3,85	3,86
Be an adversary of the government	287	3,64	3,71	3,67
Provide advice, orientation, and direction for daily life	286	3,68	3,32	3,50
Provide information people need to make political decisions	290	3,34	3,31	3,33
Provide entertainment and relaxation	290	3,51	2,95	3,24
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	289	2,91	3,15	3,03
Monitor and scrutinize business	289	2,70	2,79	2,74
Motivate people to participate in political activity	289	2,04	2,25	2,14
Support government policy	290	2,11	2,02	2,07

The general impression from the results is that Albanian journalism is not “feminized” solely due to the increasing number of women journalists but rather due to the usual boundaries of criticism against politics and business and the lack of courage and desire to influence public opinion.

Influence Perceptions

The survey findings suggest that news organization owners have the least impact on Albanian journalists compared to other factors. Editorial policy, which refers to the policy followed by media publishers and indirect political bias, is seen as a more influential source (Table 3). Young journalists know which topics they should avoid in order to escape direct pressure from media owners.

Table 3: Influences on Journalists (Source: Godole 2014)

	N	Women (mean)	Men (mean)	Total mean
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	291	3,38	3,05	3,22
Managers of your news organization	286	3,18	2,81	3,00
Owners of your news organization	277	3,08	2,84	2,97
Editorial policy	288	3,42	3,35	3,39
Peers on the staff	291	2,47	2,60	2,53
Friends, acquaintances, and family	292	2,22	2,35	2,28
Colleagues in other media	292	2,09	2,06	2,08
Personal values and beliefs	286	3,25	3,53	3,38
Profit expectations	272	2,42	2,42	2,42
Censorship	291	2,67	2,45	2,56

The results show that male journalists in Albania take influences from peers in the field more seriously compared to self-referential sources, in contrast to journalists in the West (Weischenberg et al. 2006, 146). Both women and men journalists are pragmatic about profit expectations, and there are no significant differences between genders. Women journalists in Albania express more concern about censorship than men, but overall, censorship is one of the least influential factors in journalists’ work.

Self-censorship is evident in newsrooms and may be embedded in the socialization process of journalists’ careers. The impact of close friends and social milieu on journalists’ work is worth considering, as journalists tend to socialize with their colleagues in the workplace. However, limiting interactions within their professional group may result in less understanding of other social groups they report on, potentially reinforcing field hegemony and perpetuating existing clichés.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests that despite an increased number of women journalists in Albania after the fall of communism, it does not necessarily indicate the emancipation of journalism in the country. Women journalists still face barriers to reaching top positions, which men predominantly occupy. Despite having higher cultural capital, women still face barriers to

reaching the top hierarchy predominantly occupied by men (RQ1). They often find themselves relegated to reporting on “soft news” sections or other areas, such as cultural and social topics, while men dominate coverage of politics.

The patriarchal system in Albania replicates traditional gender roles, and women journalists often conform to feminine stereotypes, using power and manipulation tools to exert influence. Women’s representation in politics was made possible through lobbying efforts (Danaj and Godole 2014), but there are similarities in professional views between male and female journalists, as all criteria for measuring performance are judged by male standards (RQ2).

The results also highlight notable findings about the influences on journalists (RQ3).

Female journalists are more sensitive to influences from family and editorial supervisors and tend to fear censorship more than men, leading to self-censorship. Despite difficulties, some female journalists identify with the media organizations they work for as they navigate gender hiring policies and make pragmatic, rational choices. The few female journalists who have gained recognition in Albanian journalism often cover male-dominated topics to gain respect but face the challenge of maintaining their femininity. Their market value lies in being both marginalized and privileged at the same time.

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