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Secularity From the Lenses of the Online Media (Albania and Kosovo) – working title

This work of mine is not to talk about a religion, because I am not a theologian, nor to explain the history of religions in Albania and Kosovo. As I have worked as a journalist and as a teaching assistant in the Journalism Department at the University of Prishtina, my interest is to use media to explain certain topics. I had the great pleasure to present my on-going paper that explains how some national symbols (Skanderbeg and Mother Teresa) are used in the discourse of the religious representatives, political actors, media and some voices who are negotiating about secularity and the relation between the state, religion and the media. This project is a part of my PhD paper that shed lights on the secularity from the lenses of the online media, Secularity from the lenses of the online media, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Höpken (University of Leipzig, Germany).

There are not many studies and research that uses media to explain a different phenomenon, and certainly almost inexistent those who seek to explore the sensitive roles between the religion and the state. Media in Albania and Kosovo have frequently been accused for a polarized debate over Islam over different issues. The main drawback is when speaking and blaming only one particular religion.

Why online media?

New Media have become the new public space and the place where contradiction about religion and identity is taking place. To analyze how is used the figure of Skanderbeg and Mother Teresa in online journalism, one has to underline certain elements characterizing online media in these two countries: speed, similarity or uniformity of the news, free accessibility and usage of few sources or separate sources in separated articles and short-lived and flexible (fluid) texts. The traditional form of verifying and editing the news is vaguely respected and space is given to more people in order to ensure clicks and audience. The growing and unchecked propensity to ‘cannibalize’ copy from other newspapers leads to a greater homogenization of news content. The discussion around Skanderbeg and Mother Teresa according to our data was not heterogeneous, what was written in one medium was copied to another—hard to tell which is the original. Online it is difficult to maintain a ‘difference’ because stories will simply be stolen by every other outlet (Fenton, N. 2010).

The paper explores how and why the figures of Skanderbeg and Mother Teresa are active in the public discursive strategies through online news discourse. Those two figures are considered as national symbols in both countries, although the majority of their populations are Muslim and these two figures represent a deep connection with Christianity.

Why the medieval figure of the 15th century was so crucial for the Albanian nationalism and remains active even today? The man to whom even Antonio Vivaldi dedicated an opera about his wars is an essential reference. He is considered as the unification symbol of the Albanian Renaissance (1870-1912), the founder of the first Albanian state (1912), the general partisan and the central symbol of the Albanian identity (1945-1992), the symbol of resistance (1961-1968) and lastly the symbol of the Kosovo Liberation Army (1999). These attributions explain why he served in the Albanian nationalism and why he remains an active figure even today.

Mother Teresa, the well-known nun that dedicated her life to Christianity was of Albanian ethnicity. She was born in Skopje, then Vilayet of Kosovo. Her figure is used in Albania and Kosovo as a unification figure for all the religions and has served to portray these countries as European. Her religious uniform is downplayed when used from Albanians who embrace three different religions.

The project has used the combination of content and critical analysis methods. It has analysed sixteen online news articles in six different portals and newspapers in Albania and Kosovo. This article is structured in four parts. In the first part, it gives an overview of the online media. In the second part with in-depth literature, the historical context for the secular states and local peculiarities are explained. The third part deals with the transforming of religion and the last part brings the empirical data finding and here are explained all the discursive strategies used in the media by the actors who speak about Skanderbeg and Mother Teresa.

I was very happy at the end of the discussion for having the opportunity to speak about two countries that unfortunately there is a gap and studies on the media and religion are more than welcomed. This Summer School has been a great opportunity to share the pain that we as PhD students undergo and to learn from other examples as well.