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FROM PERCEPTION TO REALITY: MEDIA'S ROLE IN SHAPING ALBANIA'S COUNTRY IMAGE THROUGH *TIME* MAGAZINE

ABSTRACT: *The continuity of a same view about Albania as an international media subject through time was related to the media construction process and its role in shaping the country's perceptions and images. This article delves into media archives to conduct a systematic analysis of Time magazine's representations of Albania as a subject. The prevailing perception is that of a country that is continually troubled and unusual, regardless of the distinct historical periods from 1923 to 2023. This article further argues that the centennial portrayals of Albania as a chaotic, strange, and conflict-ridden country, one that seems perpetually ensnared in a cycle of crises, have influenced how both the nation and its people are perceived. Such representations extend to its urban and rural landscapes, as well as its geographical characteristics. Consequently, these narratives contribute to a broader perception of Albania as an aberrant territory, characterized by instability and disorder. From a comparative perspective along the three periods, research showed that the early discourse of an Albanian anomaly during 1924-1944, deepened further during the communist regime period from 1945 to 1989, and it was recycled again after the transition to democracy in the '90's, to continue until nowadays. However, the photo representations in the photo gallery sections of Time online not only showcase a continuity of themes such as exoticism and political unrest, but they also highlight a growing interest in the human stories and the cultural and natural heritage of the country.*

KEYWORDS: country image; media representations; Albania; Time magazine; international reporting.

1. Introduction

This article argues the subject of Albania in *Time* magazine, being constructed, and presented as a repetition during the years 1923-2023. Although the focus is on the years between 1990 to 2023, the data and research compared to earlier periods, respectively 1923-1944 and 1945-1989, talk about a resurgence of the subject of Albania in the same quantitative and quality terms by one of the most important magazines of current affairs in the English-speaking world. This article employs both media content analysis and media agency analysis as methodologies for examining the data. Media content analysis involves systematically evaluating the content of various media sources to identify structures, patterns, themes and framings in terms of representation, while media agency analysis focuses on understanding the practices of media organizations and their role in shaping narratives and public perceptions.

Regarding content analysis, the quantitative data show that the space and place given to the subject of Albania in sections, themes, frequency, and framing remain constant from one period to another. Similarly, textual analysis examines the media constructions, highlighting the portrayal of an Albanian abnormality intertwined with a narrative of American superiority. Although the language and style of journalistic texts evolve over time, they consistently convey a similar narrative when it comes to Albania, which is perpetually characterized as a "tiny," "forgotten," and "troubled" country. This persistent framing reflects underlying stereotypes and influences public perception, illustrating how certain descriptors become entrenched in the discourse surrounding Albania.

The continuity of a view, a way of constructing and presenting Albania for a long-time trajectory, from 1923 to date, confirms not only the existence of Albania as *the other* in the eyes of foreign audiences but also the establishment of a static form of construction and presentation. Therefore, the prevailing perspective portrays the country as perpetually “troubled” and “immutable”, irrespective of its distinct historical periods, each marked by fundamentally different characteristics. This is how *Time* magazine has perceived Albania during the reign of King Ahmet Zogu, and this perspective has persisted through the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha and into present-day Albania under current political leaders. Throughout this time, politics has remained the primary lens through which the country is represented in the magazine's coverage. Politically, Albania continues to be depicted as a chaotic, unusual, and conflict-ridden nation, characterized by a seemingly unending cycle of crises. Consequently, this representation shapes a narrow and skewed perception of the country and its people, extending beyond politics to encompass its urban and rural landscapes, as well as its geographical and anthropological characteristics.

The period of study, from 1990 to 2023, offered a global tableau of changes, starting with the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism in the Eastern world, of which Albania was a part. The changes observed during this period can be anticipated to establish a new normal for the transition to democracy that emerged after the 1990’s. However, the discourse of *Time* magazine regarding this period, continues to be that of a bygone Albanian anomaly. Even in the context of global developments, when Albania was aligned in the communist camp, this was randomly noted in the discourse as an *Albanian anomaly*. Such media presentations dominated the tableau before World War II and from a comparative perspective along these time periods, it is noticed that the discourse of Albanian anomaly was further deepened during the communist regime period, and it was being recycled again since the '90’s until nowadays.

However, further research into the photo section of *Time* online concerning Albania reveals not only a persistent focus on themes of institutional and political turmoil but also a burgeoning interest in human stories and the country’s cultural and natural heritage. Albania's international image in the online media is evolving when compared to its traditional representations, reflecting a broader range of perspectives and

narratives that were previously underrepresented. The dynamics of how Albania is portrayed across various digital platforms, including social media, blogs, and online news outlets, are gradually transforming the fixed images established by traditional media (Budini and Lushi, 2024). While key themes from conventional media, such as political instability, economic turmoil, organized crime, and emigration, continue to be present in new media narratives, the online media tend to provide a more nuanced and frequently positive depiction of the country. Especially tourism has seen a resurgence in positive coverage, with international news media also framing Albania as an undiscovered, exotic destination that offers affordability and cultural richness (The Guardian, 2022; The New York Times, 2023).

Selection Criteria: Why *Time* and Albania?

Despite a demonstrated interest in how others, especially Western media, view Albania, systematic studies regarding the development of these representations or the way Albania has been historically perceived, have not been conducted. This article aims at giving an evolutionary overview of Albania's presentations in *Time magazine*, from its first issue in 1923 to the present, focusing more specifically on the period after the '90's. Considered one of the most influential magazines in the world, with the highest audience for a weekly news outlet, *Time* is a media source particularly referenced by historians. Its proclaimed mission is to write history every week (*Time.com*, 2023). The selected methodology of the study object considers the magazine not simply as a logo or typology of a media outlet within the Western press spectrum, but it also envisages *Time* as an agency and media organization in terms of its managerial and professional journalistic environment that are closely monitored.

The methodological selection for the term "Albania" is its use not only in a literal sense but also as a comprehensive component or umbrella under various other sub-variants, such as "state", "geographical territory", "people," "government", "foreign subject", but also in terms of culture, tradition, and customs. Albanians as a broader category, including citizens of other state entities such as Kosovo, Macedonia, or other countries, are not considered in this study as valid analytical units under the subject of Albania. The criterion for selecting articles for analysis has thus been the word "Albania" or its sub-variants as mentioned above, stated in the title, subtitle, or first paragraph of each published article.

Accordingly, *Time* magazine has been chosen for investigation for two main reasons in terms of methodology and media typology. First it has been selected based on the methodological criteria for a comprehensive and evolutionary study of Albania's presentations by an international and influential news media, following the selection criterion of a representative case study, that is also significant within the spectrum of Western media. Another methodological criterion that has been followed is that of the presence of the subject of "Albania" in a considerable number of articles to be monitored, as well as their relevance in terms of

making headlines and selected as a newsworthy subject. Preliminary research yielded compact and comprehensive results for each period so that it justified selection. A reason for selection is that of the publication periodicity of *Time* as a general news weekly magazine, with a slower but more reflective news cycle, whose contents tend to be more concise.

Regarding the media typology, the criteria on which this media selection is based are: first, the importance of *Time* as the first weekly news magazine in the world, created in 1923 and today a global media brand built on 100 years of trust and authority. Second, the criterion of audience was relevant, as it reaches an audience of more than 100 million people worldwide across all their platforms. Third, the criterion of a historical media outlet that survives the market and the competition of new media was considered as *Time* has leveraged technology to its advantage, becoming one of the first media to apply all the options of new platforms to circulate its content. Today it includes a digital archive and a website as a magazine with a social media footprint of an audience of over 51 million, among other activities (*Time.com*, 2023).

An important role regarding the object of study is also played by its division into chronological units of analysis. The chronological order expressed in three historical periods, helped to consider developments regarding the subject of Albania in *Time* in a compact and evolutionary manner simultaneously. Periodization is applied both in the analysis of the agency and in the text analysis. Following on a periodization model used in a systematic study conducted at doctoral studies (Budini, 2014), the paper is divided into three chronological periods between 1923 as the year of the magazine's establishment and 2023 as the concluding study year for the current state of events and developments.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Approach

This study adopts a combined methodological approach grounded in the empirical tradition of media research and communication scholarship (McQuail, 2005; Habermas, 2006; Fairclough, 2010; Altheide, 2018). This approach integrates two methodological directions: Firstly, it employs media content and textual analysis to examine the articles' content from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the themes and representations present in the media. Secondly, the study incorporates interviews and insights into institutional practices that shape news narratives. This aspect is situated within the framework of the social construction of news, drawing from sociology of the media and journalism studies (Luckmann and Burger, 1966; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1980; Wasburn, 2002; Schudson, 2003; Entman, 2004).

Regarding the content of the articles, comprehensive research is directed towards close reading of the

news as narratives, filled with codes and symbols, interpretation primarily through the text itself, as evidence of its production process. Text analysis is conducted through techniques of coding, by assigning categories to themes, key words and patterns within the text in the articles of *Time* magazine. Within the selected media content, common and dominant framings are identified characterized by either positive or negative tones. This perspective says more about the origin and evolution of media content, thus more fittingly and comprehensively responding to this research study, primarily in qualitative terms complemented by the incorporation of quantitative elements. More specifically, the *Time* digital archives are searched primarily for the word "Albania" in the rubrics, headlines, sub-headings and first paragraphs as a categorization for inclusion into the analytical inventory of the study. Filtering techniques are also used to analyze how often certain terms or phrases appear in order to identity dominant themes and frames related to the journalistic style and the editorial approach of the news magazine. The research was conducted through paid access and open access to the *Time* digital archive.

The second methodological direction is inspired by the phenomenology of understanding the media within the complex field of social, economic, and political forces where it operates. This direction involves analyzing the media agency itself within its organizational, economic, political, and cultural environment, or landscape. More specifically, documentation of the organizational and professional practices is obtained through conducting interviews with journalists, editors, administrators, and historians of the magazine related to the subject of Albania in *Time* like Graff, Calabresi, Leuker, Raxhimi, Barnes, Herzstein (2012-2013). These inquiries have been supplemented by published evidence in the form of memoirs and biographies from staff members (Knauer, 1998; Wilner 2007; Editors of Time Magazine, 2008; Grunswald, 2011). Historical, ethnographic, and media studies have also been used, focusing on the organizational and professional aspects of *Time* as a media organization specifically, or within the spectrum of American media (Herzstein, 2005, 1994; Gans,1980 and Wasburn, 2002). Some of these studies have relied on participant observation techniques, from which first-hand data have been obtained, always related to the organizational and journalistic aspects of this media (Elson, 1985; Angeletti and Alberto, 2010).

3. Textual Analysis: An Old Script Revival

The frame of abnormality has been a recurring theme spanning across various periods of time, re-emerged in the discussions about Albania after the collapse of the communist regime in the early 1990's. This discourse extended through the tumultuous events of the year 1997 with the collapse of economic pyramid schemes in the country, continued into the coverage of Albania amidst the Kosovo War in 1999, and persisted until 2011, when a backdrop of political crisis emerged again in the country during the protest of

January 21st. The extreme articulations that characterized the portrayal of Albania during the communist period have also manifested in the discourse of abnormality, shaping the narrative about Albania even in the post-communist period.

Previously, Albania was depicted as "the most gloomy and isolated country behind the Iron Curtain" (*Time*, 1951) a description that carried over into the post-communist period, where it was referred to as "the forgotten Balkan state of Albania, one of the poorest in Europe" in a 1997 article (*Time*, 1997). Additionally, in 1990, it was regarded as "the poorest and most backward of the Continent" (Time US, 1990). Despite the evolution of time, the theme of abnormality continues in the 2000's, as exemplified by *Time*'s portrayal of Albania as follows: "Little Albania emerged from the communist dictatorship in 1990, only to succumb to a harsh world of gangsters, fraudulent financial machinations, and government of incompetence, trampled by capitalism without rules and non-divisive policies" (*Time*, 2011).

The coverage on Albania in the early 1990's was predominantly driven by the remarkable nature of events and developments associated with the country, as evidenced by *Time*'s exceptional title of Donnelly, S. B. (1990), "Albania and then there were none". The discourse regarding these events often began with striking assertions, such as the claim that "Only a communist government in Europe managed to contain the political earthquake. Now, six months later, the leadership of little Albania is finally releasing its grip on ultra-orthodox Stalinism" (Time, 1990, May 21). Similarly, the article from July 1990 titled "Albania, next to fall?" highlighted the extraordinary circumstances faced by the nation, noting that "When hundreds of Albanians faced police gunfire last week to seek refuge in a dozen foreign embassies in Tirana, there were few diplomats who questioned their desire to abandon the last bastion of doctrinal communism in Eastern Europe" (*Time*, 1990, July 16).

By December 1990, the exceptional scenario became more evident as encapsulated in the article titled "Albania: Goodbye Stalinism", which poignantly stated, " That thud heard last week was the sound of Europe's last Marxist dictatorship landing on the trash heap of history" (*Time*, 1990, December 24). Subsequently, in 1991, the focus shifted to Albania's landmark event of holding its first free elections after decades of communist isolation (*Time*, 1990, April 8). Notably, the same year brought new exceptional events to light, such as the aftermath of the elections where despite the communist majority in the People's Assembly, violent unrest unfolded, marking a tumultuous period for the country (*Time*, 1991, April 15; December 16).

Albania once again came under the spotlight in 1997, this time due to the bad news situation prevailing in the nation. *Time* encapsulated this in an article referring to Albania as the land without order and without law, further describing how Europe turned its attention to Albania's south to witness civilization erode rapidly (*Time*, 1997, March 24). The article vividly painted a picture of the country in a state of chaos, with spontaneous revolts in southern cities escalating into a reminiscent scene of a war movie and with children

brandishing grenades and machine guns, selling them indiscriminately, and engaging in frenzied gunfire, signaling a collapse of civil authority. Albania, once a sun-drenched land, had transformed into a state of anarchy (*Time*, 1997). This structural and conceptual frame underscores a persistent tendency to depict Albania in a polarized manner, influencing the overall narrative surrounding the country.

Extreme poverty is the category through which Albanians are more deeply described during this period, as well as in previous periods. In 1991, *Time* writes that "Albanians fled worsening shortages of food and bread in their impoverished homeland and sought asylum through the Otranto Channel in the Adriatic" (*Time*, 1991). However, the economic or social status in which Albanians are placed two decades later does not differ much from the above, when in 2007 *Time* refers to Albanians and Albania as follows: "Bush will be the first sitting president to visit the impoverished Balkan country, and Albanians have surpassed themselves in preparations to welcome him: tens of thousands have flocked to the neglected capital, Tirana, to catch a glimpse of the first American couple passing through" (*Time*, 2007). In the above formulation, the massive tableau that is built for Albanians is once again exceptional, as in the few photographs accompanying the articles, they are depicted as a crowd, as a mass of people, even predicting in advance, as in the case above, their gathering or accumulation into crowds, this time as a sign of both judgmental and admiring gaze of rare American visitors.

As an economic exception, Albania is treated in an article titled "That's Rich: Hermès Is Selling A $91,500 Crocodile T-shirt", an article that mentions Albania in this context: "The Awl agency that managed to snap a photo of the label carrying the price of the shirt (photos not allowed in Hermes stores) drew attention to the fact that only the sales tax of the shirt could amount to $8000, which constitutes almost the GDP per capita of Albania" (*Time*, 2013). Even though the main subject of the above article is not Albania, it occurs in the context of an exception, to illustrate in this case another exaggeration that the magazine observes in elevated prices of fashion brands.

Regarding the geographical and panoramic presentation of Albania, the terms used are such as: "lost place", "forgotten land", "small country", with a "ruined" and "neglected" capital (Table 4). Thus, in 2007, in the article discussing the arrival of the American president in Albania, the coordinates that *Time* sets for the country to be visited by Bush are "a lost Balkan country, the poorest in Europe" *(Time*, 2007). Nothing has changed for *Time* regarding Albania in the past ten years when Albania was characterized in the same way: "This often-forgotten country in Eastern Europe" in the article titled "Crackdown on the Adriatic" published on March 3rd, 1997, and "The forgotten Balkan state of Albania, one of the poorest in Europe" (*Time*, 1997). As for the geographical description of Albania in 1990, *Time* positions it as "an edge of the Balkan territory, south of the Adriatic" (*Time*, 1990)

Likewise, between the old and the new panorama of Albania, that is, the way Albania is presented and

continues to be presented geographically, there can be found unchanging elements over time. The presentation made of the capital Tirana, which in 1928 was described as "the filthy capital of Albania" or "ruined capital", and similarly found in *Time* also in 2007, as "Tirana, the neglected capital" or in 2005 as "the ruined capital of Albania". Similarly, in both panoramas, you find such "picturesque" elements as a donkey strolling in the middle of an Albanian city both in 1938 and in 1991, where in the article titled "Albania: Zog and Jerry" published on May 9th, 1938, over the donkeys are "bare-boned men" ["with wrinkled and impoverished faces] while in the article titled "The Balkans: Campaigning, Albanian-Style" on April 8th, 1991, the donkeys that "wander aimlessly amidst the crowd of people in the shattered city of Mamurras, 19 miles north of the capital of Albania, Tirana," are laden with firewood. Referring to the city of Mamurras, from where the journalist James Graff chose to report on Albania and the 1991 elections, he writes, "In Mamurras, where Europe seems like a distant continent" (*Time*, 1991).

Recently the view has been more nuanced when referring to cultural heritage and tourism. However, in an article about the city of Berat in Albania, classified in a rubric among the 50 best places to visit in the world, the author of the article 'Berat, history and hospitality' reintroduces the frame of exceptionality albeit under a positive tone: "Berat continues the tradition of *exceptional hospitality* in its restaurants and hotels" (*Time*, 2023). The author further highlights Albania's unique history, explaining that to fully appreciate Berat's 400 years of Jewish heritage, particularly how Albania became "the only country in Europe" whose Jewish population increased during World War II—visitors should explore The Solomoni Museum. An ethnographic museum in a traditional house across the street provides more Albanian context, along with Berat's 13th century Byzantine churches, 16th century mosques, and a millennium-old castle overlooking the "uniquely picturesque city" (*Time*, 2023).

4. Content Analysis: What Coverage?

Regarding specifics related to *Time* magazine's developments, during this period, the subject of Albania is not only found in the *Time US* version, where it continues to have the largest number of articles, but also since 1997 on the online variant of the magazine. There is also a small presence of the subject of Albania in alternative publications, specifically in *Time* magazine for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa in the *Time Europe, Middle East, and Africa* version since 2001, as well as in another publication for Asia in the *Time Asi*a version since 2002. The search about Albania produces a total of 1660 mentions. However, the selected articles with Albania as main subject according to categories are not more than 160 units for this period (Table 1).

TABLE 1: Selected articles in Time Us categorized into rubrics (1990-2023)

RUBRICS	NUMBER OF ARTICLES
World	52
Cover Story	3
From the Publisher	2
Letters	2
Entertainment (Books)	3
Total	62

The Albanian subject itself is not the only one for this period, as developments in Kosovo at the end of the '90s projected a second Albanian subject for the international media audience, which, although not the same in the sense of an administrative political unit, often emerges with the same name and even with the same flag. Also, when talking about Albanians in Macedonia and the Albanian factor there, the subject of Albania is present in 46 articles in total, including 25 articles in *Time US*, 16 articles in *Time online*, 3 articles in *Time Europe*, and 2 articles in *Time Asia*.

Otherwise, the total number of articles addressing Albania as main subject, even when it is related to Albanian developments in Kosovo and Macedonia, is 157 articles for the period 1990-2023, from a monitoring across all four *Time* horizons: *Time* US with 62 articles, *Time* online with 77 articles, *Time* Europe with 14 articles, and *Time* Asia with 4 articles. It should also be noted that *Time* US covers the entire period from 1990 to 2023, while Time online covers only from its creation in 1997 to 2023, meanwhile *Time* Europe and *Time* Asia were created even later, the former in 2001 and the latter in 2002 (Table 2).

TABLE 2: All articles according to publications (1990-2023)

PUBLICATIONS	ARTICLES
TIME US	62
TIME.COM	77
TIME EUROPE	14
TIME ASIA	4

A new subject in the Balkan states /countries that received the highest coverage so far is Kosovo. Its situation, starting from 1999 dominates *Time*'s agenda over the Balkans and it appears in 1261 articles for the period

1990-2023, surpassing not only Albania and all other states in the region, but also Greece, Romania, and Croatia, in the broader coverage.

Except for some time periods when there was a concentration of the number of articles on Albania, such as in 1990 with 9 articles, in 1991 with 8 articles, as well as in 1997 with 10 articles in *Time* US and *Time* online, the presence of Albania for the rest of the time is low, sporadic, or non-existent. During the Kosovo War, in 1999, Albania's presence remains low, although there are 17 articles where it appears in the context of the joint subject of Kosovo-Albania, but not as a separate subject.

Despite being prominently featured in the headlines, articles about Albania in *Time* magazine during this period are primarily short in terms of word count. About 30 of them consist of texts of fewer than 400 words, and only 3 articles are long, two of which belong to *Time.com* and one to *Time US*. The remaining articles are of average length, ranging from 400 to 800 words. This trend was differing in the preceding period, where articles consisted of longer texts, albeit rarer due to the country's isolation. However, the same trend was observed in the early period, between the years 1923-1944, where the number of articles about Albania was higher compared to other periods, but the majority of them, 40 articles, consisted of short texts and only 6 long articles. Regarding cases where Albania is mentioned in the context of developments in Kosovo, the articles are presented to be much longer: 28 is the number of long articles under this categorization, while 1 of the articles within the framework of developments in Macedonia is long, while the others fall into the category of average-length articles.

Certainly, in interpreting the aforementioned data, technological and organizational developments addressed to the expanded study must be considered. The transition to the digital age for the American magazine *Time* in relation to Albania has not been entirely smooth, as during this period there have been closures of regional offices such as the one in Vienna, which was responsible for the coverage of Albania and the broader Balkans (Graff 2013; Calabresi, 2013). Without a regional editorial office and continuous attention to Albania, it is understood that the coverage has continued to be sporadic and scant. With few exceptions, related to developments in Kosovo and significant socio-political turmoil considered of major importance for Albania, such as the democratic changes in the years '90-'91, 1997, 1998, as well as 1999 and 2011, when the texts of the articles about Albania were long and average, the years without significant developments, the coverage mainly consisted of short articles.

The section where articles about Albania appear is primarily that of world events, thus the World section (Figure 3). In the Letters, From the Publisher, Entertainment, and Politics or National sections, very few articles appear regarding both the US and the magazine's online version at *Time.com*. For this period, most articles, grouped according to their main themes, deal with internal political developments. Democratic changes in the governance system and Albania's emergence from isolation constitute the primary theme

concerning the subject of Albania, mainly during the years 1990 and 1991. Fifteen articles comprise this main theme within Albania's internal politics in *Time* US. Similarly, interest continues to focus on internal politics, such as the five articles published in Time US in 1997 and 1998, as well as five more articles published on *Time* online. Political conflicts or crises are common themes in three articles following January 2011, in both Time US and *Time* online.

TABLE 3: Albania in Time.Com categorized into rubrics (1990-2023)

Entertainment	5
Politics	6
Verbatim	3
World	140
Quotes of the Day	3

As for internal developments in Albania receiving coverage, the themes pertain to the categories of democratic transformations, upheavals, and political crises. Considering articles in *Time US*, that address to democratic changes, out of which 15 to address crises and political conflicts in Albania during the years 1997, 1998, and 2011. The rest of the articles interested directly in the subject of Albania do so from within the framework of foreign policy and international relations of Albania. In this context the most common frames are those of a vassal country for this period, like previous periods when *Time* calls Albania “puppet state of Italy” in the ‘30’s, a “satellite state of Soviet Union” or a “geopolitical pawn of China” and before that “dependent from Yugoslavia” (Table 4). However, a few positive depictions also relate to international relations in articles that single out Albania as “defiant” or a “sovereign state” (Table 4).

TABLE 4: Common frames with negative and positive tones (1923-2023)

COMMON FRAMES WITH NEGATIVE TONES	FRAMES WITH MORE POSITIVE TONES
Troubled state	Exceptional in hospitality
Unusual country	A country with a unique history
Ensnared in a cycle of crisis	The only country in Europe whose Jewish population increased during WW2
Conflict-ridden country	Uniquely picturesque
Aberrant territory	Going under democratic transformations
Instable country	A NATO member country
A country with no law or order	U.S. ally
Abnormal state	Partner
Backward country	Defiant
Vassal country of the US	Sovereign
Puppet state of Italy	Aspiring European nation
Dependent from Yugoslavia	EU candidate country
Satellite state of Russia	Dua Lipa's origin country
Geopolitical pawn of China	The country of Mother Teresa
Isolated	A gateway to the Adriatic
Alone	Hidden gem
Tiny country	
Pocket-size country	
Forgotten land	
Benighted nation	
Impoverished homeland	
Chaotic nation	
An edge of the Balkan territory	
A politically and institutionally turbulent country	
A country in economic turmoil	
Poorest country of Europe	
The most backward country of the continent	
Last bastion of doctrinal communism in Eastern Europe	
Last Marxist dictatorship	
A state of anarchy	
Sun-drenched land	
Lost-place	
Often-forgotten country in Eastern Europe	
a nation in a state of chronic turmoil	
marked by political unrest	
undergoing continuous upheaval	

When asked about topics selection criteria for coverage, *Time* journalists offer their perspectives in interviews for this study. Here's what James Graff, who reported on Albania in 1991, says about the fact that his articles focused more on political themes than social or other aspects:

"I think this is mainly because we were only able to cover a few stories, so we had to be very selective compared to daily newspapers, always considering that we were working with much more limited staff than the dailies. The specific desk for the region we are talking about is naturally smaller for a weekly American than for a European daily and even smaller than other American media such as the New York Times. Moreover, I think topics like prostitution, crime, etc., emerged as news topics in Western media after my departure from the Vienna office for *Time"* (Graff, 2012).

The insights from *Time*'s Albanian correspondent, Raxhimi, shed light on the magazine's editorial decisions regarding its coverage of topics related to Albania:

"Social themes like prostitution, for example, are difficult to sell as stories from Albania to America when such stories are more associated with countries like Romania or the former Soviet Union, or even the Czech Republic. Albania, as a small country, does not constitute any significant example for these phenomena. It is also linked to the fact that stable people are not kept in Albania, nor are they interested in being stable, precisely because of its small size. Therefore, writings about Albania were done during the time of the Kosovo War and 1997-1998, in other well-defined contexts. The narrative element must also be considered. Usually, a storytelling structure was required, a story that had to be both interesting and new. The Kosovo War had this, as its conclusion was unknown (or at least treated as such), and the crisis of 1997 had a new story" (Raxhimi, 2012).

In his interview, Herzstein (2013) highlights the changing landscape of journalism at a pivotal period such as that of the Cold Wars. As he puts it:

"The evolving nature of journalism, along with the shifting thematic interests of *Time,* provides insight into the magazine's departure from international coverage. During this new era of American journalism, Cold War themes no longer captivated *Time*'s editorial focus, signaling a significant transformation in its content priorities. Instead, the magazine increasingly emphasized more general interest stories, reflecting broader societal trends and a shift in the interests of the American public" (Herzstein, 2013).

More on the *Time*'s topics selection about Albania, Edward Barnes responds that "political developments are at the core of its interest, particularly those related to the international arena. The audience of *Time* is primarily American. Issues such as drug trafficking, crime, and blood feuds can resonate well in Europe, where they have implications or consequences that extend beyond Albania's borders to other countries. However, these phenomena have limited relevance for the United States" (Barnes, 2012).

The values that *Time* magazine attributes to news from the Balkans and Albania are closely linked to the

interests of American readers. According to the former Europe Editor, Massimo Calabresi, these interests include aspects of U.S. foreign policy in the region, humanitarian concerns, and the historical context marked by violent conflicts in this part of Europe: "Within these categories, new developments, significant political figures, and the experiences of American military personnel, diplomats, and humanitarian aid workers represent considerable journalistic interest for us. I'm not sure why the Balkans and Albania receive limited attention regarding cultural and social aspects in *Time*, but I can say that in a larger world, they are less influential, partly due to their size and partly because, as part of Europe, they remain overshadowed by the strong cultural traditions in both its eastern and western regions. In practice, *Time*'s coverage of Central Europe and the Balkans, for which I have also been responsible, has focused more on events that constitute news rather than on cultural histories" (Calabresi, 2013).

Finally, when discussing about the coverage logistics and decision making about what to cover from Albania, the administrator of the Viena office for the region of Central Europe and the Balkans, between 1986 and 2006, Angela Leuker states that: "Typically, the bureau chief (in the 1990s, James Graff, followed by Massimo Calabresi) would propose article ideas to the editors in New York, and if a story was approved for coverage, funds would be allocated to facilitate its realization. Certainly, during times of crisis—when the bureau was engaged in covering ongoing stories or "breaking news" events—securing funds and support was significantly easier than during quieter periods. The urgency and immediacy of such situations often led to quicker decisions from the editorial team in New York, resulting in a more streamlined allocation of resources. However, once the situation stabilized and global focus shifted to another region, it became much more challenging to secure a story for the magazine. In these instances, bureau journalists had to present compelling arguments and demonstrate the significance of their proposed coverage in order to persuade the editors of its value" (Leuker, 2013).

5. Photos on Time.Com: Towards a Human Approach

During the '90's, political themes have taken center stage in the photos showcased on *Time online*. The appearance of new photocentric features and columns is evident. Albania is prominently featured in a total of eight distinct categories for individualized coverage. Among these categories, eight columns specifically have Albania as their main focal point. Notably, three of these columns were classified under "*Quotes of the Day*", spotlighting quotes relevant to current affairs alongside large accompanying photographs.

These quotes, encapsulated within quotation marks, conveyed messages from notable figures regarding Albania as the central subject matter. During American President Bush's visit to Albania on June 11th, 2007,

one quote highlighted Albanian Prime-Minister Berisha's description of the visit as the most significant friendship of all time, depicted alongside a close-up photograph featuring both (*Time*, 2007). Berisha is quoted saying: “This is the greatest and most distinguished guest we have ever had in all times”, a quote accompanied by the caption: “Sali Berisha: Albanian Prime Minister, on George W. Bush, who visited the tiny Balkan country on June 10, the first sitting U.S. President to do so. Albania marked the occasion by renaming the street in front of its parliament building in Bush's honor and by issuing a commemorative series of postage stamps” (*Time*, 2007).

Another quote, attributed to Albanian woman Qamile Stema on June 26th, 2008, reflected on life as a “man” within traditional customs, presented with a poignant portrait showcasing distinct facial features and wearing a white brimless felt skull cap traditionally worn by Albanians (Figure 1). The inclusion of a quote from Stema, reflecting on her experience as a "sworn virgin", illustrates *Time*'s attempt to humanize complex cultural traditions albeit the exoticism elements of portrayals.

Figure 1

“Qamile Stema, 88, of Albania, where, for centuries, to swap genders was a practical solution for a family

with a shortage of men — the tradition of the sworn virgin is a ritual for rural women who become patriarchs of their families". This is the photo caption of *Time* Magazine for the rubric "Quotes of the Day" under the headline: "I liked my life as a man. I have no regrets". Photo credits: Johan Spanner / NYT / Redux, June 26, 2008.

Furthermore, a photo column titled "Washington Photo Blog" (Figure 2) revisited President Bush's Day in Kruja, emphasizing a photograph of the watch he carried, aimed at dispelling theft rumors during his stay. This exclusive image, captured by Christopher Morris in the Oval Office, served to address speculations encircling the President's watch. The caption writes: "Still ticking: President Bush displays his watch, refuting rumors that it had been stolen in Albania, in the Oval Office" (Morris, 2007).

Figure 2

On June 13, 2007, President George W. Bush displays his watch in the Oval Office, addressing rumors that it had been stolen in Albania. (Christopher Morris / for TIME)

In another instance, a photograph by Visar Kryeziu captured the protests on January 21st, 2011, showing burning cars in the boulevard of the capital Tirana, Albania (Figure 3). This powerful image was featured in the "Today in Pictures" column under the tag Fanning Flames, depicting opposition protests demanding government resignation and fresh elections (*Time*, 2011).

Figure 3

A vehicle engulfed in flames in Tirana, Albania, following an opposition protest on January 21, 2011, where demonstrators called for the resignation of the government and demanded fresh elections. Photo by Visar Kryeziu, featured in *Time* Magazine's "Today in Pictures" under the tag “Albania: Fanning Flames”.

Moreover, coverage in the "*Photo Essays*" segment highlighted Albania alongside various nations as a significant focus on February 10th, 2009 (Figure 4). Specifically, the Church of Saint Ndoj in the city of Laç was spotlighted as the 7th holiest site globally, with an image capturing a child touching the healing rock of Laç's Church (*Time*, 2009).

Figure 4

A boy touches a healing rock in Laç, Albania, believed to have miraculous powers associated with the Christian pilgrim Shna Ndoj. Photograph by Bartek Wrzesniowski, featured in Spiritual Healing Around the World (2009).

These are not the only images of the subject of Albania in *Time* magazine. However, they are considered as individual units about Albania since they appear in the photography section of the magazine. Nevertheless, the photographic coverage of the subject of Albania is not extensive, as generally articles about Albania are presented without accompanying photographs, either due to their absence or because the space allocated to the subject of Albania has often been limited due to relatively short articles.

However, the content of the photographs highlighted above consists of a more humanistic approach to the subject of Albania. Different topics were treated, like the topic of the Sworn Virgin, and the visit to the Church of Laç as a holy place, albeit on exotic notes. Close-up portraits are characteristic of these photographs, but they are not devoid of crowd scenes or massive ones. While the gallery of the accompanying photos primarily revolves around political themes, a more human-centered approach is becoming evident. Noteworthy is the prevalence of portraits and close-up shots among the images, complemented by views of crowds and masses, offering diverse visual narratives surrounding Albania's portrayal in *Time*.

Tourism and culture are not typically featured categories in *Time* magazine. The city of Berat in Albania, that is one of the 5 world heritage sites protected by UNESCO in the country, is included in the rubric World among 50 extraordinary destinations to explore as one of the world's greatest places for 2023 to visit (Figure 5). To compile this list of the top spots to visit, *Time* solicited nominations of places from their international network of correspondents and contributors, with an eye toward those offering new and exciting experiences (Tomky, 2023). However, the country's cultural and natural aspects are rarely present in the magazine articles as well as in the photo gallery section of *Time*.

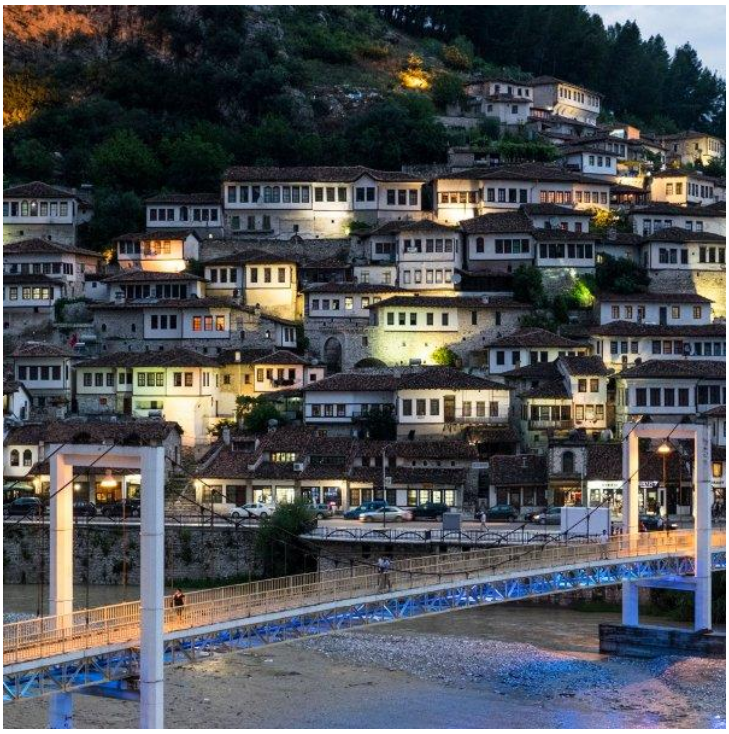

Figure 5

View of Berat, Albania, showcasing its historical architecture and picturesque landscape. Photograph by Giovanni Mereghetti (2013) featured in the rubric World of *Time* magazine.

The overall photographic coverage of Albania in *Time* magazine remains limited. Articles often lack accompanying images, and when photographs are present, they typically focus on political themes. The analysis underscores an evolving narrative of Albania in *Time* magazine, demonstrating a shift towards a more humanistic representation while still largely centering on political themes. The emphasis on quotes and close-up portraits reflects an effort to capture the human experience behind Albania's political landscape. However, the predominant focus on political events and the limited presence of images representing Albania's natural and cultural heritage suggests that while the magazine has made strides in adopting a more personal approach, it still adheres to a primarily political narrative.

6. The American Superiority in the Representations of Albania

The narrative of American superiority is pervasive in articles spanning the period from 1990 to 2023, albeit less explicit than during the earlier period of 1923-1944, when the language used was more directly

paternalistic towards Albania. However, even though the denotative language may be less overt, the connotative reading of the content of articles about Albania post-'90s reveals the lines of the perpetual narrative of an Albanian abnormality intersecting with the narrative of all times American superiority.

As historian Robert Herzstein puts it in an interview for this study: "Luce was the voice of Christian American capitalism and undoubtedly supported a global agenda of capitalism and American democracy. All his magazines reflect this aspect. I think you must agree as well that the subject of Albania, even in this case, was more important than dictated by its geographical dimensions due to implications with Yugoslavia. On the other hand, it is understood that there was an American interest in the attempt to detach Tito's Yugoslavia from Russia" (Herzstein, 2013).

It is well understood that even when dealing with Albania, *Time* is addressing the American audience, and consequently, the subject of America is almost always present. This overlay is observed not only in articles with common themes such as those discussing US relations with Albania, but such also as the Kosovo War where US involvement was direct, or topics touching on issues like the transfer of Guantanamo Uighurs to Albania (*Time,* 2009). In these cases, American supremacy is the subject itself (*Time,* 2009). However, the US superiority narrative towards Albania is also present in articles where America seems not to be directly involved.

Indeed, the verdict or interpretation of events and developments from an American perspective is the hallmark of American presence in articles about Albania. Such traces of American superiority in articles about Albania are found in every story. Whenever it is labeled as "tiny Albania", which occurs in almost all articles, the determination as a "small country" is certainly made in relation to the "big-sized country" that is America. The first reading of superiority is thus obtained through the regular use of this reference to tiny Albania vis-a-vis the great America, whose superiority is inherent in the narrative.

Moreover, through articles dealing with developments regarding Albanian democracy as a political regime, American concern or "paternalistic worry" of the US for the "Albanian democracy infant" inspired by America is clearly read. Alarm signals for the situation or developments in Albania, linked also to their possible reflection or extension in neighboring countries and other parts of the Balkans, signals that stand behind the selection or decision by the magazine to report on Albania, are also linguistic signs of American preoccupation as "caretaker" or "guardian" of fragile democracies or countries in transition towards democracy, of which Albania is a part.

To support the above interpretation with more examples, the headlines alone give a clear overview like in "The Trouble with Democracy: Albania’s Worrisome Vote" or "Albania, Crisis in the Capital" and in the article titled "Deadly Protests Don’t End Albania’s Power Play". This is not the only period when the focus of Time is on the "avarices" of Albanian democracy. Articles about Albania during 1997, but also in

the subsequent years of 1998 and 1999, had the same American concern expressed in the headlines: "Democracy School" in 1999, or "Albania back to the brink" in 1998, or "No Law or Order in the Land" in March 1997.

Time's interest in the democratic movement in Albania in the early 1990's is also envisaged within the framework of international developments related to the overthrow of communist regimes, so in this period we also find titles with the aspiration for almost perfect democratic order such as "Albania and then there were none", published in May 1990, or "Albania, her turn to fall", published in July 1990.

Similarly, the titles of the subsequent period speak of the internal effort in Albania towards democratization, such as in the article: "*Albania: Coming out of the Cage*" in January 1991 or the concern that in Albania the change of power might not be over yet, a concern expressed in the article: "It cannot be called closed" published in the spring of the same year. The same concern is reflected in the article about "Albania, the deadlock of the Old Caste" commenting on the situation in Albania after an election result not as expected: "Despite the narrow victory in the first free elections in Albania last spring, old communist leaders find it difficult to hold on to power as the wave of reforms engulfs the poorest and most isolated country in Europe" (*Time*, 1991).

On the other hand, the notes of American superiority in relation to the subject of Albania are clear in the article about Bush's visit to Albania in 2007, supported by linguistic characterizations of Albania such as "small country", "forgotten country", and "backward country", given as "justification" or "reason" for the extraordinary honors that Albania is willing to reserve for an American president with which even the "enlightened" part of the world and the US were not very happy at that time.

The content of the article also emphasized the fact that in Albania there were no critical voices against Bush, but only enthusiasm and political and popular fanfare, while the title of the article "Albania: Please Occupy Us" precisely translates Albania's willingness, according to *Time*, to become a "symbolic vassal" of the USA (*Time*, 2007). It's curious the fact that this narrative of subordination and vassalage is not recent, firstly used about Albania and Italy during the regime of Ahmed Zogu, and again in the context of Albanian relations to Russia and latter China during the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha.

Similarly, in articles that touch on the issue of Guantanamo Uighurs who have been accepted to be housed in Albania, it is considered astonishing the "unconditional readiness" on the part of the Albanian side to accept them on Albanian territory despite the international complications of the issue, at a time when they cannot return to their countries, when America seeks to remove them from its territory and no other country accepts them. However, the subject of Albania in this case is treated as an exception with a positive tone, in terms of its courage, gaining some sympathy and symbolic support for this act (*Time*, 2009).

Finally, regarding the Kosovo War where American involvement and interest were also direct, the assertion

of American superiority over the Albanian subject is again quite evident. While Kosovo and Albania are different subjects, as long as Albania was part of the subject of the Kosovo War during the exodus, the protection of the Albanian factor and the presentation of an almost unified tableau between Albania and Kosovo are observed on the pages of *Time*. Thus, in considering an article titled "Don't wear a gala costume in Tirana", the extremely dire situation of Albanians during the exodus of Kosovo Albanians from their lands being displaced towards neighboring countries, including mainly Albania, is precisely treated. Although the place from where the article was written was Kukës (northern city in Albania) and the surrounding areas where the Kosovo Albanians had landed, nevertheless, in the headline it appears Tirana, which is described as inappropriate for wearing expensive clothes and for showing off with luxury cars. In an article that seems like a call from the magazine to sympathize with the situation and conditions in which the displaced Albanians find themselves, journalist Frank Pellegrini writes that the last thing needed by the victims of the exodus is a visit from Hollywood stars wearing expensive clothes and driving luxury cars, while citing a refugee named Hatixhe Ajeti in relation to Richard Gere's visit: "Oh, a famous actor. Too bad. I need a doctor" (*Time*, 2007).

Therefore, the dominant narrative of *Time* about Albania in the context of American correspondence, has been that of American superiority, especially in political terms, regularly constructed through the proposition that the United States has a sacred mission to fulfill towards the rest of the world, which it could achieve through "saving" and "benevolent" interventions or through enlightenment (towards Europe). In the analysis and interpretation of media contents, it is important to recognize the values that the media places at the center of its reports. Some of the main themes or codes that permeate the reporting of American media have been identified by Herbert Gans, such as ethnocentrism, individualism, altruistic democracy, moderation, social order, responsible capitalism and national leadership (Gans, 1980). At the top of the list is ethnocentrism, which speaks to the American orientation as universal (thus with the widest dissemination) regarding the coverage chronicle of international reports by American media. Ethnocentrism is manifested both in the content of international reports and in the space given to them in relation to domestic reports.
As Massimo Calabresi, former Editor of *Time* in the Vienna Bureau and Washington, puts it in an interview for this study:

“Time reports on the Balkans and Albania are defined by the interests of American readers. This implies the interests of American foreign policy in the region, humanitarian concerns, and interests related to the level of dramatic events or violent conflict in this part of Europe” (Calabresi, 2012).

7. Conclusion

The analysis of *Time* magazine's portrayal of Albania reveals a persistent narrative of "Albanian abnormality" that has endured over nearly a century, from 1923 to 2023. This consistent approach highlights the magazine's enduring institutional and professional ties to the subject of Albania, reflecting broader dynamics within the American media landscape. Key factors influencing this portrayal include the magazine's ownership structure, editorial practices, and organizational framework. These elements shape not only the frequency and nature of Albania's coverage but also the underlying narratives that align with American values and perspectives. The journalistic model employed by *Time*, along with its editorial stances and audience considerations, has reinforced a specific lens through which Albanian events are reported and discussed.

The content analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, demonstrates a uniformity in reporting that spans different historical contexts. The representation of Albania remains largely unchanged, with similar themes, linguistic choices, and discursive frameworks recurring across decades. This continuity indicates a deeply ingrained narrative that intertwines perceptions of Albanian difference with notions of American superiority. Thus, the analysis underscores the significant role of American media in framing narratives about Albania, often through the lens of superiority, ethnocentrism, and an emphasis on extreme schemata. In terms of persistence of the American superiority narrative, the analysis revealed a consistent narrative of American superiority in representations of Albania across articles from 1990 to 2023. Although this narrative has evolved from overt paternalism to subtler connotations, the underlying themes persist, indicating a long-standing framework through which American media interprets and presents Albanian society and politics.
In terms of framing and ethnocentrism, the frequent use of descriptors such as "Tiny Albania" serves to frame Albania as a lesser entity in comparison to the United States. This linguistic choice underscores an ethnocentric perspective prevalent in American media, reinforcing notions of American exceptionalism and superiority. The articles highlight Albania's perceived deficiencies in democracy and governance, often through a paternalistic lens. Furthermore, the coverage of Albania is closely tied to American foreign policy interests, particularly during pivotal moments such as the Kosovo War and U.S. interventions in the Balkans.

Articles tend to reflect a narrative that aligns with the U.S. agenda of promoting democracy and stability in the region, portraying the U.S. as a guardian or caretaker of Albania's democratic aspirations.
The overarching narrative constructed by *Time* magazine often overlooks the complexities of Albanian identity and culture. By reducing Albania to a backdrop for American interests, the media risks perpetuating stereotypes and failing to acknowledge the agency of Albanian people in shaping their own narratives and futures. The research indicates that the themes of American superiority in relation to Albania have historical

roots, tracing back to earlier media portrayals. This continuity suggests a deep-seated cultural perspective that informs current narratives and shapes public perception. These findings underscore the significance of media narratives in shaping public perceptions of foreign countries, illustrating how longstanding discourses can influence the framing of national identities and international relations. The impact of this portrayal extends beyond mere representation, contributing to a broader understanding of how American media constructs and perpetuates cultural narratives about Albania over time.

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