

Book Review

Influencers- Journalists Versus Politicians

On the Book “*Influencers/Ndikuesit*” by Belina Budini, UET Press,
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Media is the common denominator of this generation. Every single major event that has happened in our era is being *shaped, formed, and transformed* by the eyes and insights of those who run mediums. Thus said, instead of looking for facts, today’s people tend to look for those who defined the course of the event and the answer in most of the cases is: the influencers.

Influencers are those who affect or change the way other people behave and in a media context, those are to be found among politicians, journalists, and media owners. And it is in this light, that the scholar and author Belina Budini, combining the scrupulosity of research and the creativity of journalism, brings to the readers a much-needed study on the role of the journalists in the Albanian context. The book is an in-depth analysis of the relationship between journalists and politicians but in a counter-pedal sense, it is not looking to understand more about the nature of politics or those who do it; it sheds light on how journalists are *structuring/ selling* themselves as agents of symbolic power, in a context where freedom of expression and the free will to exercise power or produce change may seem impossible due to country democratic fragility.

Divided in 5 chapters, the book raises 3 fundamental questions:

1. Who defines news events in Albania?
2. How journalists exercise their power?
3. Which roles do journalists play/ take in the public space?

While the first chapters take a methodological stance, trying to explain through theoretical lenses the roles and the mechanisms of power, the third chapter offers a set of detailed interviews with the most prominent journalistic figures in Albania, such as Blendi Fevziu, Adi Krasta, Ben Blushi, Fatos Lubonja, Baton Haxhiu etc, interviews that are to be considered little gems thanks to the insightful analysis and diagnosis they provide on the complex relationship between media and politics in our country. Its final chapter is an attempt in tracing down the features of the Albanian press in the 30's, aiming to find similarities and differences with the actuality, believing that some things are perpetually changing, still remaining the same.

Who defines current events in Albania?

“The agenda is set by the Prime minister” is the sad but hard truth accepted by one of the interviewed journalists in the book. Even for Artur Zheji, who has written the introduction, the truth is that politicians are those who lead the events, dividing media and journalists in two main camps: those with the party in power and those against it. Almost all journalists have given the same answer to this question, affirming that despite the increasing power of the journalists as symbolic agents, the short connections that media owners have with politicians seem to control or decide the version of the truth that is going to be given to the audiences. Journalists might have turned into *popstars*, but the truth is that in most of the political crisis or serious events in this country, their role was reduced in mere spectators or even worst transmitters of the messages produced by the state agenda. Are still voices to be heard? Of course! But as it happens in these cases they are like small ponds, destined to be drained by the flow.

How do journalists exercise their power?

The author provides a thorough analysis on possible roles that journalists might play and possible means of power. Language seems to be the most relevant among other weapons in terms of identity construction and public discourse. It is especially relevant the analysis that Budini conducts on the division between normative language and negative language. From one side stand the politicians, mainly represented by the PM Rama, who is directly interested in demonizing media and on the other side, the journalists who use his language to create discrepancies among themselves. Thus said, it seems that journalists *are fallen victims* to a compulsory circle, being unable to create an alternative discourse

different from what politics pushes towards them. Social media or even their prime time talk shows are not capable to change the route of what is about to be sent to the dinner table of every Albanian.

What roles do journalists play?

In democratic societies journalists tend to be informers, analysts, critics, radicals, educators, and facilitators. The truth is that those roles tend to be acquired based on cultural values of the place where they are exercising their activity. So, if we want to understand the roles journalists play in Albania, we must pose some serious questions on possible systems of values, expectations, and even historical concerns. Albania has been through difficult historical moments that have created the chances for journalists to run excellent stories; some have seized the moment, leaving traces of qualitative media and investigation, while others went with the flow. Still the present dwells between these two extremes; between a minority of journalists who are faithful to their mission and a majority who serve as a mike for the state propaganda.

The future lying ahead will not be a walk in the park for none working in the media. While the rise of the *citizen-journalist* is challenging the daily tasks of the journalists, the need for qualitative journalism and courageous individuals who look after the truth, is more present than ever. Fake news, disinformation and propaganda are gaining more territory and this war requires well – equipped and solid professionals, ready to fight difficult battles against a lack of media literacy on the part of the audience and in front of defiant politicians, who are looking for someone to serve their agenda and not to reach the truth.