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Children in television news

**A multi-method research of the portrayal and reception of children in
Albanian television news**

Emiljano Kaziaj

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Promotor: Prof. Dr. **Sofie Van Bauwel**

COVER: Child sitting on many televisions/ Shutterstock.com

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INTRODUCTION

On May 19th, while finalizing this dissertation, an unprecedented news item appeared on a television news channel in Albania. Five children were driven by taxi from Cerrik – a small town in central Albania – to the capital of Tirana, without informing their parents, and were featured on a special News 24¹ program to denounce the psychological and physical abuse they had been receiving from their teacher. The five classmates, all 11 years old, appeared live in a news studio and had a discussion with the news anchor, which lasted around 16 minutes. News stories of teachers experiencing violence in schools had been covered often by the Albanian news media in the years leading up to the group interview², but this news event was different. The fact that the story was told by the children themselves, in a news studio, live, was an unprecedented event. Furthermore, their parents knew nothing about the troubles their children were undergoing. When the children appeared in the television screen and began describing their experiences, their parents were caught by surprise. One of the parents was cited in the media as saying: “We didn’t know anything about this. My wife fainted when she saw our daughter on the news”.

As the story unfolded in the following days, it was found that the children were encouraged by their teacher, who had been having problems with the school director, to denounce her live on television. Moreover, the teacher had paid the taxi driver and instructed him to drive the pupils to the news program. She was immediately suspended from work soon after the story was revealed, and it was discovered that no violence against children had occurred. The full video of the news item, which featured the children describing the fictitious assault, appeared on the television channel’s web page immediately after its broadcast, with the title “Traveling

¹ A popular news channel in Albania.

² <http://www.oranews.tv/vendi/video-mesuesja-rreh-nxenesin-ne-klase/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lWawkJXqsM>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUvIDl9ohxk>
<http://www.shekulli.com.al/p.php?id=333583>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwKiku3YgVg>
<http://www.albeu.com/shqipëri/shokon-mesuesja-ne-koplik-dhunon-nxenesin-ne-klase-/185654/>

alone by taxi from Cerrik to Tirana, children say they have been violated by their teacher”³. The same news item was picked up by several media outlets and was reported accordingly⁴. Only one newspaper responded by pointing out the news channel’s negligence in handling such a sensitive case involving children⁵. Even though it was a brief comment, the article stated:

In their competition for more viewers and clicks, media has trespassed all boundaries. [...] The craziness of making news cannot reach such levels! How can children be put on air without first consulting their parents or psychologists? How can someone end up going so far? [...]

I also reacted to this case, with an opinion piece that was published by several print and online media outlets⁶. As someone who for three years has intensely studied the relationship between children and the news media in Albania, I tried to raise questions about how this specific case could be used to illuminate critical aspects concerning the news media’s coverage of children. I pointed out how the common expression, ‘in the best interest of the public’, which is used frequently by the news media, was transformed in this case to ‘the best interest of the media’, which overstepped ‘the best interest of the child’⁷. Furthermore, I highlighted several ethical issues and violations regarding children’s appearances on news broadcasts, as defined by the Code of Broadcast (Nr. 01/2014) and the Law on Audiovisual Media in Albania (Nr. 97/2013).

First, the Code of Broadcast (article 1.4) defines that:

³ <http://www.panorama.com.al/me-taksi-vetem-nga-cerriku-ne-tirane-femijet-denoncojne-mesuesen-na-ka-dhunuar/>

⁴ Other media articles on the same news item <http://top-channel.tv/lajme/artikull.php?id=327038>
<http://www.gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/2016/05/20/nga-cerriku-me-taksi-ne-tirane-5-femije-denoncojne-dhunen-e-mesueses/>
<http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme-nga-shqiperia/cerrik-nxiti-nxenesit-te-shanin-drejtoreshen-ne-televizion-ndalohet-mesuesja-202533/>

<http://www.balkanweb.com/gazetashqiptare/nxenesit-nga-cerriku-na-dhunojne-mesuesja-qe-i-nisi-ne-news24-pyetet-nga-policia/>

⁵ <http://www.mapo.al/2016/05/5-femije-denoncojne-mesuesen-ne-news24-po-ku-po-shkon-media>

⁶ <http://www.reporter.al/kur-femijet-perdoren-per-interesin-me-te-larte-te-medias/>
<http://al.ejo-online.eu/profesionalizmi-ne-media/kur-femijet-perdoren-per-interesin-me-te-larte-te-medias>
<http://www.mapo.al/2016/05/kur-femijet-perdoren-per-interesin-me-te-larte-te-medias>
<https://twitter.com/gazetamapo/status/733348778162434048>

⁷ Article 3.1. of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”.

All audiovisual broadcasting should particularly take into consideration the rights, interests, moral and legal requirements for the protection of children.

More specifically, article 5 which is related to Children in the Media Broadcast, states that:

All audiovisual media outlets (OSHMA) should restrain themselves from broadcasting in audio or video, any item that can reveal the identity, visual features, address or any other details of any child who has been a victim of abuse, testimony, accused or found guilty, in any penal act (5.1).

Meanwhile the five children in the news broadcast, besides being on air for 16 minutes, talking about ‘the violence of their teacher’, were asked twice by the news anchor if they could clearly articulate their names and surnames, as it would calm their parents knowing that their children were safe. Moreover, article 5.10 of the Code of Broadcast defines that:

Interviewing children in media should be done in the presence or at least knowledge of his legal representative, or another person appointed by him.

Obviously, none of these requirements were taken into consideration in this specific case. Five 11-year-old children, who left town without informing their parents, were hosted in a television news studio, were put on air in a typical news debate program setting⁸, to talk about the violence against them. After my opinion piece was published, the video of the original news interview, which had once appeared prominently on the new channel’s website, was deleted.

Using this case, I wanted to introduce several issues related to children and the news media, which will be further explained in this dissertation, that go beyond the ethical coverage of children by news outlets. First, this case reaffirms the important role that the news media plays in society. The fact that a teacher (supposedly a well-educated citizen), considers the news media as a solution to her problems, and avoids any other referral system in schools or communities, shows that news media can be seen as a trustful institution. Second, this case points to the media’s omnipresent fascination with presenting children as victims. This explains why, instead of referring the case immediately to the authorities, or at least a more specialized institution that deals with children, media professionals chose to put those children

⁸ images:

https://www.google.be/search?q=femijet+ne+news+24+denoncojne+dhunen+e+mesues&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwJV1TF2vzNAhUjL8AKHXxTAjgQ_AUICSgC#imgsrc=0T05wAgxXVH9M%3A

on the air without any restraint. Third, this case highlights the lack of respect, or in the best-case scenario, the unawareness of media professionals about the existence of policies and articles concerning the codes of broadcast and the portrayal of children in media. From another perspective, it could also be seen as an attempt to empower children to have a voice in news coverage, by providing a space to speak about their problems. Nonetheless, considering how the event unfolded after the news item was broadcast, where it was revealed that the abuse allegations were actually an attempt by one teacher to discredit her superior, the case clearly illustrates the level of tokenism or the adult manipulation of children by the media.

The controversies highlighted by this example point to the importance of the representation of children in the news media. Discussions concerning the relationship between children and the news media have taken place since the 1960s, which occurred along with growing concerns over television's effect on children, as the popularity of television during that time period increased (see Eron, 1963; Huesmann & Eron, 1986; Adoni & Cohen, 1980). This topic received media attention again after the 2000s as a result of several events, such as the 9/11 attacks in the US, the Israeli-Palestine conflict and the subsequent Afghanistan and Iraq wars (see Lemish & Goetz, 2007).

In 1989, the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child encouraged all countries who signed the Convention (or would sign it in the coming years) to recognize "the important function performed by the mass media and ensure that the child had access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health". Since then, the portrayal of children in newspaper and television news coverage has been considered as an important starting point when accounting for the role of media in advancing children's rights (see Carter, 2013; Ponte, 2007, 2009; Goonasekera, 2001; Children Now, 1994, 1999). However debates on children and the news media have mostly focused on ethical issues (Fullertone, 2004; Goddard & Saunders, 2000; Moeller, 1999). As a consequence this has led to the adaptation of several policy changes and practices related specifically to child protection (see Kitzinger, 2004).

But, as Prout (2004:7) notes:

New ways of speaking, writing and imaging children are providing new ways of seeing them and these children are different from the innocent and dependent creatures that appeared to

populate the first half of the twentieth century. These new representations construct children as more active, knowledgeable and socially participative than older discourses allowed. They are more difficult to manage, less biddable and hence are more troublesome and troubling.

Thus, taking into consideration the potential of the news media to construct different concepts about childhood, there is a need to explore such potential beyond issues of child abuse and media ethics in relation to children. Issues of abuse, “are, however but one of a multiplicity of childhood representations conveyed by the contemporary mass media” (Prout, 2004:7).

Instead “we must content ourselves with the analysis of how different discursive practices produce different childhoods, each and all of which are ‘real’ within their own regime of truth” (Prout & James, 1997: 25). This dissertation responds to this need. Central to this argument is *the representation of children in television news in Albania*. This country offers a unique platform to explore such topics base on the overwhelming presence of television news, which is considered to be the most influential media outlet (Kevin, Pellicano & Scheenberger, 2013). Furthermore, a latest report on social conditions of children in Albania⁹ highlights social exclusion as one of the main problems that children face. In such a context, researching the representation of children in television news would contribute to exploring the role of news media in relation to the social conditions of marginalized groups, namely children. Advancing the rights of these marginalized groups is a crucial need for the development of democratic values in a post- communist country such as Albania.

Four research questions are addressed in order to unfold the many facets of the representation of children in television news: (1) How are children represented in television news? (2) How do news media professionals shape the ways in which children are portrayed in television news? (3a) How is the representation of children in television news perceived by children? (3b) How is the representation of children in television news perceived by adults? The first research question aims to explore how the representation of children in television news coverage contributes to the construction of specific ideas and beliefs about children and childhood. The second research question accounts for the role of journalists on the ways children are portrayed in television news coverage. Finally, the third research question attempts to uncover the news media’s role in inciting the participation of children in society

⁹ See National Report on Children’s Rights situation in Albania (National Agency for Child Rights Protection): <http://femijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Raport-komb%C3%ABtar-mbi-situat%C3%ABn-e-te-drejtave-t%C3%AB-f%C3%ABmij%C3%ABve-n%C3%AB-Shqip%C3%ABri.pdf>

by focusing on the views of children and adults concerning child-related news items. By exploring these research questions, this dissertation examines the role of television news in constructing, defining, and molding our ideas on children and childhood. This dissertation is concerned with knowing how the representations of children are constructed by the news media, and how they signify the ways in which children engage with society, or in the words of Holland, (2004: xiv) "...how these attitudes and images together put pressure on real flesh and- blood children". By exploring the representations of children in television news, insights can be gained on the positioning of children in society. As Jenkins has argued, "a state of being, such as childhood, should be formulated through the 'analytic gaze' within a particular epoch must tell us as much about the condition of our society as it does about our children" (2005: 53).

This research project can be situated in the field of cultural studies, which is considered "a multifaceted intellectual area that explores the ideological connections among media, political economy and practices of individuals in a cultural system" (Miller, 2005: 75). A cultural studies approach to researching children and the media would consider the representations of children as presented by the news media, the meanings that arise from such representations and would relate them to various other meaning systems available in society (see Lemish, 2006). Nonetheless, this dissertation does not focus on the media as a general concept, but specifically on television news. When studying television news from a cultural perspective, some clarifications need to be underscored in order to better conceptualize their role.

First, in this dissertation, television news is acknowledged as an important social institution that plays a role in the production of meaning (see Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Gamson et al., 1992; Kellner 1990; Gurevitch & Levy 1985). As Gamson et al. (1992) pointed out, "*we walk around with media-generated images of the world, using them to construct meaning about political and social issues*". Furthermore, Barker (2008:315) argues that:

The development of [the] institutionalization of cultural studies has long been intertwined with that of media studies. In particular, television, the major form of communication in most western societies, is one of cultural studies' prolonged concerns.

Additionally, the choice to focus on television news is related to the dominance of the medium when compared to other media outlets in Albania. The country of only 2.8 million people is home to a disproportionately high number of television channels. In addition to the

public broadcaster (TVSH), there are two private national television channels, 71 private local television channels, and 83 private cable television channels currently operating in Albania (AMA, 2014). Furthermore, eight television channels broadcast only news (Kevin, Pellicano and Scheenberger, 2013), and all news channels are privately owned and freely available in most of the country's territory. Both the public broadcaster and the commercial channels are broadcast in analog and digital by the two multiplexes, as well as terrestrially and via satellite (Londo, 2012). A latest report (Nelaj, 2014) found that 84% of Albanians get most of their news from television, while 73% of the population place their highest level of trust in television news when compared to other media. Furthermore, with the ubiquitous presence of the Internet, most television channels have their own online pages where they provide content from both news and other programs as it is broadcast live. The expansion of television news points to its great potential to either construct or reinforce different social concepts that are inclusive of children.

Second, when studying television news from a cultural studies perspective, a critical investigation on the role of news coverage in society is implied. This would mean moving away from the old dichotomy of media-society but instead:

It is important that we take sufficient care to avoid losing sight of how the news media are embedded in specific relations of power and control while, at the same time, recognizing the ways in which they are working to re-infect, transform and, if only infrequently, challenge these same relations over time (Allan, 2010:4).

Therefore in this light:

Attention focuses on the decisive role the news media play in establishing a discursive space, one framed by the state and the economic domains on either side, for public deliberations over social issues. The formative influence of the news on popular attitudes is accentuated by conceiving of the news audience as citizens engaged in public dialogue. (Allan, 2010:4)

Third, as the above quote suggests, a cultural studies perspective on news emphasizes the role that audiences play in the production of meaning. In other words, an audience's agency is acknowledged (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). I respond this way to the call for more qualitatively oriented research on a micro level in order to block ideas about the "implied audience" in media and cultural theory (Biltereyst, 2001: 43). Audiences – in this dissertation – is a term that will be used to refer to both adults and children. Consequently, in this

dissertation, children's agency is considered to be central when accounting for the role of television news to construct ideas and beliefs about children and childhood. This is in line with the new sociology of childhood that is employed as a theoretical approach, in which children are seen as active participants in social life and as actors with a potential for having agency of their own (Prout & James, 1997). In the context of the news media, children's agency would mean that they are capable of forming and articulating their own opinions regarding television news in general, and their own portrayal, in particular. As Lemish (2007: 71) states:

(Here) children are not assumed to be passive, defenseless, receptors, the proverbial tabula rasa, on which television 'writes' freely. Rather, they bring with them and apply in the viewing encounter their own accumulated knowledge and experience, needs and sensitivities, meanings acquired in complicated socialization processes, tastes and preferences. Accordingly, the active viewer cultural studies approach assumes that the meanings (rather than effects) of television for children are a result of complicated processes of negotiation that develop over a multitude of viewing encounters, over an extended period of time, and in given social circumstances.

When conceptualizing childhood as a social construction, Jenks (1996:32) stated that:

The child is 'a status of person which is comprised through a series of, often heterogeneous, images, representations, codes and constructs'. Indeed, it is now often argued that it is more correct to talk of 'childhoods' rather than childhood.

This quote suggests that television news, as a source of information that makes use of images and sets of narratives, can contribute significantly to the construction of stories about children that become part of the cultural competence. These stories, as Holland (2004:3) argues, organize patterns of expectations that sediment into a broader set of public meanings and can become part of the mapping of social, political and emotional worlds.

They make it possible for daily lives to continue and meaningful actions to be undertaken, as we half-consciously refer to them for guidance on behavior and relationships.

Therefore, as television news is considered to be a significant source for information about the world (Buckingham, 2000), accounting for the ways in which children are represented in television news would mean exploring how different representations of children in television

news produce different childhoods. Furthermore, by studying journalist's views and practices related to children, the processes of how these construction on children and childhood come to being in television news, are conveyed. Finally, exploring how children and adults give meaning to the portrayal of children by the television news media exposes how the media constructions of childhood are embedded in the social practices and social relationships between children and adults. This way, we respond to the call for an enlargement of the public debate, not only on the social conditions of children in contemporary societies, but also on the role of television news in promoting democratic values (Ponte, 2007).

However, I do not mean to present a deterministic role of television news in one's social life, rather than seeing it as one of the ways in which childhood(s) and the realities of children are constructed and reified. Hence, this dissertation aims to enrich the body of work on children's representation in media with an inquiry into the construction of childhood(s) in television news and its role in reinforcing and transforming the dominant ideas on children and childhood. To this end, I rely on critical insights from other fields such as childhood studies and feminism.

Before elaborating on the structure of this dissertation, I want to underscore that this research project titled "Children in television news: A multi-method research of the portrayal and reception of children in Albanian television news" was funded by the European Commission¹⁰ through the Basileus project - Erasmus Mundus Partnership (Action 2). The timeline for this project was 36 months, from September 2013 to August 2016.

This dissertation contains seven chapters divided into two main parts. First, two theoretical chapters are introduced. In the first chapter, several important theoretical considerations on the role of the news media in the social construction of reality, and more specifically childhood, will be introduced. I will start by exploring several traditions used to examine the role of the news media and relate each of them to studies on children and news coverage. Further, I will point out their common approaches and empirical foci and argue the complementarity of these traditions, as employed in this dissertation. Additionally, the chapter is devoted to exploring the concept of childhood as a social construction, by focusing on how the concept has changed throughout time and the various traditions that have been employed to study childhood. A short section on the history of childhood in Albania will also be

¹⁰ This publication reflects the views only of the author(s), and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use, which may be made of the information contained herein.

presented. Finally, I conclude the chapter by presenting arguments on the important role of the media in general and the news media's particular ability to mold our conceptions of children and childhood, which will pave the way for a deeper discussion on the news media's role in constructing notions about childhood in the subsequent chapter.

Subsequently, chapter 2 presents a thorough overview of literature on children and the news media. Three main themes are identified: studies researching the portrayal of children in the news; studies on news media professional's views on children; and studies on children as a news audience. So far, studies on children and the news have focused on the aforementioned themes separately (see Alon-Tirosh & Lemish, 2014; Carter, 2014; Ponte, 2008; Fullertone, 2004; Goonasekera, 2001). I argue that by combining approaches on news production, news content and news reception, a thorough understanding of the ways that ideas on children are produced, shared, presented and consumed, can be achieved. The combination of all these dominant themes in research on children and the news media and their empirical investigation in a specific context, such as Albania, is one of the main contributions that this research project brings to the field.

The second part of this dissertation consists of five empirical chapters, including a chapter on methodology. These chapters empirically investigate the portrayal of children in television news, media professionals' views on children and the opinions of children and adults on the portrayal of children in television news. I start with a methodological chapter (chapter 3), in which I elaborate on the chosen methodologies and discuss the use of specific techniques as they relate to the specific research questions posed in the empirical articles. Additionally, the selected methods of content analysis, interviews and focus groups are presented in relation to their application within the empirical chapters of this dissertation. Next, a chapter on the Albanian media context (Kazaj, 2016b) will be presented as a way to provide additional information on how the specificities of the political and economic situation in Albania play a role on the ways social issues in general, and issues related to children in particular, are presented by the news media. This chapter is conceptualized as an introductory component to the subsequent empirical chapters that will be presented in the form of articles. Table 1.1 provides an overview of these empirical articles and the chapters in which they are covered¹¹. In line with the theoretical section, chapters 5, 6 and 7 will be based on a research question

¹¹ Ultimately, I refer to the CD-R that is attached to this dissertation for details on the empirical work, listed in the Appendixes section.

regarding the representation of children in television news (chapter 5); media professionals views on children as news subjects (chapter 6) and children's and adults opinions on the representation of children in television news (chapter 7). It should be noted that all these articles are already published or revised and resubmitted in international peer-reviewed journals¹². Since each article was submitted for publication to international journals separately, they had to be conceptualized as a stand-alone empirical contribution to the field of children and news media. Therefore, when brought together in this dissertation, some repetition of theory may be noticed.

The first article, "The adult gaze: exploring the representation of children in television news in Albania" (Kaziaj, 2016a), analyzes the monitoring of 4416 news items from three national television channels in Albania. The article identifies 154 news items related to children and analyzes those items further by making use of both quantitative and qualitative content analyses. In particular, this article shows how distinct media patterns repeatedly used in television news items are related to children and reinforce the perspectives of adults on children. The term "adult gaze" is coined in this article, as a way to describe such perspectives. I argue that such a view on children puts them in a more vulnerable position and denies them full participation in society. Eventually, this article addresses the first research question: How are children represented in television news?

The second empirical article "Journalists' and news editors' views on children as news subjects in Albanian media: Exploring issues of newsworthiness and self-censorship" (Kaziaj, 2016c) makes use of a series of interviews with noted media professionals in Albania. Departing from the premise on the important role of journalists in the ways different social issues are presented to the public, it shows how the views of journalists on children and the decision-making processes in the newsroom on items related to children, play a crucial role in the ways children are covered or quoted by the news media. By using a constant comparative approach as a method for analysis, this article addresses the second research question: How do news media professionals shape the ways in which children are portrayed in television news?

Finally, the third empirical article "The Ignored Audience: A multi-method reception study on children and television news in Albania" (Kaziaj & Van Bauwel, 2016) uses a series of 12 focus groups conducted with children and adults in Albania, to explore their opinions on

¹² Citations and references in these articles might differ according to the style of the journal where they have been published or submitted.

television news, with a special focus on the portrayal of children. This article examines how children's discussions of news coverage demonstrates their need to be considered as active participants in the public sphere, which is presented by the news media as an exclusive domain for adults. Furthermore, it shows how adult's opinions on news items related to children are underpinned by dominant ideologies on children as lacking the critical thinking skills, or the proper knowledge to make sense of the news. This article states that while the interest of adults in news coverage is taken for granted due to the belief that adults are the main targets for news outlets, the noticeable interest of children in television news is hidden. Therefore, the remaining research questions are addressed: How is the representation of children in television news perceived by children? How is the representation of children in television news perceived by adults?

The last section of this dissertation presents a summarizing conclusion concerning the role of the television news media in the social construction of childhood(s) in Albania. Additionally, a number of recommendations addressed to policy-makers, media professionals and children's rights organizations will be presented. Lastly, taking into account the limitations that were presented during the theoretical and empirical inquiry, some ideas on possible directions for future research will be shared.

THEORETICAL CHAPTERS

Chapter 1

News and Childhood

In this first chapter, several important theoretical considerations on the role of the news media in shaping the social construction of reality, and more specifically childhood, will be introduced. I will start by exploring several traditions used to examine the role of the news media and relate each of them to studies on children and news coverage. Further, I will point out their common approaches and empirical foci and argue the complementarity of these traditions, as employed in this dissertation. The second section of this chapter is devoted to exploring childhood as a social construction, by focusing on how the concept has changed throughout time and the various traditions that have been employed to study childhood. A short section on the history of childhood in Albania will also be presented, for the first time. Finally, I conclude the chapter by presenting arguments on the important role of media in general and the news media's particular ability to influence our conceptions of children and childhood, which will pave the way for a deeper discussion on the news media's role in constructing notions about childhood in the subsequent chapter.

1.1. News and the social construction of reality

[...] I do claim that it is valuable to identify news as an artful accomplishment attuned to specific understandings of social reality (Tuchman, 1978: 216).

As the above quote suggests, my empirical work deals with the news media's role in shaping the social construction of reality, with a focus on childhood. Therefore, social constructionism is used as a theoretical starting point (see Burr, 2003). As such, this thesis details the ways we understand the realities around us, particularly those related to children. As social constructionism maintains, "all ways of understanding the world are historically and culturally relative" and "it is through the daily interactions between people that our versions of knowledge become fabricated" (Burr, 2003: 4). Therefore, social interaction is at the core of studies employing social constructionism as their theoretical framework. The point of

departure can be found in Berger and Luckmann's (1966) book, *The Social Construction of Reality*. They were among the first to articulate that:

Reality is socially defined. But the definitions are always embodied that is, concrete individuals or groups of individuals serve as definers of reality (1966: 116).

In later studies, Luckmann (1975, 1984) logically directed his focus to language as the major medium of knowledge. This discussion was followed by several scholars in the field of media research who acknowledged media, specifically the news media as one of the institutions that had more power to determine the ways in which social reality was perceived (Fishman, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Gans, 1979; Schlesinger, 1978; Altheide, 1976). This is strongly related to the nature of the news media in acting as teachers of values, ideologies, and beliefs and continuously providing images for interpreting the world (van Dijk, 2008). When talking about news media from a social constructionist perspective, one implies a considerable number of actors, actions and processes, all involved in contributing and producing meaning in society. As such, theories exploring the role of the news media have been numerous. This can be noted in the titles of a whole list of influential studies on *making, creating, manufacturing, and deciding* what is news (Tuchman, 1978). According to Tuchman (2002, see also Schudson, 1991), three approaches to studying news can be identified:

The first, political economy, employs a macro-perspective approach on the role of news in shaping our social constructions of reality, by focusing on general political and economic categories to examine their specific contribution to the production and reproduction of the social status quo. Gurevitch and Levy (1985) argue that news is a site in which various social groups, institutions and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality. Along the same lines, Kellner (1990) analyzes news as part of a process of economic, political, social, and cultural struggle where different social groups compete for social dominance and attempt to impose their visions, interests, and agendas on society as a whole. In their first editions of *Mediating the Message*, Shoemaker and Reese (1991, 1996) labelled this approach as the *ideological analysis* approach. In their recent edition of the same book (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014: 64), this category is defined as *the social system level* of analysis. By *social system* the authors refer to "the structure of relationships among people and the institutions they create". Within this approach research is focused on influences on media content from social *institutions*, such as government, financial, and religion, which are the structural manifestations of political, economic, and cultural subsystems. This approach is

rooted in the Marxist tradition, that no aspect of society can be understood apart from its social and historical context. In communication theory, such an approach corresponds to the critical tradition in which “the basic ‘*problem of communication*’ in society arises from material and ideological forces that preclude or distort discursive reflection” (Craig, 1999:147). Researching the role of the news media within this tradition is an attempt to “explain how social injustice is perpetuated by ideological distortions and how justice can potentially be restored through communicative practices that enable critical reflection or consciousness raising in order to unmask those distortions...” (Craig, 1999:147).

Taking the wider socio-political context into account has been identified as an important conceptual approach when researching children and the news. In their study on children in Israel, Lemish and Goetz (2007), argue that children’s access to media, as well as their perceptions of and response to media representations, is influenced by conflict reporting and the war context. Moreover, in such contexts children internalize the news media’s framing of the conflict (Lemish & Alony-Pick, 2014; Lemish, 2007). An extensive account of research on children and the media will be presented in the subsequent chapter¹³ (see chapter 2).

The second approach on the role of the news media in the social construction of reality relies on exploring how news (media) contributes to producing and maintaining society as a shared symbolic environment by focusing mostly on journalistic routines. These studies are usually grouped under the social constructionism theory of news (Lau, 2012). A common premise of this tradition is that the routine practices of communication workers play a significant role in accomplishing the social construction of reality. *Routine practices* refers to the ways media workers do their jobs, what they think about them, and what rules the organization imposes on them (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Most research that has contributed to this field focused on the role of journalistic practices. According to Fishman (1999: 211), “News stories, if they reflect anything, reflect the practices of journalists”. Molotch and Lester (1974) clearly highlighted the impact of journalists’ practices on news production. They saw media as reflecting not a *world out there*, but the practices of those having the power to determine the experiences of others. According to them “news assemblers have their own event needs ... as routines of getting work done in newsrooms” (p. 105). Consequently, Tuchman (1972, 1978) focused on the analysis of journalists’ professional practices, such as the practices concerning

¹³ In this chapter I will touch upon research on children and the news as a way to cement how research on this topic has made use of different approaches that are currently being discussed here.

facts and objectivity, and their impact on the process of news making. She concluded that the organization of news staff and their routines have a great influence on what was and was not considered as news. Similarly, Fishman (1980) in his ethnographic study *Manufacturing the News*, described how this necessity of *beats* influenced a uniform way of presenting the world in the news. The term *beat* was used to describe places where journalists pick up their information. More recently research based on this approach has identified the fast changing nature of such routines as a result of the fast development of communication technologies (Lowrey, 2006; Høyer, 2005; Livingstone & Bennett, 2003).

Other studies employing this approach, have explored how personal characteristics of journalists such as gender, personal values and beliefs, religious orientation, political attitudes or sexual orientation could influence news media's content or the ways media messages are constructed (Deuze, 2002; Patterson, 1998; Kaniss, 1991; Sigal, 1973).

In research on children and the media, this approach has been taken into consideration when exploring journalists' routines for covering children. As Trost (1994) notes, there has been an attempt to create a *kidsbeat* in some newsrooms in the beginning of the 90', but it was unsuccessful and children's issues were added to existing educational or social services beats covered by journalists who were already overworked. According to Hancock (2000: 79) an explanation for such a situation could be that:

Full-time reporters are rarely assigned to specialize in children's institutions the same way they would for City Hall. Journalists almost never have sufficient training in child development or interviewing kids. The day-to-day realities of children are little covered and less understood.

Therefore, within this approach, research on children and the media shifted from focusing on journalistic routines to exploring journalists' beliefs and attitudes towards children as news subjects and sources. A number of studies within this tradition have explored journalists' ethical coverage of children (Coleman, 2011; Slopen et al., 2007; Fullertone, 2004; Davies, 2003; Goonasekera, 2001; Goddard & Saunders, 2000) or children as news sources (Mackay, 2008; Stone, 1999; Tompkins, 1999). Studies that employ this theoretical conception depart from the assumption that journalists play a significant role in the ways different issues related to children are presented to the public. Furthermore, the quality of children's coverage by the

media could be taken as an indicator of the socially determined beliefs on children as social actors.

In addition, the textual approach analyzes the ways in which news texts produce particular perspectives on social reality, while blurring or obscuring others. This third type of news research has analyzed news as narratives to identify how the repetition of texts related to particular social groups could influence our perceptions of them (for an overview see Larsen, 2002). Such studies typically do not examine the production process in an empirical sense, but rather they seek to understand how media content shapes the way we think about the world as cultural, political and social beings (Ott & Mack, 2010). Within the social constructionism perspective, language (in our case, news media texts) is at the heart of the construction process. “Far from simply describing the world, language, both constructs the world as we perceive it and has real consequences” (Burr, 2003: 46).

This tradition has been very prominent in research on children and the news media. By exploring the portrayal of children in the news, media scholars have analyzed the hegemonic representations of children in different contexts and investigated how their representations in the news media affect our views on children and their positioning in society. A great deal of studies have made use of children’s images as they are presented in news media coverage to investigate their role in humanizing events, arousing sympathy from adults, or symbolizing the brutality of war, famine or genocide (Carter, 2014; Kitzinger, 2004; Goonasekera, 2001; Moeller, 1999). Other studies have made use of the discourse on children in news media as a way to examine the dominant ideas on children and the ideologies underpinning them (Morrow & Mayall, 2009; Ponte, 2007; Davies & Mosdell, 2005). This body of research is based on the concept of representation as articulated by Hall (2003: 15), as the act of “using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully to other people”. Consequently, these studies depart from the assumption that the news media plays an important role in constructing, representing and interpreting realities related to children, by making use of the redundancy of images of children and different terms and definitions associated with them in news media coverage.

As Tuchman (2002) notes, news media scholars have mostly considered these three traditions separately because of their different approaches and empirical foci. In fact, these traditions have, more often than not, defined themselves through competition or conflict. By reviewing one representative study from each tradition, Tuchman (2002) exemplified some of the

theoretical and empirical points of contact and argued for a reconsideration of the complementarity of the three traditions. According to her, “it will be important to take another meta-theoretical look at the traditions, asking where and how they may complement one another in further empirical studies” (p.90).

A serious attempt to frame the first two traditions as a single theoretical framework of news research was completed by Shoemaker and Vos (2009) in their influential book on Gatekeeping Theory (see also previous studies on gatekeeping analysis in Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shoemaker, 1991; Gieber, 1964; White, 1950). According to the authors “gatekeepers determine what becomes a person’s social reality, a particular view of the world” (p.3). Gatekeeper is an inclusive term for internal and external influences in news that lead to a mediated way of presenting reality and therefore to some events being absent, ignored or marginalized. Shoemaker and Reese (2014), recently presented a new edition of *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century* (for earlier versions see Shoemaker & Reese, 1991; 1996) in which, based on a similar concept as gatekeeping theory, they present a Hierarchical Model of Influences on which to account for the role of the news media in mediating reality. This model offers five distinguished levels of analysis starting with social systems, social institutions, the organizational level, routines and individuals. By carefully analyzing several factors at each level of analysis and reinforcing it with empirical verification, this framework provides a good basis to investigate why news takes its current form as it is presented to us, while providing a holistic account of the influences on news media. Furthermore, an important aspect of the hierarchical model of influences, as well as the gatekeeping theory, is that issues and events that are not covered, are absent from the worldviews of most audience members. Theories on the role of news in the social construction of reality have received criticism related to the assumption that the reality is already given and is *out there* (Harcup, 2004: 33; McQuail, 2000: 279). In response to these critiques, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) state that:

We now know that our mediated realities—from any medium, social or mass—are not real in the sense of mirroring some objective, externally discernible reality, but that they have a profound impact on individuals, social collectives, and the world (p.63).

In this thesis, several elements presented by Shoemaker and Reese (2014) will be employed to empirically account for the construction of the idea of childhood in Albanian television news media.

As a first step, the potential of the Albanian (television news) media to construct a social reality is explored (chapter 4) by focusing on the organizational level, the social institutional level and the communication routines level of analysis. By doing so, I establish a context where the question of why the news takes its current form in Albanian media will be answered.

Additionally, by following Tuchman's (2002) suggestion on the complementarity of the three approaches, a textual approach is employed to explore the many facets of the portrayal of children by television news outlets in Albania (chapter 5), media professionals' attitudes towards children, and issues affecting children as news subjects and topics (chapter 6). I analyze several factors from the social system (ideology and culture) while identifying the role that journalists and news media professionals play in defining the social realities of children as they are presented in news coverage.

Up to this point theoretical approaches that deal with the production of news and news content have mostly been considered as a way to investigate the general role of news in the social construction of reality, and realities related to children in particular. As Shoemaker and Reese (2014:38) state:

This hierarchy of influences is ultimately important in understanding the audience and effects, because they determine the available information from which audiences must choose.

In order to provide a thorough view on how issues related to children are produced, represented and consumed in the Albanian media context, a very important consideration in this theoretical framework will be dedicated to the audiences. As Jensen (1987: 22) states, "researchers that set out to study communication as a social process with ideological ramifications cannot afford to ignore those audiences that are the manifest link between the media and the wider social processes". In order to link how the social realities of children – which are constructed by the news media – are meaningful to social actors themselves (i.e. adults and children), reception theory is used as a conceptual approach. Following Jensen (2011) this dissertation will investigate how concretely the social realities of children, as constructed in the news media, are integrated into both everyday life and institutionalized practices. Therefore, in this dissertation the element of the media audience will be explored (chapter 7) to account for the role of television news in the social construction of children's realities, in the words of children and adults.

Children as an audience have been considered to be important actors in research covering the news media. Several reception studies have investigated children's views on the news media in general (Alon -Tirosh & Lemish, 2014; Ponte, 2008; Gunter, B., Furnham, A., & Griffiths, S, 2000; Lemish, 1998) and their own representation in particular (Carter et., al, 2009; Carter & Allan, 2005). Furthermore, a number of studies have investigated the effects of the news media on children (Meijer, 2007; Walma van der Molen & van der Voort, 2000; Gunter, 2000), especially for news items related to violence and fear (Blankemeyer, Walker & Svitak, 2009; Carter and Davies, 2005; Walma van der Molen, Valkenburg & Peeters, 2002; Cantor & Nathanson, 1996; Huesmann & Eron, 1986; Adoni & Cohen, 1980; Eron, 1963). This body of research departs from the assumption that children's interpretations of news media messages are crucial when accounting for the role of the news media in their lives. As Lemish (2006) states in her book on Children and Television:

In summarizing the role of television in the construction of social reality, we return once again to the conclusion that viewers, even the young ones, located as they are within social and ideological contexts, are selective in their viewing of content and active and creative in their interpretations of it (p.144).

In sum, by employing a conceptual framework that addresses the role of the news media in the social construction of childhood, this dissertation will investigate such roles in the context of Albania. By combining approaches on news production, news content and news reception, a thorough understanding of the ways that ideas about children are produced, shared, presented and consumed by the television news media is presented. Overall, this dissertation focuses on the interplay between media production, media text and media reception.

1.2. The advantage of television news (as the medium for research)?

Television news is considered a significant source for information about the world (Buckingham, 2010). According to McNair (2009; 1998), television news for technical, cultural and historical reasons is considered to be the most believable media in the hierarchy

of journalistic believability. This authority of television news towards other news media comes from the combination of several factors. According to Bignell (2000; 1997), one of the most important factors is the format of television news, which is a mixture of language and visual images seen as shaping and representing the factual and the real. Other factors are related to the authoritativeness that comes from the perceived impartiality of news broadcasting due to the rules of *balance* and *objectivity* in the regulations governing television broadcasting, which in most countries is still being developed among other media outlets, such as new media. The advantage of television news also derives from its immediacy, since television news can incorporate new reports even during the program broadcast (Bignell, 1997:111).

Nowadays, television news is the most influential media in Europe. A report from the European Commission (Kevin et.al, 2013) that assessed citizen's use of news among both EU members and prospective EU members, confirms the dominance of television news when compared to other news media in Europe. According to this report a major expansion of television news channels took place in Europe from the late 1990s into the 2000s. A similarly large explosion has also taken place in the past 10 years. Furthermore, the report finds that receiving news from a variety of reliable sources is fundamental to the process of information gathering, decision-making and the opinion forming of European citizens. Despite the economic crisis, 28 news channels have been launched since 2010. In addition, new channels have launched in Albania, Croatia, Portugal and Poland in 2012 and 2013. Even though there is an increase in private news channels in Europe, it should be noted that public channels represent about 14% of the entire universe of television channels in Europe (contained in MAVISE¹⁴), whereas public channels represent over 30% of the national and international news channels in Europe. Hence the role of public service television is heightened with regard to news broadcasting (Kevin, et al., 2013).

The digital television transition or digital switch that began around the globe (for Europe see European Commission Recommendations, 2009) has further strengthened the role of television in those countries that have already adapted to the new technological innovations. This new system that is proliferating around the world¹⁵, presents several advantages for media transmission in general, and news in particular. Digital television has the potential to

¹⁴ Database on TV and on-demand audiovisual services and companies in Europe

¹⁵ A worldwide view on the digital broadcasting systems can be found here: <http://en.dtvstatus.net/>

cover greater areas, improve the technical quality of its transmission and most important increase public access to its services. As a result, news services – as an integral component of television transmissions – have profited from these advantages.

Furthermore, the development of online media or the new technological devices, such as tablets or smartphones, have strengthened the position of television news in Europe as a main source of information. The largest global study to date on the consumption of news in the digital age, conducted by BBC World News (2013) in Australia, Singapore, India, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Poland, Germany, France and the United States, provided a particular focus on the consumption of news. According to the research results, “tablet devices are boosting audiences’ appetite for news and transforming the way they consume it”. The study found that 43% of tablet users claim to consume more TV news than they did five years ago, and most say that they use tablets alongside TV. The BBC survey also found that in breaking news situations, the primary source tends to be television (42%), and most people (66%) will then use the Internet sources to investigate stories further.

There is very limited data regarding the audiences for news channels specifically. However the report on news channels in Europe (Kevin et, al. 2013) highlights that alongside viewing of news channels and accessing of news online, a very significant part of the public and indeed the majority of the TV viewers still seek their news by viewing the main television news broadcast of the day. Audience shares for these news programs ranged from 15% (Turkey) to 67% (Bulgaria), which points to the high popularity of television news media.

Arguments on the dominance of television news compared to other media also hold true in the Albanian context¹⁶. A latest report (Nelaj, 2014) found that 84% of Albanians get most of their news from television, while 73% of the population place their highest level of trust in TV news when compared to other media. This ratio means that news media outlets, especially television, have great potential to construct or reinforce different social concepts, inclusive of children. Taking this context into consideration and on the basis of arguments on the role of television news in Europe – as the most popular and believable media – this dissertation focuses on television news as a medium for research.

¹⁶ An extensive description of the state of news media in Albania will be provided in chapter 4.

1.3. Childhood as a social construction

1.3.1. From passive ‘little adults’ to active participants

An overview on the history of childhood would allow us to understand how the concept has changed throughout time and which ideas about children have circulated around the globe. Within this topic, common or diverse research trends on children will be identified as a way to gain a deeper understanding of how children have been positioned in research agendas and in which time periods. Finally, the choice to account for childhood as a social construction in the context of news media is explained.

It is very difficult to determine a specific moment where the concept of childhood was used for the first time. In literature, the concept of childhood emerges with John Locke (1693) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1705), who were among the first to address the importance of education for children. In his book *Emile*, Rousseau argues against the concepts of freedom presented in Locke’s work *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Both authors view children as the future free adults, contributing in this manner to an emerging debate on children. This was the period of the industrial revolution in Great Britain and Western Europe, when children were thought of as little adults, engaged in work from an early age. The industrial revolution helped to diffuse the ideas of Rousseau on childhood which, when combined with other events of the time, ushered in a new way of thinking about children and childhood. Cunningham (1991) explains that initially it was the damage to children’s physique that attracted attention to the work of children in cotton factories, due to fears that they would not develop the bodily strength necessary for a successful adulthood. In March 1890, at the Berlin International Congress, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland all voted to establish the minimum age of factory work to 12 years old, with the UK, Spain and Italy abstaining (Cunningham, 1991: 176). This is believed to be the beginning of the “saving the children” era (*see* Pearson, 1983; Platt, 1977). For the first time childhood was effectively defined as a period in which those who were previously viewed as little adults needed protection by law. The same thing happened in other countries in Europe and the US and then increasingly, but very unevenly, across the globe: children were excluded from full-time paid employment but included in compulsory schooling

(Heywood, 2003; Cunningham & Viazzo, 1996; Lavalette 1994; Cunningham, 1991). As a result:

By the end of nineteenth century, conceptions of children as innocent, ignorant, dependent, vulnerable, incompetent, in need of protection and discipline were widespread. In general terms, by the start of the twentieth century these ideas have been diffused through the different social classes and grouping within the industrial societies. They supported and were in turn reinforced by the effort to construct the school and the family as the 'proper place' for children (Prout, 2002: 23).

Furthermore, Vannobergen (2003) identifies the role played by philanthropists and activists, in defining what childhood was about, by writing educational tractates on child-rearing practices. Moreover, Cunningham (2005) highlights the role that philanthropists played in opening and running homes for orphans and other neglected children, organizing schemes for emigration, setting up kindergartens and schools, founding societies for the prevention of the child cruelty, and the development of numerous programs for visiting the poor. All these initiatives reinforced the premise that children were not able to participate in the public sphere; instead it was the adults' duty to care for and protect them. The transition from valuing children for economic reasons and their ability to contribute to the family income, to valuing children for emotional reasons was "probably the most important [change] to have occurred in the history of childhood" (Cunningham, 2005: 177). According to Vannobergen (2003), this new way of looking at children caused a major shift in the ways they were represented and depicted in art and history of the time, and as a consequence children began to be considered as subjects for the advertising market.

Childhood studies then emerged alongside the modern idea of childhood. According to Prout (2008), its beginnings are often located in Darwin's work, who published two books based on observations of his son, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) and *Biographical Sketch of an Infant* (1877). Later, Piaget and Inhelder (1969) used the developmental psychology approach to consider childhood in terms of "ages and stages" as a linear progression towards entry into adulthood. This was a dominant theoretical and research paradigm in childhood studies. Children were understood as "becoming adults", which meant they were incomplete and incompetent social actors with respect to adults (James, 1998).

However, towards the end of the twentieth century there was growing academic criticism on how the psychological approach handled childhood (Prout, 2008). This was reinforced with the adoption of the Convention on Child Rights by the United Nations in 1989. Apart from making children a subject of rights, with rights to protection, provision and participation, the Convention enshrines the “best interest” of the child, recognizing children as a “human beings who have a ‘voice’ worth listening to” (Mascheroni & Pasquali, 2013).

At the same time in the academic field, an influential set of ideas appeared that could also be applied to childhood. This set of ideas came to be known as *social constructionism*. In its most general sense this term refers to what is almost axiomatic in the sociological tradition: reality is made in specific social circumstances, it varies across both history and culture, and is open to change, both intended and unintended (Prout, 2008). According to this new approach, rather than seeing childhood as a universal constant, it became possible to think of childhood as a variable and a changing entity, which radically challenged previous notions of childhood and children.

Prout and James ([1990] 1997:30) listed some features of the critical elements of this new paradigm. According to them “children must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives and the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live. They are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes”. Furthermore, conceptualizing childhood as a social construction meant that childhood was to be considered as “a variable of social analysis” in which “children’s social relationship are worthy of study in their own rights, independent of the perspective and concerns of the adults”. Finally, studying childhood was seen as engaging in and responding to the process of reconstructing childhood in society.

According to Prout (2005), this body of ideas was critical of two concepts of childhood studies of the previous period: socialization and *developmentalism*. First, socialization was criticized primarily for rendering children passive; it was argued that children should be seen as active participants in social life and as actors with the potential for agency. The second approach to be criticized was *developmentalism*, a dominant approach within the psychological discourses of childhood. It was argued that *developmentalism* tends to set up adulthood as the standard of rationality against which children are judged deficient; that it renders putative stages of growth as being natural and it assumes that childhood is universal while historical, social and cultural studies suggest that it is not.

Anyhow, Prout (2005) presents a critical account of the new paradigm on childhood as it is proposed in the social constructionist approach. In his book *The future of Childhood*, he points out that the new sociology of childhood was situated on some dualistic oppositions such as structure and agency, the individual and society, or being and becoming while many other authors focused on one level only when accounting for the social construction of childhood. According to Prout, this way of conducting research on childhood is not sustainable and he proposes that research move beyond the dualisms of nature and culture by examining how culture and nature can be seen as mutually constitutive. One way to achieve this would be to explore the ways in which childhood is conceived and articulated in particular societies, into culturally specific sets of ideas and philosophies, attitudes and practices that combine to define the *nature of childhood* (Prout & James, 1997).

On this account and by acknowledging the important role that news media coverage plays in constructing social reality – as argued in the previous section – this dissertation will explore the social construction of childhood in the context of news media. Therefore, how conceptions on children that are articulated, presented and consumed in news media contribute to the positioning of children in society and in constituting such positions will be investigated. This dissertation departs from the assumption that “ideas, concepts, knowledge, modes of speaking of children in news media codify social practices and in turn constitute them” (Prout & James, 1997). By this we do not mean to set a deterministic account on childhood as it is constructed in the news media. Instead, I follow Prout and James (1997: 25) who stated that “instead we must content ourselves with the analysis of how different discursive practices produce different childhoods, each and all of which are ‘real’ within their own regime of truth”. Moreover, as Prout (2005: 55) emphasizes:

The more the nuts and bolts of making a representation are made visible, the more it becomes apparent that what is produced is not a stable, fixed mirror image of the ‘reality’ that is being represented.

By conceptualizing childhood as a social construction, I look to explore how different discursive practices on children in the news media, produce different ideas on childhood and children (chapter 5). Eventually, news media professionals’ views on children are investigated (chapter 6) as a way of exploring those socially determined attitudes and beliefs that become apparent in their representations and naturalized through its redundant use in the news media. Finally, by acknowledging children as active participants in social life and as actors with the

potential for having agency of their own (Prout & James, 1997), discussions of children about the news media and their own representation in television news are explored (chapter 7) – as articulated by them – as a way to investigate how children make sense of the news media’s constructions and how the news media contributes to the ways children see themselves as part of society.

In this dissertation, the term child is used to refer to the age group 0–18 years, following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989).

1.3.2. Childhood in Albania

A short overview on the history of childhood in Albania will be provided in order to better understand how children’s experiences were affected by the influential ideas and concepts on children present in other parts of the worlds. Furthermore, how specific political developments in Albania, especially during the communist period, 1944-1990, have played a tremendous role in changing the ways children are positioned in society, will be highlighted. So far, no attempts have been made to write a history of childhood in Albania. Therefore, this contribution – even though conceptualized within the scope of this dissertation – provides a good basis for researchers in the future to investigate how children have been considered as members of society during different time periods in Albania.

In the pre-communist period, there was a total lack of attention towards children and children’s issues in Albania. This is reflected in the few existing documents where children are mentioned as a separate category. The traditional laws during medieval times, known as Kanun¹⁷, stated that a child’s position in society was peripheral. Children are only mentioned a few times throughout Kanun’s 1,262 articles¹⁸, and mostly in relation to practices of birth and death. Children and women were excluded from the rights and obligations of Kanun, meaning they were not allowed to participate in the decision-making process of the community (political and public life), and were not engaged in any form of work outside the

¹⁷ Kanun was primarily oral and only in the 20th century was it published in writing. Lekë Dukagjini first codified it in the 15th century. The code was divided into the following 12 books (or sections): Church, Family, Marriage, House, Livestock and Property, Work, Transfer of Property, Spoken Word, Honor, Damages, Law Regarding Crimes, Judicial Law, Exemptions and Exceptions.

¹⁸ The code was written down only in the 19th century and partially published in 1913. The full version appeared only in 1933.

home. From the age of 13, boys were usually considered old enough to follow their fathers to jobs outside of the home. The 'promising' of daughters from birth to their future husbands was a known practice. Usually the family of the daughter received financial compensation. The families decided the age when their daughters were given away, and it depended on whether there were enough women to do the work of the house (Durham, 1909). Overall, a bigger preference for boys as successors of the family's heritage can be noted during this period of time.

Up to the 19th century children faced serious health-related problems, which contributed to high child mortality rates. As demonstrated by Naumovic and Stojanovic (2001) in their description of childhood in South Eastern European (SEE) countries, children's health issues were widespread across the region. The poor conditions of families, insufficient parental care (as mothers had to start working shortly after giving birth) and a lack of knowledge about many diseases are listed as the main factors contributing to high child mortality rates during the period.

During the Communist period, in comparison to the total lack of attention to children received in the previous period, a radical new approach was introduced. After taking power in late 1944, the communist regime prioritized the opening of schools and organized the entire education system to teach the communist ideology. The regime's objectives for the new school system were to wipe out illiteracy in the country as soon as possible, to transmit the ideas and principles of communism to Albanian children (as interpreted by the party) and finally, to educate children of all social classes on the basis of these principles. The Albanian Constitution of 1946 made it clear that the regime intended to bring all children under the control of the state (Zickel & Iwaskiw, 1994). According to the authors, official statistics indicated that the regime made considerable progress in education, with illiteracy being virtually eliminated by the late 1980s. From a total enrollment of fewer than 60,000 students at all levels in 1939, the number of children in school had grown to more than 750,000 by 1987, with roughly 47% of all students being female. The regime used the education system for political and propaganda purposes. On May 5th, 1945, Enver Hoxha¹⁹ noted in one of his speeches:

¹⁹ The communist leader of Albania from 1944 until his death in 1985. During his rule Albania faced one of the harshest regimes in Europe.

The present democratic government will be interested in youth education, more than a parent who is concerned about the education of his children ... This education will be for all and especially for the children of the long-suffering and hardworking people, so that they can use the education and science knowledge's they receive in serving the nation (Kola, 2014:424).

The communist system was organized in such a way as to transmit this ideology in all of its stages. All children between the ages of three and six years old were entitled to a free place in the state funded kindergarten where children could be introduced to communist propaganda at a very young age. According to Naumovic and Stojanovic (2001), communist leaders in all Southeast European countries were represented as “spiritual fathers”, “teachers” and “protectors” of all children. Schoolchildren’s compulsory attendance at public events was also a way to involve children and young people in politics.

All children aged 7-15 were called *pioneers* and they engaged in various (some overtly political) sports and cultural activities, work campaigns, and competitions, which mainly functioned as a form of ideological and political education (in schools, summer camps, etc.). In this way the regime constructed *the child of the regime*, which was educated based on the communist principles and devoted to the development of patriotic sentiments, in order to better serve the party and the country. Therefore the boundaries between childhood and adulthood were blurred. This idea of the *child of the regime* was also supported by the school curriculum, as well as popular literature and the media of the time, whose aim was to influence and shape children’s national and ethnic identities on the basis of the communist ideology (Qafleshi, 2013).

As a consequence of the emphasis that the regime put on children as the country’s future, several techniques were used to increase their number. In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, Albania had the highest fertility rate in Europe, with an average of more than six live births per woman (Falkingham & Gjonca, 2001). The authors describe the scheme that the government adopted from the Soviet practice to encourage mothers to have more children. On the first birthday of the eighth surviving child, the mother was awarded the accolade of ‘Heroic Mother’, while third class, second class, and first class awards of ‘Mother’s glory’ were bestowed respectively on women who gave birth to between four and seven children. The government continued this practice until the end of the 1980s.

The transition from a dictatorial regime to a democratic one in Albania was a process which – while it offered the population many opportunities – was traumatic due to the loss of recognition and a sense of identity (De Lucia, 2008). The long transition that has characterized the country's developments since the break of communism further challenges attempts to describe the impact of these processes on children and childhood development. Moreover, the scarcity of research on this topic makes it difficult for someone to extend this research despite the fact that the number of children and youngsters in Albania who are 0-19 years-old, constitutes 30% of the entire population (847,312 children in a total population of 2,800,138)²⁰. The average age is 31.6 years, ranking Albania as one of the youngest countries in Europe.

Nevertheless, various studies on children's status demonstrates a continuity of the concepts from the pre-communist and communist period. The lack of attention on children, leading to a high prevalence of violence against children at home or in school is identified in a number of studies (Unicef, 2014; Save the Children, 2012; Tamo & Karaj, 2006). These studies describe the culture of violence against children as being largely accepted in Albanian families, schools, and society. Expressions like: "Children fight from time to time, but that is normal"; "Those who smack a child do it for the best of the child" (see, Tamo & Karaj, 2006), could be used among parents who see violence as a legitimate disciplinary tool. However, research on the issue is sporadic and mostly conducted by children's rights organizations.

Furthermore, a disturbing phenomenon that took place during the transition from Communism in Albania was the use of children for political parties or individual politicians. According to Fejzulla (2013), during electoral campaigns, children stand in the first row and can be found on podiums applauding for leaders, and at rallies in their schools carefully listening to politicians. Images like this are widespread in the media during election periods. According to the author, it is hard for these images to not be reminiscent of the dictatorial regime Albania has left behind, where children were used for political purposes and introduced to certain ideologies from an early age.

Additionally, a report on sex selective abortion in Albania (UNFPA & World Vision, 2012) confirmed that son preference is a distinctive feature of the Albanian population. Sons in Albania are perceived to be a source of protection and support, a need reinforced by the

²⁰ Census 2011, <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/census/census-2011/census-data.aspx>.

uncertainties in the economic and social environment since the exit from communism in the early 1990s. In this perspective, children are still seen as objects rather than subjects, as property of their own families and successors to their familial values. These conceptions embed traces of the pre-communist mentality where boys were valued more than girls, for the same reasons.

While these problems persist, Albania has made remarkable progress regarding the legal framework and instruments needed to safeguard children's rights. The law (nr. 10347), "For the protection of the rights of the child" was approved in November 2010. This was the biggest achievement in the field since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1992. The passing of the law was immediately followed by the founding of the National Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Children, an institution established as a mechanism for capacity building, monitoring and coordination of all actions regarding children's rights at the national and local level. This was followed by the establishment of child protection units in all communes and municipalities. It is still too early to assess the effectiveness of such initiatives, as the mechanisms provided by the law are still being established. However, a research assessment conducted by World Vision (2012) found that one of the most significant achievements of the Child Protection Units was the creation of a space to talk about children and child protection, which has brought child protection issues to the forefront in a way that had not previously existed.

The diffusion of information technology in Albania found an adaptive audience, as consumers brought a new perspective on children who were now seen as competent subjects in accessing and handling technology. Such views on children were reinforced by several governmental programs and political discussions aimed at diffusing and implementing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in schools²¹. In a survey on Children and Media, with children aged 13-17 in Tirana, the Albanian Media Institute (2011) found that the internet is a highly used media tool among this age group. 407 children out of 500 surveyed use the internet at least once a day. As a matter of fact, most of children access the internet several times a day. Meanwhile, only six children surveyed said they did not use the internet at all. The situation is not so different in other parts of the country. A study conducted by World Vision (2013) in six regions in Albania found that children aged 13-17 use mobile phones

²¹ The governmental program 'Albania in the Internet Age' began to be implemented in December 2006. This project aimed at providing computers for each school in the country and to improve the quality of education and participation. There are no reports on the effectiveness of the initiative.

(65%), PCs (59%) or laptops (43%) to communicate and participate in social networks, or access and retrieve online information, every day.

As this section showed, notions about children in Albania are strongly influenced by the political context of the country, which has experienced dramatic changes in previous decades (see Tarifa, 1995). Children moved from being ignored in pre-communist times to *being cared for and protected* for ideological purposes during the communist period. In the present democratic transition of Albania, it is difficult to determine which concepts about children are predominant. It becomes even more difficult to generalize when taking into consideration the rapid development of media outlets and their influence on society. Therefore, this dissertation considers the role that media, and specifically television news, is playing in the construction of dominant concepts about children and the issues affecting them in Albania.

1.4. Mediated childhoods

The previous sections demonstrated that the concept of childhood, including in Albania, is complex and a result of the combination of various influences. It derives from the perspective that social reality is not fixed, constant or unitary, rather it is seen as being constantly created through the activities of social actors (James & Prout, 1990). This aspect has created a particular interest in the perspectives of low status groups in social organizations and settings. One such low-status group is of course, children (James & Prout, 1990: 15). This section examines the role that media can play in this process of change. First, the focus will be on the attempts to study the changing nature of childhood by focusing on different mediums, such as literature or visual arts. Afterwards, the role that television plays in this respect will be clarified. This is crucially important when taking into consideration the fact that the media provides powerful *symbolic resources* with which people must actively make sense of in their social worlds, and also construct and define those worlds in particular – and inevitably partial-ways (Buckingham & De Block, 2007: 196). As a matter of fact, only recently have scholars begun to investigate the role of media in the social construction of childhood.

Recently, Fass (ed. 2013) explored the main themes surrounding the history of childhood from antiquity to present day. According to her, “our lenses of looking at children and childhood have been constructed quite literally, out of images in literature of children and the

visual arts” (Fass, 2013: 6). She explored how childhood has developed into a distinct context among specific groups by using the growing literature on modern childhood in various locales, and in particular historical moments. The aim was “to help the reader to understand how our childhood has become the particular stage of life in which we have invested so much hope and which may today worry us as [being] increasingly unsustainable. It shows which groups have benefited, which have been ignored and how as a society we have come to define ourselves so passionately according to the manner in which we value our children” (p.31).

This collection – in addition to exploring different constructions of childhood – emphasizes the role that different mediums play in the ways childhood was constructed. Images of children in paintings, photographs or literature varied from ‘adorable creatures or angels’ to ‘irredeemable devils’. In return, these representations were sometimes seen as “a cultural ideal to which children conformed or were made to conform, and other times as a threat to domestic or familial tranquility” (p.400). All these dominant representations of children throughout history have impacted experiences of children in families, schools and communities. Furthermore, these representations have impinged upon rules, regulations and regimes that control the education of children and the ways they are being raised. In the end, the history of childhood shows that our knowledge and understanding of this period of life is rapidly changing and evolving. The role that different mediums – such as visual culture (paintings, photography etc.) and more modern media (such as print, broadcast media or online media) – play in this respect is of crucial importance. From this perspective, mass media and popular culture constitutes a crucial link between societal institutions (and the superstructure in general) and individual consciousness (Berger, 2005:49). Thus, although we may not be aware of the fact, media images have implicit social and ideological dimensions; as highlighted at the beginning of this chapter when talking about textual approach (see 1.1). The same applies to children and childhood. Examining media’s depictions of children provides an understanding of the ideological dimensions of these depictions. As Holland (2004) pointed out, pictorial representations of childhood are widely used to illustrate the underlying ideologies of Western society towards children. Nevertheless, the public imagery of childhood has tended to take itself for granted. Only in recent years has it reflected on or commented on its own construction (Holland, 2004: 126).

The primary focus in this dissertation will be the medium of television, more specifically Albanian television news, on basis of the arguments discussed previously on the significant

role of this medium in constructing social realities in general, and those related to children in particular (see chapter 1.1 and 1.2). As Hall (1982: 64) points out, “news has been recognized as an important institution to define social reality through its active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping; not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labor of making things mean”. I depart from the assumption that media has the means to represent social actors, and by doing so they contribute to the construction and maintenance of several concepts on them, as social constructionism maintains. As Buckingham (1993:15) puts it, “talk about television is thus a forum within which social behavior is patrolled, identities are formed and social inclusions and exclusions are defined”.

At first glance, it might sound irrational to rely on media to tell us what childhood is about. We have all passed through what could be called *a childhood period*, thus we all have first - hand experience on what it means to be a child. Nevertheless, as Shoemaker and Reese (2014: 63) account “our social reality is the sum of the physical forces in our environment, what we personally experience, plus what we understand about other people. Based on such complexity, it is no surprise that no two people share the same social reality.” Furthermore, as the new paradigm of childhood suggests, childhood is not a universal concept but rather a changing concept that is constantly being constructed and reconstructed through several processes. Media plays a crucial role in this respect. It provides us with resources for thinking in specific ways about children.

Rather than pointing out how television news provides limited representations of children, this dissertation provides a holistic understanding on how the media’s texts, the attitudes of journalists, media practices and the dominant ideologies on children in Albania influence the constructions of specific but essential ideas of the place that children occupy in society. Furthermore, this dissertation will be looking at how the representations of children in the news media play a role in the ways children see themselves as being positioned in society and how the news media, if at all, encourages children to engage with society in meaningful ways.

In the next chapter, an overview of studies that have explored and investigated the representation of children in news media will be presented. When possible studies that focus on television news will be emphasized. This overview will serve to provide a better understanding of the role news plays in the social construction of childhood, as well as

identify research trends concerning children and the news media that will inform the empirical chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter 2

Studies on Children and the News

2.1. Introduction

In the theoretical portion of this dissertation I stressed that the topic of children and the news media has been researched through several different approaches (see 1.1). In various time periods some themes within these approaches have been more dominant than others. In this chapter I will more closely explore the dominant research themes concerning children and the news media. Furthermore, I will present a short overview on how research of children and the news media has been influenced by developments on media in general and those on children's rights in particular. I group the studies based on the theoretical frameworks they rely on.

Three main groups of studies related to children and the news media are identified: studies researching the portrayal of children in the news; studies on news media professional's views on children; and studies on children as a news audience. This structure can also be recognized in the empirical chapters of this dissertation (see chapters 5,6,7). The combination of all dominant themes in research on children and the news media and the empirical investigation of these themes in the context of Albania is one of the main contributions that this research project brings to the field of news and children. By combining approaches on news production, news content and news reception, this dissertation accounts for a thorough understanding of the ways that ideas on children are produced, shared, presented and consumed. Until now, studies on children and news (as I will illustrate extensively below) have focused on the aforementioned themes separately.

Eventually, I discuss the main results and conclusions of these studies as a point of departure for the empirical enquiry of this dissertation. By introducing studies on children and the media, based on their theoretical approaches and providing an overview of their main results and/or arguments, I am in a better position to stretch the links between the general theoretical approaches on news media that were discussed in the first section of the dissertation and the approaches that I have chosen to employ for the empirical portion of this research, which will

be extensively discussed in chapters four to seven. However, before beginning with this comprehensive overview, an outline of the different directions that research on children and media has focused on in different time periods will be presented. This way, insights on the evolution of children's research and the media throughout time will be offered.

Before the 1990s, media and communication scholars had an increased interest in the media's effects on children, mostly focusing on the harmful effects of television content. These studies considered news items related to violence or war and children's frightening reactions to such *harmful content* (see Eron, 1963; Huesmann & Eron, 1986; Adoni & Cohen, 1980). This focus was influenced by the growing concern over television's effects in general, which was a major field of research concerning the media during that time period, due to the increasing popularity of television. This topic of research continued to be dominant in children's and media research until the beginning of the 90s (see Cantor & Nathanson, 1993) and was brought to the attention of media researchers again after the 2000s, incited by several events such as the 9/11 attacks in the US, the Israeli-Palestine conflict or the subsequent Afghanistan and Iraq wars (see Lemish & Goetz, 2007). As a consequence of the growing concern over the effects of violent television content on children, a large number of studies focused on the ethical coverage of children in the news as a way to mitigate such harmful effects by accounting for an accurate representation of children with a focus on their protection and rights (see Fullertone, 2004; Goddard & Saunders, 2000; Moeller, 1999). An extensive discussion on these studies will be presented in the subsequent section (see 2.1.2).

After the 1990s, research on children and the news media mostly focused on children's portrayal in newspapers and television news (see Ponte, 2007, 2009; Holland, 2004; Goonasekera, 2001; Children Now, 1994, 1999). This time period coincides with the signing of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, in which all countries who signed the Convention (or would sign it in the coming years) were encouraged to recognize "the important function performed by the mass media and ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health" (Article 17). It was also required that state parties "encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child..." (Article 17). Because of these developments, "since the 1990s, child participation in the media, protection of the child against harmful influences through the media, and respect

for the integrity of the child in media reporting have been discussed in forums that include media representatives” (Ponte, Bauwens & Mascheroni, 2009:3). In the same period, the new sociology of childhood emerged, in which childhood was defined as a social construction and children were to be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives and the lives of those around them (Prout & James, 1991). Starting from such perspectives, many scholars accounted for the portrayal of children in news as a way of exploring how constructions of children in the news could provide insights on the hegemonic beliefs on children and their positioning in society.

Only recently have scholars considered children as an audience for news and have explored their comprehension and attitudes towards the news media (see Alon –Tirosh & Lemish, 2014; Carter, et al., 2009; Seiter, 2007). This is related to the increasing interest of governments in many countries to include digital skills as an important topic in school curricula and the continuous effort of scholars to stress the importance of media literacy, and more specifically, news literacy as a prerequisite for children’s access and understanding of information (see Moeller, 2009). Research on children as a news audience has emphasized the concepts of children’s agency and citizenship (see Davies, 2003; Buckingham, 2000). By applying these concepts to their studies, researchers have considered children as social agents able to form and express their opinions on the news media in general, and their own representation in particular.

In the subsequent section, I present an overview of studies that have explored and investigated children and the news media, which are grouped by their theoretical approach. Even though the studies discussed here are a substantial yet non-exhaustive selection, they can be argued to fairly represent the kind of research conducted on children and the news. When possible, a broad geographical range is covered with studies conducted throughout different continents, such as Europe, North and South America, Africa and Asia. A broad international context allows for a comparison between countries with different experiences and histories of child rights and for exploring the role of media in such contexts.

2.1.1 News media's portrayal of children

The literature review on children and news shows that most research within this field focuses on the portrayal of children. These studies interchangeably use the concepts of representation and portrayal to refer to what Hall (2003: 15) has articulated as “the act of using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully to other people”. In this dissertation, the word portrayal is used when referring to the concrete practices of the news media as they are related to children, such as the act of presenting images of children or referring to children in news narratives. On the other hand, the term representation will be used as a more inclusive term to account for ideas that certain ways of portraying children in the news might imply. The studies that will be reviewed in this section are diverse in length, geography and methodology and their selection has been made based on their specific focus on the portrayal of children in the news. One of them is a longitudinal study (Ponte, 2007), comprising a long term monitoring (1997-2000) of Portuguese newspapers. According to the study's author, “images of children in the media reveal a deep-rooted ambivalence about the nature of childhood and by implication, of children themselves” (p. 736). Other studies account for cross-country differences within one continent²², or for an inter-continental exploration of the portrayal of children in the media²³ (Rikhotso et al., 2014; Andi, 2009; Ponte, Bauwens & Mascheroni, 2009; Aqtashi, Seif & Seif, 2004; Goonasekera, 2001). What all these studies have in common is that they depart from the same approach, namely a textual approach that focuses on texts and images concerning children's news items. By employing this approach, studies on children and the news media try to explore the hegemonic representations of children in the news and how the news media affects our views of children and their positioning in society (Ponte, 2014; Carter, 2014; Rikhotso et al., 2014; ANDI, 2009; Ponte, 2007). Answers to these questions are not easy, as the concept of childhood is handled differently in different cultures and is subjected to continuous change (Prout & James, 1997). Furthermore, as Livingstone (2013) notes, this task becomes even more difficult in the continuously changing and fast-developing information and communication technology environment that is re-shaping children's lives across the globe.

²² Africa -Rikhotso et., et al, 2014; Europe- Ponte, Bauwens & Mascheroni, 2009; South America- Andi, 2009; Asia -Goonasekera, 2001.

²³ Aqtashi et. al, 2004- USA, UK, Israel and Qatar.

Studies on the portrayal of children in the news show that there are very few stories about them (Fullertone, 2004). Children are often absent from news coverage, despite the fact that in most countries they constitute one of the major segments of the population. In 2013, the Media Monitoring Project Africa (Rikhotso et al., 2014) investigated the representation of children and children's rights in the South African and Zambian news media. The monitoring was conducted over a period of five months in 2013, and 78,546 news items broadcast by 28 different news media outlets, including print, radio and television, were analyzed. Results from the overall monitoring confirmed that children are under-represented in the news, accounting for only 10% of all news items in South Africa and only 5% in Zambia, even though children constitute 35% of the total population. Similarly, Children Now (1999)²⁴, an advocacy organization in the United States, concluded after studying the national news media's coverage of children that their coverage was meager. Along the same lines, ANDI (2009)²⁵, the News Agency for Children's Rights, carried out an extensive news monitoring survey for the time period 2005-2007 in 12 countries in Latin America. The monitoring process was focused on the most prominent newspapers in Latin America. The survey results indicated an insufficient commitment on the part of news organizations to report on children and the issues affecting them. Particular emphasis was put on Education, Violence and Health at the expense of issues such as child labor, migration and displacement, homelessness or special needs, all equally important to children and yet cited in a mere 3% of coverage. Additionally, long-term monitoring (1970–2000) of Portuguese newspapers (Ponte, 2007) concluded that the exclusion of children from headlines was a common trend in all newspapers. Moreover, research on the representation of Palestinian children and the Intifada across six news outlets in the US, the UK, Israel and Qatar (Aqtashi, Seif & Seif, 2004) found that children and young people tend to be either absent from world events or used in news for signification purposes in discourses of violence and conflict, which are tightly controlled by adults. Research carried out in Asia (Goonasekera, 2001) on the presence and portrayal of children in 13 Asian countries, highlighted the absence of children in news coverage when compared to other topics.

When children are part of news items, they tend to be given limited roles. Carter (2014) notes that children's images are frequently used to symbolize the brutality of war, famine and

²⁴ This study was a replication of a major study on the national news media's coverage of children, first conducted in 1994.

²⁵ ANDI is the Portuguese acronym standing for: Agência de Notícias dos Direitos da Infância (ANDI).

genocide in adult news, arouse adults' sympathy and humanize events. In the words of Moeller (1999:107), "children make ideal victims. Children tend to be framed within discourses of violence and conflict and thus in discursive terms do not exist outside these frames (Aqtashi et al., 2004). Likewise, Goonasekera (2001) found that children are mostly pictured as victims and sufferers in news stories that carry sensational or tragic elements. This trend was also noted in a study that looked at the discourses within news on children and their online experiences, by comparing 13 European quality newspapers (Ponte, Bauwens & Mascheroni, 2009). Results from this study showed that in general, children were mostly depicted in passive terms. Especially in news items dealing with sexual risks, children and young people were almost exclusively represented as being victims, mainly as being exposed to or exploited by pornographic content, which accounted for 80% of all news dealing with sexual risks. According to the authors, "although quality papers are deemed to be less sensationalist and more composed when discussing matters with a high personal relevance for the public the findings show that the newsworthiness of stories about children and the internet is framed in terms of bad news" (p.16). Furthermore, the study found that the voices that were heard (in news items on children and internet) showed that children were spoken about and sometimes spoken for by different social institutions, while their own voices were usually silenced. The absence of children's voices is one of the findings that appears continuously in research on children and the news. They are rarely given a voice of their own, and their views do not really matter (Ponte, 2013; Carter et al., 2009). As a result, little is known regarding the ways in which children make sense of the events happening around them.

Assigning limited roles to children in the news, while leaving them voiceless, imposes certain constructs on children as being naive, dependent and in need of protection. In turn, this presents implications for the ways social policies on children are designed. Altheide (2002) assessed the content of three main newspapers (the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times* and the *Arizona Republic*) and ABC news reports for the time period 1987–1996. He argued that the redundancy of the associated use of the words children, school and fear in news reports may cause their meanings to overlap, and in turn, they may be accepted and used by people in various social situations. The discourse of fear as related to children and their protection occurring in the news media can contribute to stances and reactive social policies that promote state control and surveillance of children.

A concerning issue related to the representation of children in the news is the tendency of government representatives, or politicians in general to include children in their discourses as a way of increasing public empathy. ANDI (2009) found that during the election period, coverage of children's issues surpassed that of the general coverage of children in the news. Morrow and Mayall (2009: 219) stated that government representatives have a growing tendency to "value children in terms of future human capital [becoming] over the present [being]". The same conclusion was reached by Ponte (2007) in her longitudinal research (30 years) in which she found that the idea of children as the country's future are often repeated. According to Carter et al. (2009) balanced debate can be difficult to achieve because of sensational events and the emotive way in which notions of childhood are discussed in the media. Considering children as 'the future' has an implication on their present situation. It permits politicians to shift the attention from actual problems and to avoid addressing fundamental issues that children are facing.

2.1.2. Media professionals' views on children

Limited research has examined media professionals' views on children. These studies focus on journalistic routines based on the premise that the practices of communication workers play a significant role in accomplishing the social construction of reality (see 1.1). Within this approach, research on children and the news has explored journalists' beliefs and attitudes towards children. They assume that journalists play a significant role in the ways different issues related to children are presented to the public. Furthermore, the quality of children's coverage in media is taken as an indicator of the socially determined beliefs on children as social actors that are also shared among media professionals that want to see their work disseminated.

Most research on journalists and children is concentrated around the general ethical obligations of journalists while reporting on children (Mackay, 2008; Fullertone, 2004; Goddard & Saunders, 2000; Moeller, 1999). This is related to the fact that children are mostly considered to be newsworthy in stories triggered by a tragic element (Carter, 2014; Holland, 2006; Davies, 2003; Goonasekera, 2001; Moeller, 1999). Within this dominant frame of the vulnerable victim, they are included in discourses of (distant) suffering (Joye, 2009;

Chouliaraki, 2008, 2006; Moeller, 2002), as “the image of an endangered child is the perfect ‘grabber’” (Moeller, 2002:39). According to Ponte (2007) handling children when they are the subjects and sources of news stories is one of the newer and thornier subjects in journalism ethics. This has also been the case for the scant number of research studies conducted in Albania that have mostly dealt with the ‘misuse’ of children in print media (see 2.2). However, a few studies, which will be extensively discussed below, have specifically examined journalists’ decision-making processes for considering children as news subjects or news sources. This body of research is mainly carried out in North America while in Europe, research is framed in the context of children and the media in general and does not specifically focus on the role of journalists (see Carter, 2014; Buckingham, 2011; Livingstone, 2009; Ponte, 2007). The same can be concluded for research on children and the news media conducted in Africa (Rikhotso et al., 2014) and Asia (Goonasekera, 2001).

Few studies were found when reviewing the empirical research on journalists’ decision-making processes for including children in the news. Coleman (2011), for instance, used a controlled experiment to examine the decision-making process of 99 professional journalists in the United States, and investigated if they held different attitudes, made different decisions, and used different levels of moral judgment for stories that involved children compared to stories that involved adults. Her study uses Kohlberg’s theory of moral development (1981, 1984) as it focuses specifically on moral reasoning in the professions, making it a good fit for the study of journalists. The study is set in the context of use of photographs. Coleman found that although journalists believed they were protecting children from harm, they did not carry through with those beliefs, i.e. they did not display significantly higher levels of moral judgment for children than adults, nor did they withhold children’s photographs more often than those of adults. Additionally, Fullerton (2004) drew on several Canadian cases and used in-depth interviews with journalists to explore if *Journalists are Guilty of Exploiting Children*. She departed from the perspective that journalists play a significant role in shaping children as story subjects and that their choices influence the ways these subjects (children) construct themselves in the process of growing up. She argued that news organizations in general and journalists specifically must borrow research protocols set out by the social sciences and adapt them to their interview situations, in order to better ensure that children’s stories are told in a responsible and ethical manner. Fullerton concluded that even though

journalists confessed that children's voices should be heard in the news, there were no real guidelines or protocols in place to ensure this.

Likewise, Mackay (2008) and Slopen et al. (2007) focused on newspaper coverage of children, with particular emphasis on the privacy, accuracy and elements of responsible journalism²⁶. As such, both studies depart from an ethical perspective to study the implications of quoting children in the news. Mackay (2008) argued in his findings that reporters compromised the privacy of children by merely naming them in the media. On the other hand, the study on newspaper coverage of mental illness (Slopen et al., 2007) found that articles related to children were more likely to incorporate elements of responsible journalism, while articles related to adults were significantly more likely to use stigmatizing terminology. Finally, Stone (1999) and Tompkins (1999) provided prescriptive arguments for journalists on how to deal with children as interviewees.

All the aforementioned studies depart from the assumption that journalists play a significant role in the ways different issues related to children are presented to the public. As we can see from the cases presented above, it is difficult to reach a sole conclusion on how news media professionals view children as news subjects or topics. Differences emerge from the sample that have been taken in consideration. When talking about all children in general, (Coleman, 2010) journalists apply different judgments than when taking into account that children belong to a special group, such as children who suffer from mental illnesses; as in the case study presented by Slopen et al. (2007). Furthermore, differences also emerge from the focus on two different mediums, either television or print media. This is the case for Mackay (2008), whose research focused on the privacy of children in newspapers. If children quoted in television news are considered reliable sources because of the visual characteristics that this medium displays, “newspaper journalists may feel more pressure to assure readers that the children in their stories are real, not fakes or composites, by naming them and showing their pictures” (Coleman, 2010, p. 267).

Despite the contradictory findings, these studies highlight the important role that journalists’ decision-making processes play in the ways children are included in news items or quoted as news sources. As such they provide valuable ground in confirming the choices for conducting in-person interviews with media professionals as a way to explore their views on children and

²⁶ The term ‘responsible journalism’ is used to indicate the presence of perspectives from experts, statistics related to the topic, referrals to additional sources and avoidance of slang terminology.

to provide contextual information on the ways the news media in Albania portrays children (chapter 6).

2.1.3. Children as an audience for news

Recently, research on children and the media has focused on children as a news audience. As stated earlier in the introduction of this chapter, this comes as a result of the growing efforts of many scholars in different countries to stress the importance of (news) media literacy (see Hobbs, 2010; Frau-Meigs & Torrent, 2009; Livingstone, 2009; Buckingham, 2007; Snyder, 2007) in face of the growing interest of children in new media and technology, which is currently an indisputable fact (Livingstone, 2013). As Moeller stressed, people first need to be news literate and understand the role of news and information in civic life as a prerequisite of being digitally literate and understanding how they can use the new digital tools to engage with the news and information ecosystem and to become part of it (Moeller, 2009). Therefore the first important step in researching children and the news media would be to explore children's exposure, views and comprehension towards the news media.

Studies that focus on children as a news audience depart from the assumption that children's interpretations of news media messages are crucial to consider when accounting for the role of the news media in their lives (see 1.1). These studies employ a cultural studies perspective in which children are not viewed as *deficient* in comparison to adults, but focuses its attention on how their unique characteristics mediate the effects (Lemish, 2006:71):

The active viewer cultural studies approach assumes that the meanings (rather than effects) of television for children are a result of complicated processes of negotiation that develop over a multitude of viewing encounters, over an extended period of time, and in given social circumstances.

Existing research on children as a news audience has mainly focused on three areas: children's attitudes towards the news media (exposure, recall and comprehension of news items); children's emotional reactions to news coverage; and the role of the news in political socialization and the civic engagement of children (see Alon-Tirosh & Lemish, 2014).

Research conducted on the attitudes of children towards the news media, challenges the existing perceptions that children are not interested in adult news and that they find it ‘boring’. A study with children (aged 8-15) and youth (aged 16-18) in Israel (Alon-Tirosh & Lemish, 2014) found that children and youth expressed a desire to be informed on core national issues but asked for a positive framing that removed the scary and gory elements. Moreover, previous research carried out with kindergarten children in the US and Israel (Lemish, 1998) found that the participants were interested in the news and this interest was closely related, either to the sociopolitical context of the country (the case of Israeli children), or to parental mediation (the case of children in the US). Additionally, Carter, et al., (2009) found that the majority of children aged 8-15 surveyed in the UK considered the news to be interesting (96.8%), and more than half of the sample – 112 children – mentioned TV as their “favorite place for news”. Furthermore, Ponte (2008), having interviewed 500 children of different ages, concluded that children showed great enthusiasm on following both adult and children’s news.

The second body of research on children as a news audience focuses on children’s ability to comprehend news and their emotional reactions towards news content. Research on this area dates back to the 60s and 70s due to the prevailing discourses during that period on television’s negative influences on children (Eron, 1963; Huesmann & Eron, 1986). Adoni and Cohen (1980) documented that children show fear or anxiety when exposed to news items related to the coverage of war, which was a prevailing topic of research in the following years (Cantor & Nathanson, 1993; Walma van der Molen et al., 2002; Smith & Wilson, 2002; Blankenmeyer, Walker & Svitak, 2004; Lemish & Gotz, 2007). Nevertheless, later studies revealed that children are able to engage in a more critical way with the news media if news is constructed with children as an audience in mind i.e., children express awareness that the program is a text constructed by professionals who have their own attitudes and perceptions and they have additional thoughts derived independently from the program itself (Carter, 2014; Alon –Tirosh & Lemish, 2014; Lemish, 2006).

The ways in which children engage with the news media brings us to the third group of research: the role of the news media in introducing children to civic engagement. According to Patterson (2007:5), “there is evidence that news habits developed early in life effect later use that appeal[s] to civic virtue”. Earlier studies have suggested that children who watched the news more frequently, were more knowledgeable about the political world, demonstrated

greater curiosity towards the news, and were more motivated to actively pursue additional information (Atkin & Gantz, 1987). Recent studies have documented that viewing both traditional forms of news and nontraditional sources of political information (late-night comedy shows) increases children's internal political efficacy, which in turn positively predicts their civic participation (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009). Additionally, authors have sought to research the news media's perception of children's place in the world and how it shapes their understanding of citizenship (Livingstone, 2002; Buckingham, 2000). If the news media became more accessible to children, their participation in the public sphere would be enhanced. The aforementioned studies, in general, have considered children aged 15-18, due to the positioning of this specific age group on the boundaries of becoming 'citizens' (see Meijer, 2007).

2.2. Children and news media in Albania

Little attention has been paid to researching children and the news media in Albania. In line with international research, the focus has mainly been on print media rather than television, and research has only considered the portrayal of children in media by mostly focusing on ethical issues. Research on the portrayal of children in the news was supported by children's rights organizations and carried out regularly by the Albanian Media Institute (2006,2007,2008,2010)²⁷. Six of the biggest newspapers in Albania were monitored over a period of one month (in 2006 and 2010) to six months (in 2007,2008). Insufficient coverage of children in the press existed, although an increase in news items related to children, from 99 articles in 2006 to 157 articles in 2010, was noted. Nevertheless, media coverage of children was still far from systematic, regular, in-depth and ethical. The main categories of news items on children in 2006, 2007 and 2008, were child trafficking and violence (39%), followed by education (30%) and health (15 %). Data from 2010 showed a change in this trend, with education comprising most of news items on children (40%), followed by health (27%) and crime and violence (17%). As a matter of fact, the monitoring period in 2010 was only one month, which is not a sufficient indicator to conclude that the reporting trend has really changed.

²⁷ These studies were initiated and supported by two children's rights organizations, UNICEF and Save the Children Albania.

Children in the news were portrayed as either victims or perpetrators, which lead to sensational coverage of the event and the paternalistic coverage of children. The latter category of portrayal is usually found in news items on children from another minority background (such as Roma children) but the studies do not provide a deeper analysis on such categories.

A common conclusion from all these studies was the absence of the voices of children, instead grown-ups, parents, government representatives, human rights activists or experts talked on their behalf. Editorials about children in the press were non-existent. Furthermore, only a limited number of articles included statistics in their reporting.

Additionally, an analysis of seven newspapers on topic of human rights was conducted in 2012 over a period of 12 months (Dizdari, 2013). The conclusion from the 74 articles analyzed was that children's rights issues were the least represented in the sample, with only three articles. The main topic of these articles was domestic violence. Likewise, a monitoring of the daily newspaper *Koha jona* over a period of 10 months – January-October 2012 – identified 19 articles related to child abuse or death (Teršana, 2012).

In 2013, the Albanian Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA, 2014) dedicated a section to child rights in television for the first time, as part of their annual report. The report stated that programs targeting children, including all genres of programs, were fewer and less qualitative when compared to those that target adults (AMA 2014:10). Furthermore, the report identified serious issues related to the ethical coverage of children in the news – for example when children were portrayed as victims – across all television channels. As a result a note²⁸ was sent to all television channels, to draw attention on the ethical reporting of children. However, this report does not present any qualitative or quantitative data on the portrayal of children in the news. The data presented in the report were related only to the coverage of political parties or political individuals, in three national television channels.

Lastly, the only study that focused on television news (Londo, 2005) found that there was no news on children throughout the 16 news editions monitored in the public broadcaster (TVSH).

²⁸ Shkresa nr. 673 prot., datë 19.03.2013. The report (in Albanian) can be downloaded from: <http://ama.gov.al/images/stories/Raporti%202013.pdf>

Conclusion

Overall it can be said that research on children and news illustrates the same general trends. Children are assigned limited roles in news items (mostly that of the victim) and their voices are usually silenced. Furthermore, studies on media professionals' views on children show that journalists are eager to provide meaningful space for children to participate in the news media, but this is not reflected in actual news coverage. The main factors for such a discrepancy are the lack of guidelines and protocols for most newsrooms, and implications related to the ethical coverage of children. Finally, studies on children as a news audience challenge the perception that children are not interested in news. They show that if news is constructed with children as an audience in mind, they are able to critically engage with news coverage. As a consequence, the role of the news media in introducing children to civic engagement would be enhanced.

In fact, studies that are discussed in this chapter (especially those discussed in 2.1.1) have mostly focused on newspapers and have ignored television news or other mediums such as online news. This could be related to the fact that television news, besides being the most popular media in Europe (Kevin et al., 2013), is also the most complex medium to analyze (Selby & Cowdery, 1995). Furthermore, the availability of numerous newspaper databases in many countries (such as Lexis-Nexis as an example) and the fact that most local public libraries provide access to free newspaper archives, allows for an easy selection on a large number of news items covering children, which is not the case for television content. On the other hand, television "remains an important storyteller in the lives of children and young people" (van Bauwel, 2010: 142) and furthermore, television is reported to be the favorite place for news, both for adults and children (Carter et al, 2009). As such it deserves primary attention. Taking into account the role of media in constructing social concepts, mapping the presence of children in television news (chapter 5) may contribute to an augmentation of the public debate, not only on the social conditions of children in contemporary societies but also on journalism and human rights (see Ponte 2007).

During the process of the literature review, the important role that children's rights organizations, such as Unicef or Save the Children, have played in urging for increased research on children and the media was noted. This holds true also for the case of Albania, where these organizations have been alone in advocating for more children's rights in the

media, while no other institution (public or private), research institutions or individual researchers are interested in engaging in this field. This points to the negligibility of research covering this topic in Albania. Furthermore, within these settings, research has exclusively focused on children's rights and fails to explore media processes or journalistic practices that influence the portrayal of children in the news media. The influence that journalistic practices or the decision-making processes in newsrooms have on the ways children are covered by the news media remains unexplored. In this thesis, I respond to this need through a series of interviews with journalists and news editors, thus revealing the views and opinions of media professionals on children, the practices of newsgathering and the decision-making processes in newsrooms (chapter 6), which can play an important role in the ways children are covered and represented in news coverage.

While research has shown that children see themselves as being excluded from the typically adult-centered news outlets and that their perspectives are not taken into consideration (Ponte, 2013; Carter et al., 2009), no research was found which presents the views of adults on how children are being represented in the news. Keeping in mind the news media's ability to strengthen civic participation while exploring the views of children and adults (chapter 7) becomes crucial.

EMPIRICAL CHAPTERS

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

In this dissertation, I examined how television news represents children, the role this plays in constructing and reinforcing certain ideas and beliefs about children, and the implications this presents for the potential engagement between children and society. As such, this research project can be situated in the field of cultural studies, which is considered “a multifaceted intellectual area that explores the ideological connections among media, political economy and practices of individuals in a cultural system” (Miller, 2005: 75). Many scholars (see Barker, 2012; Royek, 2007; Kellner & Durham, 2006; During, 2005; Miller, 2005) emphasize the complex ways in which a variety of cultural factors are interwoven and need to be considered when engaging with research in cultural studies. A cultural studies approach to researching children and the media would consider ideas about children as they are presented in the media, the ways in which these ideas are reinforced and naturalized, the practices related to children in society and the ideologies they emphasize. Such an endeavor requires the selection of appropriate methods and techniques in order to be able to grasp the phenomenon that is being investigated and present how it can best be understood. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to motivate and elaborate on the chosen methodologies and discuss the use of specific techniques in relation to the specific research questions. Lastly, the selected methods of content analysis, interviews and focus groups will be presented in relation to their application concerning the subsequent empirical chapters in this dissertation.

3.1. Children and news media: a cultural studies approach

According to Hammersley (2012), there is no single or all-purpose way of drawing distinctions among the various approaches that can now be found within the field of social research. Rather, someone has to adopt different typologies by focusing on various lines of distinction for different purposes. In this dissertation, I consider the role of television news and their representations of children in the social construction of childhood. As such, social constructionism (see Burr, 2003) is the basis from which I begin to draw on the methodological choices for this dissertation. However, it must be emphasized that in my empirical enquiry, I do not consider the news media as operating in an isolated environment, rather I set out to explore this role within a cultural system, in relation to the dominant ideologies of children and the social practices in which these ideologies are embedded. Furthermore, I do not intend to present a deterministic role on the effects of television news on social life, rather it will be presented as one of the ways in which childhood and the realities of children are constructed and reified through the redundant use of certain images and ideas about children. As such this dissertation positions itself in the field of cultural media studies, which claims that:

Media texts like television shows or newspapers, far from merely reflecting the world around us, actually represent a skewed version of society in relation to race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability and a host of other social constructs (Ott & Mack, 2014: 124).

Cultural studies is a field that draws from many disciplines. As such scholars who situate their research within this field, are confronted with a large variety of approaches and methods. There is no single method that could be said as being the 'right' method to choose for a certain study, rather different approaches have to be adopted based on the specific research questions and the specific research context.

My methodological path takes a social constructionist approach to media discourses on children and the issues affecting them. Hammersley (2012: 25) explains that:

In methodological terms, constructionism generally leads to an emphasis on analyzing discourse, whether that which is found in documents of various kinds or in audio- or video-recordings of social interaction.

In the case of this dissertation, I investigate how the social worlds related to children are continually being constructed and re-constructed through the use of discourse. Nonetheless, this covers only one of the objectives of this dissertation, that of investigating how childhood is constructed in and through the television news media in Albania. As stated earlier, my aim is to explore this role further and investigate how the dominant beliefs on children are presented in the news media and how they are embedded in the social practices of children in Albania. Therefore, the second field from which I draw methodologically is the field of Critical approach. According to (Hammersley, 2012:22):

Critical research explicitly extends this process of assessment to social practices and institutional arrangements, and the evaluation of these is usually in terms of some notion of equity or social justice. Furthermore, as a matter of fact, the conclusions reached are generally negative: showing up injustices that had previously been overlooked or identifying causes of inequity that had earlier gone unrecognized or have been given insufficient emphasis.

A very important concept of the critical approach is ideology (see Barker: 2008; Miller 2005). Research that employ this approach “set[s] out to capture the real social forces involved, whereas common sense views are regarded as frequently distorted by ideology, by misconceptions that are socially generated so as to disguise injustice and its causes” (Hammersley, 2012: 22). In the case of children and the news media, the ways of looking at the world are mainly adults’ ways, and therefore the knowledge that is produced is grounded in the adult experience. As a consequence children are made to conform with the perspectives of adults, which in turn disempowers them and reinforces unfair practices related to children (see Holland, 2004). In this dissertation I investigate how these practices are socially ingrained and generated within and through the news media. In methodological terms:

Research that uses a critical approach have employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Emphasis is placed on analysis of all data in terms of a theory about the structure of the wider society and how this can generate false appearances, either directly through conscious bias deriving from interests or indirectly through processes that are below or outside the consciousness of the people involved (Hammersley, 2012: 22).

Additionally, one of the distinguishing features of the critical approach, which I have endorsed throughout this dissertation, is the belief that the researcher and science in general, can play a key political role. As Miller (2005: 81) assesses:

Critical theorists argue that social scholars and researchers cannot stand by and take a representational role by merely observing, understanding and explaining the social world. Rather, critical theorists are united in the need for theories that are normative in their statement or preferred values that are activist in their commitment to social change.

Within this tradition, feminism as a research tradition is seen as a representative example of critical research. Several scholars have drawn parallels between research about children and feminism (see Mayall, 2013; Kellett, 2005). Just as the emergence of feminism occurred in response to women's dissatisfaction with their minority voice and status in society, research concerning children has mostly drawn upon similar ways of thinking. In this dissertation, I draw on the influential concept in feminism studies of the 'male gaze', coined by Mulvey (1975) to describe the disadvantaged position that women occupy in society by analyzing visual representations in films. Similarly, I introduce the concept of the 'adult gaze' as a way to account for dominant perspectives of adults in the ways children are seen in television news broadcasts (Chapter 5).

By combining perspectives from social constructionism and critical approach, I am in a better position to emphasize the linkage of theory to the wider research practice. Therefore, I study and empirically investigate not only the dominant concepts concerning children, but also how they are constructed by the news media, the media contexts in which they are formed, and how these concepts are embedded in several social practices related to children in Albania.

Both the social constructionist approach and the critical approach have been subject to criticism regarding their methodological assumptions, as with all other approaches. In the case of critical research, criticism is mostly related to the fact that this kind of research tends to neglect the practical constraints under which all agents operate, some of which derive from basic characteristics of the human situation, such as scarcity of resources and the relativity of desire and aspiration (Hammersley, 2012). In relation to this dissertation, criticism can be translated into a lack of consideration of practical constraints such as children's physical abilities or cognitive skills compared to adults when considering children's agency. This perspective derives from developmental psychology, which considers children's competence

in relation to their age and sets adulthood as a standard of rationality (see chapter 1.3.1), which is the very concept that this dissertation tries to challenge. As Kellett (2005: 7) points out, “children’s competence is ‘different from’ not ‘lesser than adults’ competence. The claim that children do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding does not stand up to close scrutiny”.

Regarding the second approach, namely constructionism, criticism is mostly generated around the fact that it ignores the real world – in particular social structural constraints – thus suggesting that people are free to construct alternative realities through discursive practices (Hammersley, 2012). This critique assumes that social structures presented in a cultural environment should be acknowledged as such. When arguing for the participation of children in society, this dissertation considers the social structures presented in Albanian society as not being a fixed reality which cannot be changed. In the contrary, by endorsing a constructionist approach I explore the very ideologies related to children that are embedded in and reinforce the existing social structure. This way, I acknowledge the existence of the social structures as a starting point for this study, and set out to carefully explore the role that television news plays in reinforcing these structures, which in turn has consequences on the ways children engage with society (see chapter 5, 6, 7).

A major critique related to methodological choices concerning research about children is the ethical question of whether or not adults are ‘legitimate’ to engage in research about children or if instead children-led research could potentially be a new paradigm in social research. Such ethical questions are mostly related to power issues: whose interests does the research serve, who owns the research and whom the research is for (Kellett, 2005). As a matter of fact, recent research has moved from seeing children as ‘objects’ to considering children as ‘subjects’ or ‘participants’. Furthermore, research ‘with’ children is increasingly seen as a common practice (see Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Clark, 2004; Kellett et al., 2004; Christensen & Prout, 2002; O’Kane, 2001). This type of research places emphasis on listening to children’s voices and engaging them in the design and implementation of research studies, as a way to increase the relevance of research on the one hand and empower children, on the other hand. However, as Kellett (2005) notes, criticism is still being leveled at the tokenism of some of this participation, the adult manipulation, unequal power-relations and the adult focus of such research. Such criticism also remains in cases of research carried out by children themselves. There is an agreement among researchers that if children were meaningfully

engaged in research from the initial phases, they would provide an original contribution to our understanding of childhood and children's lives. However, this does not mean that the validity of other research by adults about children or child participatory research should be ignored. As Kennett (2005: 6) concludes in her paper *Children as active researchers: a new research paradigm for the 21st century?*, "there is room for all of these perspectives and each should speak to and inform the other".

In this dissertation, I acknowledge the complementary nature of children and adults' perspectives on the portrayal of children in television news (see chapter 7).

3.2. Research aim, questions and methods

The empirical chapters of this dissertation are constructed around articulations of television news on children in Albania. I set out to empirically explore three main topics related to children and the news media: the representations of children in television news, media professionals' views on children as news subjects and the views of children and adults on children's representations in news. Framed as research questions, the aforementioned topics correspond to: **(1) How are children represented in television news? (2) How do news media professionals shape the ways in which children are portrayed in television news? (3a) How is the representation of children in television news perceived by children? (3b) How is the representation of children in television news perceived by adults?** The theoretical and empirical chapters in this dissertation should all be discerned in relation to these research questions. While the theoretical chapters present a thorough investigation of the theories and literature on the topic, the empirical chapters explore the subject appropriated in a specific context, such as Albania. Both parts contribute to constituting a thorough understanding on the role of news media in constructing ideas about childhood and contributing to the ways children are encouraged to participate in the public sphere and be recognized as active citizens.

Specifically, research question (1) will be empirically elaborated in chapter 5, in which an account of children's representational strategies in Albanian television news is presented. Additionally, in chapters 4 and 6, I address research question (2) by using in-depth interviews with media professionals and a considerable number of secondary sources from the Albanian

media landscape. Lastly, research question (3) is answered in chapter 7, where I make use of reception analysis and investigate audience views through a series of focus group discussions with children and adults in Albania.

As mentioned earlier, this study can be situated in the broad field of cultural studies. As such, it makes use of traditional methods within this field: content analysis, interviews and focus groups (see Barker, 2008). In the subsequent section an extended overview on the use and arguments on such choices will be provided. Additionally, information on the procedures for data gathering and data analysis will be presented.

3.2.1. Exploring the representation of children in television news: Media content analysis

As the empirical inquiry in this dissertation is constructed around articulations on children in television news in Albania, the starting point of the data gathering process was news monitoring. The prime-time news editions for three national television channels in Albania were monitored over a period of three months, from October-December 2014. According to the Albanian Media Authority (AMA) the three national television channels that were chosen for the purpose of this study, the public broadcaster (TVSH), and two private national channels (Top Channel and TV Klan), (separately) cover over 80% of the countries' territory and have the biggest audience share²⁹. It is important to recognize that by attaining national television status, all channels are obliged to “promote democratic values and diversity, with a special focus on the freedom of speech, the right to be informed, and children’s rights, especially in news reports and throughout their broadcast³⁰”.

During my previous experience as an assistant media analyst for OSCE/ODIHR in Albania, for the general elections of 2009, I had already been provided with a strong expertise in news monitoring and analysis. Furthermore, by being fully engaged in all stages of the process, I was able to familiarize myself with the specific use of language and images on children in television news, which proved, already during the data gathering process, to be very useful in identifying different patterns of children’s representation strategies in television news.

²⁹ Ligj nr. 97/2013 datë 4.3.2013, Për mediat audiovizive në Republikën e Shqipërisë, article 55/i

³⁰ http://ama.gov.al/rregullorja_per_autorizimet_me_ndryshimet_e_propozuara.pdf, article 5/3

In total, 276 prime time editions were monitored. From a total of 4,416 news items, only 154 news items or 3.4% of the total news items were identified as being related to children or issues affecting them. This could be considered one of the first findings that points to the negligibility of children in television news broadcasts in Albania. According to Krippendorff (2004: 59), “the frequency with which a symbol, idea, reference or topic occurs in a stream of messages is taken to indicate the importance of, attention to or emphasis on that symbol, idea, or reference for audiences”. Data were collected over a period of three months, October to December 2014. The public broadcaster, TVSH, and two national private channels, Top Channel and TV Klan, were chosen based on their extensive coverage and audience share (see Chapter 5). Data were gathered using web pages for TV Klan and Top Channel. Their prime time news editions are posted on a daily basis, as they appear in the actual broadcast, unedited. All news editions during our monitoring time frame were downloaded and saved for further analysis. The prime time news editions of the public broadcaster TVSH, were recorded by using the digital platform Tring, which made it possible to capture content for later analysis.

The items on children were selected and categorized based on a detailed coding guide that was carefully elaborated for the particular purpose of this study (Appendix 1). Furthermore, a registration form was developed to ensure uniformity in the selection and in the analytical choices (Appendix 1).

The analysis consisted of a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004), using statistical software SPSS 21, to explore patterns and characteristics of the representation of children and the issues affecting them. The quantitative analysis was used as a way to measure the number of favorable and unfavorable characteristics [attributed to children], taken to indicate the beliefs held by the producers, the audience or their common culture (Krippendorff, 2004: 59). In addition, the qualitative analysis focused on the lexical choices of journalists when naming and referring to children (Richardson, 2007). Richardson states that “the manner in which social actors are named identifies not only group(s) that they are associated with, it can also signal the relationship between the namer and the named” (p. 49).

Lastly, I would like to refer to the empirical chapter 5, which contains a thorough explanation of the methodology used for this purpose and the results from the analysis.

3.2.2. Media professionals' views on children: Interviews

The purpose of the second empirical study (chapter 6) was to obtain qualitative data on journalists' and news editors' views on children as news topics or subjects. This part of the doctoral research can be seen as a further exploration of the representational practices of children in television news presented in chapter 5, by providing contextual information on the individual and organizational choices of journalists and news editors, as well as the role that the sociocultural environment plays in news selection and the production process. The impetus for such a complementary research model comes as a reflection of the theoretical considerations on the role of journalists in the construction of social reality, which was presented in chapter 1 (see 1.1). According to Shoemaker and Reese (2014) the ways in which media workers do their jobs, what they think about them, and what rules the organization imposes on them, are very important elements to take into consideration when accounting for the role of the news media in the construction of social realities.

According to Vanderstoep & Johnston [(2009), also see Jensen, 2013], interviewing is one of the most widely used data collection tools in qualitative research in general, and in media and communication research in particular. By interviewing journalists and news editors who cover social issues in Albanian television news, we respond to the previously cited critique that "methodological choices in critical research generally tend to neglect the practical constraints under which all agents operate", which was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. By acknowledging the views of journalists and news editors on children and carefully considering their practices in newsrooms, I present a thorough account on the representational practices of children in television news in Albania.

Eight professional journalists and news editors from leading television channels participated in this study. A list of the participants and their affiliation can be found in Table 2.1. (Appendix 2). The interviews were conducted over a period of two months, January-February 2015. I traveled to Albania for this purpose and all interviews were conducted face-to-face. The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to two hours, based on the journalists' and news editors' experience and their willingness to share their opinions. All participants showed a willingness to participate in the study. There was only one case of a news editor from the private national television channel TV Klan who refused to be interviewed, whereas a

journalist from the same television channel was eager to share her experiences and provided one of the longest interviews that I conducted.

The interview guide (see Appendix 2) was based on a partially standardized template with open-ended questions that the respondent was able to answer freely, in order to take into account all aspects of the representations of children in the news media and challenges that journalists are facing in that regard. The template was partially standardized, to the extent that several pointed questions were asked during the interview in order to direct the interviewees towards issues relevant to this study. The interview guide remains open-ended in that the guide did not require the interviewee to reply within a restricted frame (Bray, 2008). The main focus of the interviews with journalists was on news-gathering practices, organizational challenges and their take on deontological issues related to the representation of children in news coverage. Subsequently, the interviews with news editors were focused on organizational practices, codes of ethics in newsrooms and the news selection criteria. The main aim of the interviews was not only to provide qualitative data on the accounts of journalists and news editors on children, but more precisely to consider how these accounts get established and impact, transform and reproduce specific representations of children in the news media.

All interviews were digitally recorded, manually transcribed *ad verbum* and shared with the interviewees before finalization. Transcribed interviews (in Albanian) can be found on the CD-R attached to this dissertation (Appendix 2).

Grounded theory, more specifically constant comparative approach, was employed as an analytical strategy (Boieje, 2002; Glaser, 1992). Firstly, open-coding was conducted, i.e. reading the interviews several times and creating tentative labels. Secondly, axial coding was performed to identify relationships among the open codes (Tracy, 2013). Specifically, the results of these in-depth interviews are covered in Chapter 6.

3.2.3. The views of children and adults on television news items on children: Focus group discussions

The last empirical study in this dissertation explores the views of children and adults in Albania on television news items on children (see chapter 7). The study is constructed around 12 focus groups (N= 118). I conducted six focus groups with children (ages 10-15, N=64) and six focus groups with adults (ages 26-62, N=54), with 8-12 participants in each group. Parental consent was required for all children who participated. Children's groups were balanced (50% boys and 50% girls), while a larger number of participants were female in the adult groups (74.1%). This could be explained by the higher availability of women to participate in activities of this type when compared to men, due to a higher unemployment rate among this group in Albania (Rusi & Mustafaj, 2013). 12 of the participants in the adults focus groups were teachers (N=54). Nonetheless all participants in the focus group were asked to reflect on the topic of discussion in their position as parents. Only three participants (N= 54) did not belong to this group. The decision to have separate groups for children and adults came as a reflection on the fact that children's perspectives may be different from adult accounts and thus should be elicited directly from children, while minimizing the risk for adult intervention (see Balen et al., 2006; Eder & Fingerson, 2002). On the other hand, research has found that children feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas when they are among their peers (see Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Mauthner, 1997). Additionally, having children's and adults' perspectives separately is a good basis to explore differences in the views of children and adults on television news media items with a focus on the portrayal of children.

The focus groups took place in five regions of Albania: Durres, Tirane, Elbasan, Shkoder and Lezhe, from May to June 2015. I collaborated with World Vision Albania and Kosova (WVA&K), an international children's rights organization, to conduct the focus groups. Before beginning my PhD, I was part of this organization from 2009-2013, first working as the National Education coordinator and afterwards as an Advocacy Manager. I collaborated with the Education projects' team of World Vision in order to organize the focus groups. All adults and children that participated in the discussions were part of existing community groups and were accustomed to acting as a group while engaging in several development projects. This is an important factor to take into consideration when conducting focus groups,

as the social environment impacts the ability for people to express themselves (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

The meetings began with a drop-off questionnaire as a way to obtain demographic data on the participants and their exposure to television news. Dually, the questionnaire also served as a warm up exercise meant to prepare participants for the other activities planned for the focus group, which required active participation in discussions. A slightly different questionnaire was prepared for children and adults. Further, I used two custom-designed activities for the study. In the first activity, participants were introduced to 10 pictures (Appendix 3), five of which showed newscasters, and were then asked to identify them and provide additional details for each of them. In the second activity, the participants were presented with a list of 11 news items taken from actual news broadcasts, including two news items related to children and were then asked to list the news items in two different ways. First, as they would appear in an actual news broadcast and second, as the group members would like to see them broadcasted – starting from what they considered to be the most important. For both activities, participants were encouraged to engage in group discussions. I took notes of the interaction processes among the group members. These activities had two purposes. First, they aimed to explore participants' familiarity with television news (the first activity). Second, they aimed to explore their views on the importance of having children present in television news, by investigating how the groups would rank the news items that were related to children (the second activity). Presenting the same tasks to the groups of children and adults allowed us to compare if their attitudes differed in this respect. Subsequently, participants watched three news items related to children, taken from actual news broadcasts. These items were chosen based on the extensive media monitoring process that is thoroughly explained in chapter 5, and belongs to the three most prominent categories in which children appeared to be more present in television news in Albania: children as victims, as objects of emotional appeals and children as performers. These discussions allowed the participants to articulate their opinions on television news in general and on their views of the representation of children in particular. Notes from the discussions served as the main data for the analysis, which were then complemented by data on news consumption from the questionnaires and meticulous expressions and results from the custom-designed activities.

The responses from the focus group discussions were subject to a grounded analysis of emerging themes, using qualitative content analysis procedures (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I refer to the empirical chapter 7 for an in-depth discussion on the analysis and findings.

3.3. Introducing the empirical inquiry chapters

Table 1.1. presents a detailed overview of the empirical chapters included in this dissertation. In total, four chapters provide empirical evidence in relation to the main research questions of this dissertation (see 3.3).

I begin with a chapter on the Albanian media context (chapter 4) as a way to provide background information on media regulations, ownership and journalistic practices, assuming that most readers will have only a limited knowledge of this specific context. This chapter will serve to contextualize the research findings that will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Further the three subsequent empirical chapters provide insights into the role that television news media in Albania plays in constructing and reconstructing dominant beliefs on children (chapter 5); the views of media professionals that shape the ways children and issues affecting them are presented to the public (chapter 6); how the dominant beliefs on children as presented in the news media become significant to the ways adults think of and relate to children and on the ways children engage with society (chapter 7).

The empirical chapters of this dissertation have already been published or are in the publishing process, as articles in international peer-reviewed journals. Additional reference details on the articles will be provided at the beginning of each empirical chapter.

Table 1.1. A detailed overview of the empirical chapters

Empirical Chapters	Method	N	Chapter
<p>The role of gatekeepers in the social construction of reality in Albanian news media</p> <p>Impact on the representation of children in the news</p>	Literature review		Chapter 4
<p>‘The Adult Gaze’: <i>exploring the Representation of Children in Television News in Albania</i></p>	Quantitative and qualitative Media content analysis	Monitored 4416 news items in total Analyzed- 154 news items	Chapter 5
<p>Journalists’ and news editors’ views on children as news subjects in Albanian media</p> <p><i>Exploring issues of newsworthiness and self-censorship</i></p>	Interviews	N=8 Participants: Journalists and news editors	Chapter 6
<p>The Ignored Audience <i>A multi-method reception study on children and television news in Albania</i></p>	Focus Group discussions	12 FG 6 FG with children 6 FG with adults N=118	Chapter 7

Chapter 4

The role of gatekeepers in the social construction of reality in Albanian news media: Impact on the representation of children in the news

This chapter is intended as an introduction to the state of the news media in Albania. It provides additional information on how the specificities of the political and economic situation in Albania play a role in shaping how social issues – and those related to children in particular – are presented by the news media. By analyzing reports on the Albanian media landscape, findings from media content analyses of news coverage and policy documents on Albanian media regulations, this chapter explores the potential of news to represent, ‘what there is to see’ in the social domain, with a special focus on childhood.

Key to this chapter is the concept of *gatekeepers* in media, which is used as an inclusive term for media owners, advertisers and print/broadcast journalists (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; see also Graber, McQuail & Norris 1998). It departs from the premise that gatekeepers play an important role in shaping news media content. It argues that the complex interplay between gatekeepers, media owners, advertisers and journalists, influences the overwhelming presence of politics and political voices in the news. Specifically, the interference of private media owners in editorial policy, the dependency on state advertisements and journalist’s conformist attitudes and organizational structures in newsrooms are identified as the main factors that influence the overwhelming presence of politics in the Albanian news, which has a toll on the (lack of) coverage of social issues in the news. Based on these discussions, this chapter concludes that power structures, as they are presented in the Albanian news media, prevent social issues related to children from being represented in the news. Children and issues affecting them become part of the hidden reality that is rarely seen in the news, even though they constitute 30% of the entire population.

It should be noted that this chapter – written at the beginning of the research project – aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the context in which this research project is placed. As such, insights presented throughout the chapter serve as background information and contribute to a better understanding of the findings from the following empirical chapters³¹.

Reference

Kaziaj, E. (2016b). The role of gatekeepers in the social construction of reality in Albanian news media: Impact on the representation of children in the news. In Krishna- Hensel, S (eds). *Media in Process: Transformation and Democratic Transition*, (pp. 141-156). New York: Routledge.

³¹ This chapter is a shorter version of the book chapter: **Kaziaj, E.** (2016b). The role of gatekeepers in the social construction of reality in Albanian news media: Impact on the representation of children in the news. In Krishna- Hensel, S (eds). *Media in Process: Transformation and Democratic Transition*, (pp. 141-156). New York: Routledge.

The role of gatekeepers in the social construction of reality in Albanian news media: Impact on the representation of children in the news

Abstract

The media has been widely recognized to play an important role in the construction of social reality. As Hall (1982 :64) suggests, reality has to go through a process of “selecting and structuring” before being presented in the news. The decision in determining what makes news is left to the so-called gatekeepers of the media. This decision- making process leads to some events being overrepresented in the news while others are ignored or marginalized. Typical examples of the latter are issues related to children. By taking the representation of children in the news as a starting point, this chapter analyzes the potential of the Albanian news media to construct a social reality that is inclusive of all of society’s issues and voices. As a post-communist country which lacks an independent and professional media, Albania is a good setting to investigate how power structures in the media prevent social issues from being represented in the news. Conclusions from the analysis confirm that there is an overwhelming presence of politics and political voices in the news. Social issues remain part of a hidden reality, and are widely underrepresented.

4.1. Introduction

News has been acknowledged to play an important role in defining social reality through “its active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping; not merely the transmitting of an already- existing meaning, but the more active labor of making things mean” (Hall, 1982 : 64). We depend on the news media to help make sense of the deluge of information presented to us every day. This information must first pass the media “filters”. Graber, McQuail, and Norris (1998; see also Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) in their book *The*

Politics of News: The News of Politics illustrate that gatekeepers play an important role in determining what makes the news. Gatekeeper is an inclusive term for media owners, advertisers, and print/ broadcast journalists, whose influence leads to some events being absent, ignored, or marginalized. A perfect example is issues related to children. There are not many stories that focus on them and the children themselves do not make any statements to the news, they are simply not heard (Ponte & Aroldi, 2013). The case of the representation of children in the news is taken as a starting point to investigate the role of news in constructing social realities. This role becomes even more pertinent in a country like Albania, which has been influenced by communist propaganda for more than 50 years, and is now in a state of transition where society is still attempting to redefine various social concepts. In this emerging democracy, the role of media – television in particular – has become crucial to the development of the country and society in general (Dyczok, 2009). The media environment in Albania is unquestionably complex. The large number of media outlets operating in the country points to a high potential for the media to influence cultural norms and behavior, therefore an absolute need exists to examine this potential. Despite having been studied by media and communication scholars (see Lani, 2013; Marku, 2012; Londo, 2007 , 2005; Çili, 2005), Albanian news media has never been analyzed for its role in shaping social life or its potential to construct a reality that is inclusive to all.

According to McNair (1998), television news, for technical and cultural-historical reasons, is considered to be the most credible media in the hierarchy of journalistic believability. This dominance of television news over other news media is based on a combination of several factors (Bignell, 1997) with the most important being the format of television news and the authoritativeness that comes from the perceived impartiality of news broadcasting. The dominance of television news is also a result of its immediacy, since it can incorporate new reports even during the program broadcast (Bignell, 1997 :111). These arguments also hold true in the Albanian context. A recent survey supported by the European Commission (Nelaj, 2014) concluded that “89% of Albanians watch television on a TV set every day or almost every day.” Compared to other European countries, citizens of Albania are listed among the top six populations for watching television, with an average of 80.9 hours each month (2 hours and 40 minutes per day). Asked about whether they tend to trust or distrust different information channels, 73 percent – the vast majority of Albanian responders – reveal a strong tendency towards trusting television content. Furthermore, 84 percent of Albanian people get

most of their national political news from this medium. The results from this survey confirm previous findings on the use of television in Albania (Lani, 2013 ; Austin, 2009 ; KKRT³², 2004).

This analysis focuses on television. The aim is to explain the failure of television news in Albania to construct a social reality that is inclusive of all issues, not only those concerning politics. Media processes and journalistic practices are analyzed in line with the political economy and social constructionism, as two approaches to the role of news in the social construction of reality. Therefore the “external” constraining factors, such as ownership, government regulations, and economic issues, and the “internal” factors, which work towards journalistic autonomy, such as self- censorship and journalistic practices, are analyzed. Throughout this chapter, by analyzing reports on the Albanian media landscape – including findings from a content analysis of news coverage, and policy documents on Albanian media and regulations –the overwhelming presence of politics in Albanian news and its toll on the representation of social issues and childhood, will be investigated. Accounting for the potential of news media to construct a concept of childhood may contribute to an enlargement of the public debate, not only on the social conditions of children in contemporary societies but also on the role of television in promoting democratic values (Ponte, 2007).

4.2. The State of the (News) Media in Albania

Albania has developed a rich media context. According to data published by the AMA, the country of a little more than 2.8 million³³ inhabitants has two private national television channels and 71 private local television channels, in addition to the public broadcaster (RTSH). In addition, 83 private cable television channels operate in the country. There is no official data on the circulation of print media, but a report in the Media Sustainability Index (Stefani, 2012) counts 160 active print outlets, of which 26 are daily newspapers.

There are eight channels dedicated to news³⁴ that broadcast news throughout their daily programming (Kevin et al., 2013). Most of the other television channels have regular news

³² Currently known as the Albanian Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA).

³³ Data from the last Census, 2011: <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/figures/statistical-databases/Present.aspx?rxid=e365b0a8-3455-4a15-89a4-9d79cd1bd30e>.

³⁴ ABC news, A1 report, News 24, TV “Ora”, UTV Education, TV Scan, Channel 1, Neser TV.

editions. Albania is second in Europe in terms of the number of news channels offered, behind Turkey who is in first place. This is an impressive ranking, especially when taking into consideration the population of Turkey, which is 26 times larger than the population of Albania. Other Balkan countries, such as Serbia, Greece, and the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia have, respectively, three, two, and one news channels. The large number of media outlets in Albania is not a sufficient indicator of press freedom. As stated in a monitoring report from the EU (Londo, 2005b), freedom of the media in countries such as Albania soon came to mean the freedom to run media outlets as private businesses. With the abundance of outlets, some would expect a wide range of topics to be covered in news and other programs, and for the media to reflect the voices of society in all their diversity, however this is not the case. Reports monitoring Albanian news confirm that political issues are the main subjects covered by the media, eclipsing all social issues. A monitoring report from the Balkan Media Barometer (Lani, 2013) states that media outlets in Albania are increasingly becoming similar to political parties, especially during electoral campaigns. After monitoring a news series from the public broadcaster, Londo (2005a) found that there was not a single edition that did not begin with news from the Albanian government. Comparing this result with the output of one of the most watched private channels, the conclusion was that, for both channels, the political presence or presence of people promoting specific interests was the main criteria in defining the news value. As a result, social issues, as well as the diversity of other topics being offered to the public, are currently lacking in the news.

4.2.1. Media Owners

The nature of the Albanian media is largely defined by the nature of its owners (Marku, 2012). In most cases, they are the only financial source that makes it possible for these media outlets to exist. As such they establish and influence the editorial policy of their own media, and use it to advance their own interests. According to McChesney (2008), ownership influence on the news is one of the biggest problems in journalism. Cross- ownership is common among the main media groups in Albania, all of which own at least one television channel as well as a radio and/ or print media outlet (Londo, 2005b).

The law recently adopted on Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania,³⁵ No. 97/ 2013, as well as the former one³⁶ is very detailed regarding specifications on ownership. A single person cannot own more than 40 percent of shares. Furthermore, shareholders in one national television channel cannot own more than 20 percent of shares in another national radio or television channel. However, according to Çili (2005), these limitations are not wholly functional for two reasons: the relevant persons do not abide by the law, or they abide by the law in a fictitious way. The Media Sustainability Index Report (Stefani, 2012) raises the issue of media licenses being used as a tool to “buy” the media. According to Fatos Baxhaku, a freelance journalist, if a license is given by the National Committee of Radio and Television, which is dominated by government appointees, it is automatically expected that that media should favor the government in their broadcasting (Stefani, 2012 : 5).

The Balkan Media Barometer’s report on Albania (Lani, 2013), shows that the indicator “Owners of established mainstream private media do not interfere with editorial independence” scores 1.4, in a ranking scale of 1 to 5. The minimum score is “1 – country does not meet indicator,” and the maximum score is “5 – country meets all indicators.” This is the lowest score in a total of 45 indicators used to assess the country’s media situation. In the Media Sustainability Index (Stefani, 2013), the conclusion on objective 4 “Business management of private media” is that most of the media outlets are supported by other businesses in their ownership conglomerate which use these media outlets to promote and protect their interests. This indicator also scored only 1.69 in a ranking scale from 1 to 5. In another monitoring report from the EU, it is noted that it is extremely difficult to find an owner of a significant media outlet in Albania who is not closely related to some other business, to politics, or in some cases to both (Londo, 2005b). The report goes on to explain that it would be hard to find a significant shareholder in any media company who has dropped his or her other business interests. Indeed, they often expand those other businesses or enter politics. This was the case in the last parliamentary elections on June 2013, when two media owners became members of parliament.

³⁵ The law was passed in the Parliament on March 4, 2013 and was signed by the president on March 15, 2013. [http://www.inovacioni.gov.al/fi les/ pages_ fi les/ 183909149- LIGJI- Nr- 97- 2013- PER- MEDIAT- AUDIOVIZIVE- NE- REPUBLIKEN- E- SHQIPERISE1.pdf](http://www.inovacioni.gov.al/fi%20les/pages_fi%20les/183909149-LIGJI-Nr-97-2013-PER-MEDIAT-AUDIOVIZIVE-NE-REPUBLIKEN-E-SHIQIPERISE1.pdf).

³⁶ Law nr. 8410, September 30, 1998 on the Public and Private Radio and Television in the Republic of Albania. [http:// media.parlament.org.ua/ uploads/ fi les/ f915.pdf](http://media.parlament.org.ua/uploads/fi%20les/f915.pdf)

The political and business interests of media owners might become hindering factors for further media professionalism and development. As is shown in a regional report on news monitoring (Udovicic, 2005a), there is a very clear relationship in Albania between the ownership structure and the selection of information on news programs. Owners of private media establish the editorial policy of their own media outlet and use it to advance their own interests, which are often related to politics. These constraints range from “advice” given by media owners on how to cover a specific issue to clear directives on how to cover (positively or negatively) certain government institutions, politicians, or events (Lani, 2013). Some media owners have become rich, mainly through privileges obtained by the government in the processing of tenders and the privatization of different public assets. This collection of riches puts these media owners in debt to the government and thus willing to leave their media at the government’s disposal (Stefani, 2012). As a result, the agenda of the news media and its ordering, selection, and sourcing is very close to the agenda of the government or politics in general, or to that of the television’s management and their interests at that moment (Londo, 2005b). This leaves less space for topics of social relevance; their coverage is usually triggered either by tragedy or by events involving the presence of prominent Figures, with no possibility for follow up or a more detailed analysis of the problems that affect people who watch the news every day. The situation is no different for the public broadcaster, RTSH, where editorial independence is extremely poor. Judging from the extensive presence of political actors in the news, being a politician in Albania is the only asset needed in order to garner news coverage (Londo, 2005a).

4.2.2. Advertising

In his book *The Sociology of Journalism*, McNair (1998 : 93) states “in general, governments and parties in liberal democracies do not tend to own journalistic media, which would be perceived as propaganda in any case, preferring to exercise control in other less obvious ways.” In Albania the government plays an important role as one of the main advertisers in the country. According to data from the Europe & Eurasia Media Sustainability Index (Stefani, 2013), annual advertising revenue in the media sector in 2012 was estimated to be 54.5 million euro. Data from the Treasury Department database of the Ministry of Finance shows that the state spent at least 780,000 euro between June 2012 and the end of 2013 on

television advertisements (Likmeta, 2013). The same investigative report (Likmeta, 2013) also shows that the bulk of state advertising has not gone to TV stations with better ratings but to those who supported state policies. Data from this report shows that the five companies linked to Media 6 owner Aleksander Frangaj, who is known to have cultivated close relationships with former Prime Minister Sali Berisha and the Democratic Party he was leading, received a total of 103 million ALL³⁷ (730,000 euro) from state institutions over two years, when Berisha was prime minister. By comparison, Top Channel TV, Albania's largest private broadcaster, received 1.3 million ALL (9,940 euro) over the same period.

The final Albanian AMA monitoring report of 2013 (AMA, 2014) states that only 105 out of 250 operators in the audiovisual market handed in their financial balance sheets for 2012 to the authority, as required by the law. Out of these, 25 operators (12 television stations and 13 radio stations) declared a negative balance or zero profits from their activity. All reports monitoring the Albanian media state that it is very difficult to find public data on the size of the advertising market in the country (Stefani, 2013 ; Stefani, 2012 ; Likmeta, 2013). This is due to a lack of available data on the success of media outlets, a lack of audience sharing research, a lack of detailed legal provisions regarding the allocations of state advertising, and also a lack of transparency from the media outlets themselves. A report from the Open Society Institute and the EU (Londo, 2005b), states that the lack of reliable audience data has led television stations to measure their success by "gut feelings." This situation has encouraged chaos in the advertising market.

Preferential distribution of state advertising to media outlets with close relationships to the government is a worrying trend that affects editorial independence and media freedom (Lani, 2013). The same report (Lani, 2013) explains that the government, being one of the main advertisers in the country, uses this as a tool to "select" media outlets that will receive government advertisements, in accordance with their pro- government editorial policy, or to punish the media that oppose the government. The situation is no different for the public broadcaster RTSH, which by law receives 50 percent of its budget from the government. As different reports note, this dependence on state funding jeopardizes RTSH's editorial policy (Lani, 2013 ; Londo, 2005b). RTSH is the only broadcaster, according to the law on audiovisual media, that is expected to deliver "programs that reflect to the listeners and

³⁷ ALL=Albanian lek; 1 Euro=139 ALL (approximately).

viewers of all ages, the diversity of Albanian life.”³⁸ The law also specifies the program genres that RTSH has to develop, including children’s programs, programs on education, and other social topics. While it is trying to do so, the quality of these programs is often debatable. Furthermore, news editions from the public broadcaster do not present an optimistic reality.

According to the monitoring report by the Albanian Media Authority in 2012, television news editions from the public broadcaster devoted almost 60 percent of their content to reports on the government and prime minister, and only 9 percent to the main opposition party.

As a result of the dependency on state advertisement revenue as an important funding source, there are clear restrictions on viable options for media freedom and diversity. There is an obvious tendency to focus news production on events based in the capital, such as parliamentary sessions, elections, and political accusations or counter-accusations, while neglecting a wide array of social problems that do not appear in the media even though they are present in a large part of Albania (Stefani, 2012). This is a trend that pervades the entire media landscape with limited exception. The Balkan Media Barometer report (Lani, 2013) concludes that political issues are the main topic that each media outlet exhausts, while leaving aside issues of public interest, thus reflecting the invasion of public life by politics.

Aside from the state, there are also private advertisers that could influence the diversity of media programming. The two main advertisers in previous years have been the telecommunications companies and the coffee businesses (Likmeta, 2013). Both of these companies target an adult audience. As such, they are not interested in pushing for more diverse programming or news events that deal with children.

4.2.3. Journalists

Journalists are among the social actors that have a greater ability to construct a social reality. As Schudson (1995: 209) states in his book *The Power of News*, news-workers are one group with more power than most to construct social reality. They do this by creating, imposing, and reproducing social meanings. In the theoretical part of this research, social constructionism was described as one of the traditions used in studying news. This tradition is based on the

³⁸ Article 91/ 3, Law 97/ 2013 on Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania.

common premise that individual journalists and single news outlets, as well as the media institution as such, collectively accomplish the social construction of reality. Journalists are directly implicated in culturally constructing reality as one of the influences that determine the predominant social concepts in different cultures. One of these concepts is childhood. In this light, this section analyzes how journalistic practices in Albania impact the social reality that is (not) presented in the news, by emphasizing mostly politics and political voices and leaving out social issues, including those related to children and childhood.

According to the Media Sustainability Index (Stefani, 2012), independent journalists in Albania “are a rare species, near extinction.” After 23 years of struggle for the consolidation of democracy in the country, journalists still find themselves squeezed between a rock and a hard place by political interests and financial pressures – in a market that is too poor and overcrowded to sustain so many independent outlets (Likmeta, 2013).

Currently the total number of Albanian journalists is estimated to be around 5,000 (Lani, 2013). It is hard to find statistics on journalists’ education in Albania. According to a survey on *Informal Labor Practices in Albanian Media* (Union of Albanian Journalists, 2012), 33 percent of the respondents (n=334) actually had undergraduate degrees in journalism, followed by 29.6 percent with degrees in literature, and 37.4 percent in other disciplines.

Only 20.8 percent of the surveyed group held a postgraduate degree, while 11.2 percent declared that they had completed their secondary education only. These data confirm an increase in the number of journalists in the country – four times more compared to 13 years ago – and in their level of education (see Bejtja, Londo & Doksani, 2001). Becoming a journalist in Albania is not a difficult task. As one report states, you can graduate in agriculture and still immediately become a journalist in Albania (Londo, 2005b).

A number of reports investigating the media environment identify self-censorship as the main problem concerning journalists in Albania. The Balkan Media Barometer report (Lani, 2013) notes that political pressure has led to widespread self-censorship among journalists. One of the contributors to the report is quoted as saying, “each media outlet has a particular editorial line, closer to a particular political wing. This line sets invisible limits for journalists on what they can say and on what they cannot say.” (Lani, 2013: 14). Another participant in the discussion argues that “if you work in media no one forces you to say what you do not think, but they will not allow you to tell what you think” (Lani, 2013: 54). A report on ethics and

journalism in Albania (Udovicic, 2005b) confirms that in the Albanian media, all employees are generally very well informed regarding the political and business interests of media owners, and this in itself must suffice to affect their coverage, especially among young and insecure journalists. Self- censorship is also regarded as a rising issue in the Europe and Eurasia Media Sustainability Index (Stefani, 2012), where the panel concluded that self- censorship is already obvious and easily perceptible. “Self- censorship not only exists, but it is absolute and it is cemented now,” claims Lutfi Dervishi, a well- known media analyst in Albania. Freedom House describes self- censorship as “common” and something that “journalists see ... as a necessary precaution for keeping their jobs or advancing their careers” (Krohnholm, 2013). The main factors for the establishment and strengthening of self- censorship among Albanian journalists are both political and economic pressures. The report on ethics and journalists in Albania discloses that: influences and instructions from inside the media outlet, outside pressure and favors from political institutions or individuals combined with a financial dependency in an uncertain job market explain why and how self- censorship develops (Udovicic, 2005b:12). This report goes on to quote several journalists who admit to having been instructed by their media ownership to produce positive coverage for certain politicians or political parties. This need becomes even more pertinent in the case of elections. The Union of Albanian Journalists confirms that at the end of 2012 there were delays in the payment of salaries in about 92 percent of the media outlets surveyed (Lani, 2013). In their survey (2012), they found that only 42.3 percent of the respondents had employment contracts for the entire period 2008– 2011; 23.1 percent declared that they were partly covered by a contract during this period; and 31.6 percent declared that they work totally without a contract. The results signify a slight improvement in the working conditions of journalists compared to five years earlier (see Londo, 2007). While the number of journalists with working contracts has increased, the delay on payments of salaries for journalists in the country has also increased. Fear of losing their job reinforces the conformist attitude among journalists, hence the tendency to provide information on Albania that does not revolve around people and their problems, but around politicians, political parties, and their leaders (Stefani, 2012). What should be news offered to the public is a mere sum of statements and counter- statements of political representatives and press conferences, while genuine investigation is missing. Factors influencing this situation are related to the interests of media bosses linked to politics, the low number of journalists in newsrooms, and the inability to access information from institutions.

The organization of the reporting staff into beats reinforces the overwhelming presence of political voices in the news. In Albanian newsrooms, there is always at least one reporter that covers the government, one that covers the opposition party, and one that covers parliament. Furthermore, the task of covering the umbrella term “social issues” is usually delegated to only one reporter. As a result, social issues in Albania are eclipsed by political programs and politics in the news. In one month of monitoring television programs from the public broadcaster, educational and social issues did not even reach 2 percent (Londo, 2005a). This confirms the impact of organizing the reporting staff into beats, as identified by Fishman (1980) in his ethnographic study *Manufacturing the News*. In line with Fishman’s argument, this way of organizing work in the Albanian media legitimizes government sources where the journalists receive most of their news – and leads to a uniform way of presenting to the world. The consequence of the complex interplay between media ownership and politics creates a vicious circle of unprofessionalism among journalists (Udovicic, 2005b). This results in the legitimization of certain topics as relevant in the news, or certain actors as legitimate conveyers of information to journalists. As Schudson (1995) points out, news is produced by people who operate often unwittingly within a cultural system, as a reservoir of stored cultural meanings and patterns of discourse. It is organized by conventions of sourcing – who is a legitimate source, speaker, or conveyer of information to a journalist. These routine sources of information in a country like Albania, which is overwhelmed by politics, are politicians or leaders of institutions. This points to how issues of process and professionalism color the supposedly factual news while it focuses on only one section of reality, that of politics. A whole range of social issues and actors are left out as part of the hidden reality, not “qualifying” as news. The perfect example of this is children and their issues. As Nathanaili (2013) observes “all actors in Albania, including journalists have been ignoring children and child rights in the media. There is a big number of private operators that have been licensed from the Albanian Authority during all these years but none of them targets children.”

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter used the case of the representation of childhood in Albanian news to explore the potential of news to represent “what there is to see” in the social domain. Based on political

economy and social constructionism – as two traditions in the role of news in constructing social reality – this work provided insights on news content in Albania. Reports on the Albanian media landscape, monitoring news, the freedom of the press, and journalistic practices were analyzed. The role that gatekeepers – media owners, advertisers, and journalists – play in producing and filtering news stories was identified. The analysis showed that the complex interplay between media owners, advertisers, and journalists influences the overwhelming presence of politics and political voices in the news. The interference of private media owners in editorial policy, the dependency on state advertisement, journalists' conformist attitude, and organizational structures in newsrooms are the main factors to influence the overwhelming presence of politics in the Albanian news. These results confirm previous research conducted in Albania to assess the plurality of voices in the news and the freedom of press (Stefani, 2012 , 2013 ; Lani, 2013 ; Londo, 2005a , 2007). The results from our analysis are also in line with theories on the role of news in the social construction of reality. They support the views presented earlier on the role of news media in the social construction of reality (Kellner, 1990; Fishman, 1980 , 1982; Tuchman, 1972 , 1978), which highlight the impact that media owners, advertisers, and journalists have on news production and consequently on shaping the version of reality represented in the news. Based on these discussions, this chapter concludes that power structures in the Albanian media prevent social issues related to children from being represented in the news. Children and their issues become in this way part of the hidden reality that is rarely seen in the news, even though they constitute 30 percent of the entire population.

There are several limitations to this research arising from the complexity of both the media environment in Albania and childhood issues. We focused our analysis on secondary sources – reports on the Albanian media landscape; additional research and investigation based on primary sources is crucial to identify the abusive powers that exist within the media structure. Furthermore, the portrayal of children by the Albanian news media was used as an indicator of the representation of social issues in Albanian television news; the studies we reviewed lack an in- depth analysis on news content, focusing mostly on the topics covered or ethical issues. Our suggestion would be for further research to examine the potential of news to represent social life in all its diversity in Albania and investigate the role that media plays to reveal or reinforce issues of power and the positioning of children in society.

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Chapter 5

“The adult gaze”: exploring the representation of children in television news in Albania

This article presents an empirical exploration of television news items on children in Albania. While the preceding chapter argued that children and the issues affecting them are part of the hidden reality that is rarely seen in the news, this article provides empirical evidence that supports such claims. It is conceptualized around prime time news editions for three national television channels in Albania, over a period of three months, from October to December 2014. Thus, the focus is on news content.

In this article, the term “children” is used to refer to 0 to 14 year-olds. News on older children between the ages of 15 and 18 is not included in this article, as this age group has been defined as a separate social construct between childhood and adulthood, with distinctive features worthy of being studied on their own (Roberts, 2011). Considering the theoretical conceptualizations elaborated in the first part of this dissertation, this article emphasizes the role of television news media in constructing ideas and beliefs on children and childhood. Furthermore, it introduces the concept of the ‘adult gaze’, which refers to the ways in which children are represented in television news. It argues that news items on children are constructed in such a way as to reinforce the perspectives of adults. Three particular media approaches are identified in stories related to children. First, news items related to children are constructed from an adult perspective, they are designed with an adult audience in mind and they are constructed around an adult figure. Second, children are customarily filmed in a high-angle shot – as adults see them in real life. Third, stories related to children bring an adult voice to the issue that is being discussed, while leaving children in the background. All of these elements, when repeatedly used together in news items, contribute to a limited view of children and reinforce the dominant perspectives of adults on children as vulnerable and dependent. Hence this article addresses the first research question of this dissertation, which is concerned with the ways children are portrayed in television news media coverage.

The concept of the ‘adult gaze’ as presented in this article, is key to this dissertation because it further advances the theoretical and empirical inquiry on the representation of children in the news media. While the concept of *perspective* has been used previously in media theory when studying frames and framing effects (see Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999) the ways in which power relationships between the producer (and hence also the viewer) and the represented subject (in our case children) are enacted and the means through which they are articulated in the news media, remains unexplored. In this context, integrating the concept of ‘the gaze’ as an indicator of a relationship of power (see Mulvey, 1975) between the producer and the represented participant in the news media allows for an exploration of media mechanisms through which the power imbalances between adults and children are articulated, maintained and reproduced in and through television news.

For an overview of the coding book and registration forms that were used for media monitoring, please refer to Appendix 1. Additionally, different categories that were used for analysis are provided³⁹.

Reference

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³⁹This is a full version of the article as published with the Journal of Children and Media. No changes have been made.

“The adult gaze”: exploring the representation of children in television news in Albania

Abstract

This article investigates the portrayal of children in Albanian television news and introduces the term “adult gaze” to describe the construction of news items in such a way as to reinforce the perspectives of adults on children. Journalists choose to construct news items related to children by focusing the story around an adult figure, most often a politician, and giving his/her views on the issue being discussed, which points to unequal power relations between children and adults. A monitoring process over a period of three months was carried out for three national television channels. From a total of 4416 news items, 154 items were identified and were subject to further quantitative and qualitative content analyses. Based on our findings, news media portray children in limited roles as objects of emotional appeal, victims or performers. How news media think of and represent children can play a crucial role in shaping our perceptions of them and their positioning in society.

5.1. Introduction

Children in media have mostly been represented as objects rather than subjects (Cook, 2002). Throughout history, the tools and channels of communication have been controlled by adults. Therefore, children have suffered the indignity of being unable to present themselves as they would want to be seen or, indeed, of even considering how they might want to be seen (Holland, 2006).

This article seeks to reveal the power relations between children and adults by analyzing the representation of children in Albanian television news and journalistic choices that influence such representation. We take a constructionist approach, following Prout and James's (1997, p. 30) definition of childhood as a social construction: "as a variable and changing entity, which varies across history and culture, and is open to change, both intended and unintended." In this article, the term "children" is used to refer to the group aged 0–14 years. In Albania, this group shares similar experiences, stemming from the fact that they are exposed to the same educational environment. Crèches, kindergartens and primary schools, attended by children between the ages of 0–14, are usually found in the same building. This age group comprises 19.9% of the total population in Albania⁴⁰. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to research their representation in the news. When they "make it to the news," they are mostly seen in limited roles. Their voices are rarely heard, and instead, adults are always talking on their behalf. We argue that children must be seen as active participants in social life and not just passive subjects of social structures and processes (Prout & James, 1997).

In this article, the focus is on the portrayal and depiction of children in news items in Albania, a parliamentary republic, with a population of 2.8 million people. In addition to the public broadcaster (TVSH), there are two private national television channels, 71 private local television channels and 83 private cable television channels (AMA, 2014). The large number of media outlets in Albania is not a sufficient indicator of freedom of the press. Several reports in the country state that the government and different political parties do not own journalistic media, but nonetheless, they exercise control in other less obvious ways through the distribution of advertising to those media that support their policies (Lani, 2013; Likmeta, 2013). Furthermore, political issues are the main subject covered in news, eclipsing all social issues. A latest report⁴¹ of the Albanian Media Authority (AMA) on three national television channels – the public Broadcaster (TVSH) and two private channels (Top Channel and TV Klan) – shows that the time devoted to politics (news on the Prime Minister, government, parliament, political parties and political actors) is 51.02% on TVSH, 41.98% on Top Channel and 34.5% on TV Klan. On the other hand, the time devoted to social issues, for the same time period, is 15.17% on TVSH, 9.4% on Top Channel and 6.06% on TV Klan. Such data point to the high relevance of politics as news value in Albanian media.

⁴⁰<http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/population.aspx?tab=tabs-5>.

⁴¹<http://ama.gov.al/preview/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Koha-p%C3%ABr-tem%C3%ABn-elajmit-n%C3%ABp%C3%ABrqindjevetor.pdf>.

Moreover, television news is considered the most influential media in Albania (Kevin, Pellicano, & Scheenberger, 2013). Eighty-four per cent of Albanians get most of their news from television, while 73% of the population place their highest level of trust in TV news compared to other media (Nelaj, 2014). This ratio means that news media, especially television, have great potential to construct or reinforce different social concepts, inclusive of those related to children. The wider political context is also taken into account in this article, as it plays an immense role on how children are represented in the news (see Lemish & Götz, 2007). Undergoing a transitional process as a post-communist country, Albanian society is still experiencing social transformation. The communist ideology shifted the views on the involvement of children in society by constructing the idea of the so-called “child of the regime” who was uniformly educated with the communist ideology and primarily devoted to serve the nation (Kola, 2014). With the fall of communism, the place of children in society had to be redefined. The genre of news is considered to be an essential source of information that informs citizens on central issues and enables them to develop attitudes and beliefs (Van Dijk, 2008). In such a context, news media can play a powerful role in constructing an image of children and their positioning in society, through the redundant use of certain terms and images (Buckingham, 1999). The lack of a presence of children among general news coverage brings into question the role of media as agents in promoting democratic values and facilitating the ways children connect with society.

Specifically, we monitored the prime time editions of the public broadcaster TVSH and two national private television channels, Top Channel and TV Klan. According to AMA, these channels share more than 80% of the country’s territory (AMA, 2014). Following the Code of Broadcast of AMA, all television channels are obliged “to have a special focus on the rights, interests, moral and legal demands for the protection of children” throughout their programming. While the regulations are in place, there is no proper monitoring to determine if they are being taken into consideration. In this context, researching television news helps us understand how media in Albania present issues related to children, that is, how children are being portrayed and depicted and whether news media attribute any agency to them.

This article introduces the concept of “adult gaze,” which refers to the ways in which children are represented in television news. The term is borrowed from feminist studies (Mulvey, 1975), where the concept of “male gaze” was introduced to identify power asymmetries in film and the objectification of women. So far, the term adult gaze has mostly been used in

studies related to the socio-cognitive skills of children, referring to an infant's ability to follow the direction of an adult's eye gaze (see Brooks & Meltzoff, 2014; Farroni, Massaccesi, Pividori, & Johnson, 2004). As such, these studies are out of the scope of our research, which focuses on representation. On the other hand, Mulvey (1975) examined the representation of women in films, by analysing the narratives and the use of the camera. She argues that these two elements reflect underlying power asymmetries between men and women, which are reinforced by

the fact that men have the power of production in films. Our aim is to reveal the power relations between children and adults by analysing the representation of children in television news, therefore drawing parallels to Mulvey's study. In our case, the focus is on television news, i.e., factual information rather than fictional content. As two different media genres, film and news have different ways in which they are culturally defined, interpreted and evaluated. We take this into consideration when elaborating the concept of "adult gaze." We borrow the two conceptualising elements that Mulvey points out in her male gaze namely, the narratives and the camera. Accordingly, the concept is adapted in the news media's representation of children by adding a third element: the perspective of the news item. Hence, the analysis is focused on three elements: the perspective that is emphasised in the news item (e.g., who is quoted), the narratives of the news item and the camera angle. We use the term "adult gaze" as a way to delineate these approaches.

In the first element, the focus is on the voices that are quoted in the news, which are usually adult figures, politicians, parents or teachers. The second element, namely the narratives, analyses the use of words indicative of the status of children, such as minor, unprotected or infant. These words are used by adults to describe children, while children themselves rarely use them. Third, we argue that the camera's perspective on children is customarily a high-angle shot, following the ways adults see children in real life. As a result, this article argues that these three patterns, if often repeated in news items related to children, can reinforce an adult gaze that puts children in a vulnerable position.

The power asymmetries between adults and children have been previously explored by academics, researchers and advocates in the fields of psychology, traditional sociology and social policy (see Alanen & Mayall, 2001). This research is based on the concept of "adultism" as a way to describe and explain children's disadvantaged position within social life and their positioning within adult-centric research and paternalistic practices (LeFrancois,

2014). To our knowledge, this is the first research study that tries to unfold these asymmetries in the context of news media, while empirically showing evidence of the existence of such power asymmetries. Escaping the “adultist” assumptions in research on children and news media might be quite difficult, bearing in mind that research is initiated and carried out by adults themselves. Trying to reveal the power inequalities between adults and children as enacted in the news media, as our study tries to do, could be a step forward in this direction.

5.2. News media representations of children internationally

The representation of children in the news media has been analysed by several scholars (Buckingham, 1999; Carter, 2014; Livingstone, 2009; Ponte, 2007), trying to answer questions such as: Which are the hegemonic representations of children in the news? How do news media affect our views on children and their positioning in society? Answers to these questions are not easy as the concept of childhood is expected to be negotiated differently in different cultures and is open to continuous change (Prout & James, 1997). As Livingstone and Bulger (2013) notes, this task becomes even more difficult in the continuously changing and fast-developing information and communication technology environment that is reshaping children’s lives across the globe. The cases presented here were chosen because of their specific focus on the representation of children in the news and the fact that research was carried out in countries that might be referred to as “developing” as well as those that are “developed.”⁴² In this way, a broad international context is covered. Literature on the representation of children in the news shows that there are very few stories about them (Fullertone, 2004). Children are often absent in news, despite the fact that they constitute one of the major segments of the population. In 2013, the Media Monitoring Project Africa (Rikhotso, Morwe, Namumba, Kalu, & Singh, 2014) investigated the representation of children and children’s rights in the South African and Zambian news media. Results from the overall monitoring confirmed that children are under-represented in the news, accounting for only 10% in South Africa and 5% in Zambia, of all news items, even though they constitute 35% of the total population. ANDI (2009),⁴³ the News Agency for Children’s Rights, carried out an extensive news monitoring survey for the time period 2005–2007 in 12 countries in

⁴² These terms are used by different UN agencies to address the level of economic development of countries.

⁴³ ANDI is the Portuguese acronym standing for: Agência de Notícias dos Direitos da Infância (ANDI).

Latin America. The survey results indicated insufficient commitment on the part of news organisations to represent children and issues affecting them. Long-term monitoring (1970–2000) of Portuguese newspapers (Ponte, 2007) concluded that exclusion of children from headlines was a common trend in all newspapers. Research on the representation of Palestinian children and the Intifada across six news outlets in the USA, UK, Israel and Qatar (Aqtashi, Seif, & Seif, 2004) found that children and young people tend to be either absent from world events or used in news for signification purposes in discourses of violence and conflict, which are tightly controlled by adults. Furthermore, research carried out in Asia (Goonasekera, 2001) on the presence and portrayal of children in 13 Asian countries highlights the absence of children in news compared to other topics.

When children are part of news, they tend to be given limited roles. Carter (2014) notes that children's images are frequently used to symbolise the brutality of war, famine and genocide in adult news, arouse adults' sympathy and humanise events. In the words of Moeller (1999), "children make ideal victims" (p. 107). Children tend to be framed within discourses of violence and conflict and thus in discursive terms do not exist outside these frames (Aqtashi et al., 2004). Goonasekera (2001) found that children are mostly pictured as victims and unfortunates in news stories that carry sensational or tragic elements. One of the findings that reappears in research on children is the absence of their voices. They are rarely given a voice of their own, and their views do not really matter (Carter et al., 2009; Ponte & Aroldi, 2013). As a result, little is known regarding the ways in which children make sense of the events happening around them.

Assigning limited roles to children in the news, while leaving them voiceless, imposes certain constructs on children as being naive, dependent and in need of protection (Carter, 2014). This affects the positioning of children in society. Altheide (2002) assessed the content of three main newspapers (the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times* and the *Arizona Republic*) and ABC news reports for the time period 1987–1996. He argues that the redundancy of associated use of the words children, school and fear in news reports may cause their meanings to overlap, and in turn, they may be accepted and used by people in various social situations. The discourse of fear as related to children and their protection occurring in the news can contribute to stances and reactive social policies that promote state control and surveillance of children.

A concerning issue related to the representation of children in the news is the tendency of government representatives, or politicians in general, to include children in their discourses as a way of increasing public empathy. ANDI (2009) found that during the election period, coverage of children's issues surpassed that of the general coverage of children in the news. Morrow and Mayal (2009) state that government representatives have a growing tendency to "value children in terms of future human capital [becoming] over the present [being]" (p. 219). The same conclusion was reached by Ponte (2007) in her longitudinal research (30 years) in which she found that ideas of children as the country's future are often repeated. Considering children as "the future" has implications on their present situation. It permits politicians to shift the attention from actual problems and to avoid addressing fundamental issues that children are facing.

In Albania, little attention has been paid to researching the representation of children in the news, and research has only focused on newspapers (Sulce, 2014; Unicef, 2008, 2010). Their findings are in line with research conducted worldwide. Insufficient coverage of children in press prevails, although there is an increase of news items related to them. Sulce (2014) states that editorials about children in the press are nonexistent. Additionally, Londo (2005) found that there was no news on children throughout the 16 news editions monitored. Furthermore, Dizdari (2013) by analysing seven newspapers on topics of human rights found that children's rights issues were the least represented, with 3 articles in a sample of 78 news articles.

The existing literature on children and media focuses mostly on newspapers, and only a small part of it examines the representation of children in television news. This could be related to the fact that television news, besides being the most influential media in Europe (Kevin et al., 2013), is also the most complex medium to be analysed (Selby & Cowdery, 1995). On the other hand, television is reported to be the favourite place for news, both for adults and children (Carter et al., 2009; Nelaj, 2014). As such, it deserves primary attention. In addition, studies on the representation of children in the news lack empirical evidence on how power relations between children and adults are enacted in the news coverage. This paper tries to fill this gap by presenting solid examples on how television news reinforces adult perspectives in the ways children are represented. Furthermore, the paper seeks to account for the portrayal of children in TV news by analysing journalistic choices such as sources that are quoted, words used to describe children and images of children selected for broadcast, all of which influence the ways children are represented.

5.3. Methodology

5.3.1. Procedure

Data for this study were gathered from a series of prime time news editions for three national television channels in Albania, over a period of three months, October–December 2014. The public broadcaster, TVSH, and two national private channels, Top Channel and TV Klan, were chosen based on their extensive coverage and audience share (see Introduction). In total, 276 prime time editions were monitored. Data were gathered using web pages for TV Klan and Top Channel. Their prime time news editions are posted on a daily basis, as they appear in the actual broadcast, unedited. All news editions during our monitoring time frame were downloaded and saved for further analysis. We recorded the prime time news editions of the public broadcaster TVSH using the digital platform Tring, which made it possible to record and capture content for later analysis. The sample was subjected to a systematic analysis used to identify stories with a primary focus on children, aged 0–14 years, and/or child-related issues. Fourteen was chosen as the upper age limit, even though, according to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (Unicef, 1989), childhood is defined as the life stage from birth to 18 years. News on young people between the ages of 15–18 is not included in our analysis, as this age group has been defined as a separate social construct between childhood and adulthood with distinctive features worthy of being studied on their own (Roberts, 2011). A total of 154 news items were identified and further analysed. The unit of our analysis is the news item.

5.3.2. Coding and measurements

A coding guide and registration form were developed to ensure uniformity in the selection and in the analytical choices. A total of 28 variables were elaborated to better capture all aspects of the news items. These variables described characteristics of news items on three different levels. The first level focused on the presentation characteristics of the news item: title, section and presence in the headlines. The second level focused on the content characteristics of the news item, including variables such as topic of the news item, direct and

indirect quotations, specific categories of children that the news item refers to⁴⁴ and place where the event was recorded. The last level focused more in depth on the characteristics of children as subjects in the news items. It comprises variables such as gender, age, positioning of children, their function in the news items and labelling of children. The research design consists of a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analyses. The quantitative findings are further elaborated and illustrated by means of a more in-depth qualitative content analysis of the selected news items. In this study, we follow Krippendorff's (2004) components of content analysis and apply them to our sample. According to him, "researchers conducting content analysis have to observe whether communications constitute new patterns, strengthen what has been said before through repetition, or weaken a pattern by omission or attention to alternatives" (p. 72). Furthermore, quantitative content analysis is employed to explore the patterns and characteristics of the representation of children and issues affecting them. It is used as a way of measuring the number of favourable and unfavourable characteristics attributed to children, taken to indicate the beliefs held by the producers, the audience or their common culture (Krippendorff, 2004). Additionally, we focus the qualitative analysis on the lexical choices of journalists when naming and referring to children (Richardson, 2007). Richardson states that "the manner in which social actors are named identifies not only group(s) that they are associated with, it can also signal the relationship between the namer and the named" (p. 49). By investigating this relationship, we expose existing ideologies on the ways children are represented and unfold power relations between children and adults as enacted in the news. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data can become a valuable tool for news analysis, as it allows for the quantification of the recurring patterns necessary to substantiate qualitative insights and for valuable generalisations concerning the implications of such choices (Kalyango & Kopytowska, 2014).

The quantitative analysis was carried out using SPSS Statistics 21. A critically composed sample of 20 articles was tested for coder reliability with an outcome of Cohen's kappa values ranging from .863 to 1.00 for all variables. All reported results are significant at a $p \leq .05$ level unless indicated otherwise.

⁴⁴Categories included: children of ethnic/language minorities; children with disabilities; children without parental care (in institutions or not); children in street situations; children living in extreme poverty; children isolated in blood feuds; and children in contact with the law.

5.3.3. Research questions

Data analysis was conducted in view of the following three key research questions that emerged from the literature review discussed above:

RQ1: To what extent are children and issues affecting them represented in news items?

RQ2: In which roles/functions are children portrayed in news items?

RQ3: Does news attribute agency to children? (Are their voices heard in news items?)

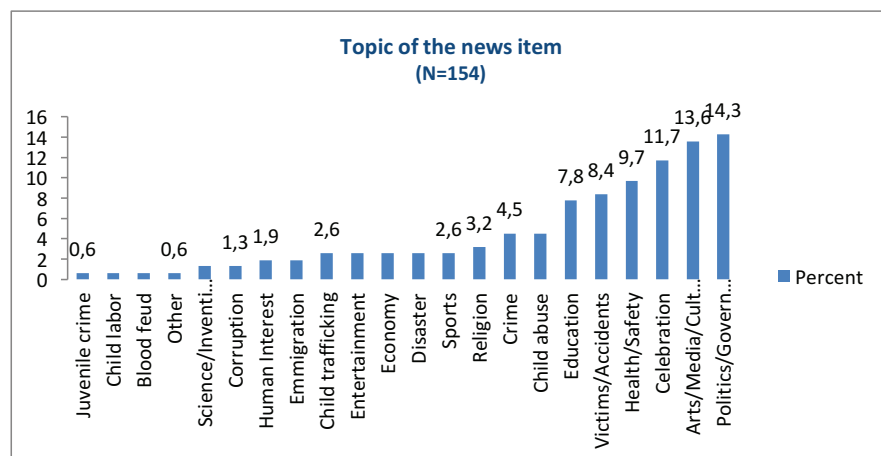
With RQ1, we sought to understand the motives that inform the presence of children or their issues in the news. RQ2 was aimed at exploring the roles that are given to children in the news and to uncover the journalistic choices used to assign these roles to children. Finally, RQ3 reflected our interest in examining the ways in which children's actions and their interactions with adults are presented in news media.

5.4. Results

5.4.1. Presence of children and issues affecting them in television news (RQ1)

We identified 154 news items related to children or their issues from a total of 4416 news items during the monitoring period October–December 2014. This sample comprises 3.4% of the total number of news items on three national television channels. On the basis of findings from previous research (Dizdari, 2013; Sulce, 2014), which conclude that is difficult to find news on children in Albanian news media, we decided to monitor this time frame in order to have a sufficient sample for analysis, having in mind that it coincides with the beginning of the new academic year and several events in which children are more likely to be subjects of news items. Graph 1.1 shows the topics that are most often present in news related to children. These topics refer to the main subjects being discussed in the news items. The exhaustive list of topics was developed from a process of reviewing studies on news media in Albania (Londo, 2005; Sulce, 2014) and studies on the representation of children in the news conducted worldwide (ANDI, 2009; Carter, 2014; Ponte, 2007; Rikhotso et al., 2014). The top three topics are politics/government comprising 14.3%, arts/media/culture at 13.6% and

celebration⁴⁵ at 11.7%. Other important topics are health/safety at 9.7% and victims/accidents at 8.4%. In total, we developed 22 categories of possible topics related to children in the news. The percentage of news items belonging to politics/government could be considered



Graph 1.1. Topics of the news items.

quite high. This could be explained by the fact that the nature of the Albanian news media is and politics in Albania emphasise the overwhelming presence of the latter as a result of media owners' involvement in politics (Marku, 2012).

The category politics/government includes all news items in which the focus is political issues, government decisions, elections, speeches of political actors addressing children's issues or politicians' attendance at events with children. In 37 cases ($N = 154$), the news concerned politicians participating in events with children. These news items have titles such as "Basha [Tirana's mayor] inaugurates Christmas tree, together with orphan children" (TVSH, 06 December) and "Rama [Prime

Minister], support for children of police officers killed on duty" (TV Klan, 24 December).

These news stories are constructed around politicians, leaving out of the news edition a whole

⁴⁵This category was added when re-organising data in order to make the analysis more explicit, as our monitoring period coincided with important holidays, such as Albania's Independence Day, Christmas and the New Year's celebrations.

range of other voices and social issues. This is a culture that is being increasingly reinforced among media professionals in Albania, influenced by the affiliations of media and politics as well as journalistic routines in the newsrooms⁴⁶.

Several cases were identified where different political actors used children for purely political reasons. In a flagrant case, “Basha in Elbasan, denounces the government” (15 November, TV Klan, Top Channel), the leader of the main opposition party, in one of his political tours, is shown to grab the microphone and hug a crying child who was describing the horror she witnessed when police officers violently entered her house. The politician is also shown crying after hearing the girl’s story and asking the cameras not to film the child.

Notwithstanding, journalists revealed that this news item was shot and sent to television channels by the press office of the opposition party itself. None of the media was allowed to attend these meetings. This can be easily verified by watching the news items on the three monitored channels and seeing that they contain the exact same images, quotations and text.

In several news items, politicians use discourses of “children as the future,” “children as the most important actors in the country” and “children in need of protection.”⁴⁷ All of these discourses reflect and reinforce ideas of children’s limited status in society.

The second category, arts/media/culture (13.6%), refers to news events in films, television shows, theatre and other media. The high percentage of news items in this category is related solely to the promotion of a talent show for children that was running during the monitoring period.⁴⁸ Events that relate to arts/media/culture, outside of self- promotion, are difficult to find.

The third category, celebration (11.7%), refers to news events that feature children celebrating festive days, mostly related to their age group. Based on our monitoring, children and issues affecting them become more visible in the news during certain days that are especially related to them, such as Christmas, New Year’s and the International Day of Children’s Rights.

⁴⁶ In television channels that were monitored, in total, there were 11 journalists who covered politics and only 4 who covered the section for social issues.

⁴⁷ “Rama: Caring for them until they can ‘face life’ themselves,” 24 November 2014, Top Channel.

⁴⁸ “*Gjeniu i vogël* [Little Genius],” TV Klan.

The monitoring clearly demonstrates that issues related directly to children's rights and well-being are less covered in the news. Child labour received only .6% of the coverage, child trafficking received 2.6% and child abuse received 4.6%. Other topics that are naturally related to children, like entertainment and sports, counted for 2.6% each.

Thirty-eight news items ($N = 154$) related to children were part of the headlines. Most of these items belonged to the category of politics/government. Six stories belonged to the categories of child abuse, child trafficking and crime, whereas only 1 out of 16 stories related to celebration, entertainment and sport "made it" to the headlines. Headlines are used as a tool to attract viewers by posting them on the online platforms of television channels prior to the news edition. As such, they aim at stories that can elicit viewers' emotions (Moeller, 1999). Moreover, news items related to children are most often broadcast in the last five minutes of the news programme, which is usually 35–40-min long. Considering the selection criteria applied when ordering news items for broadcast – from the most important to the least important – based on a hierarchy of news (see Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), this ranking is a clear indicator of the inferior positioning of issues affecting children compared to other topics.

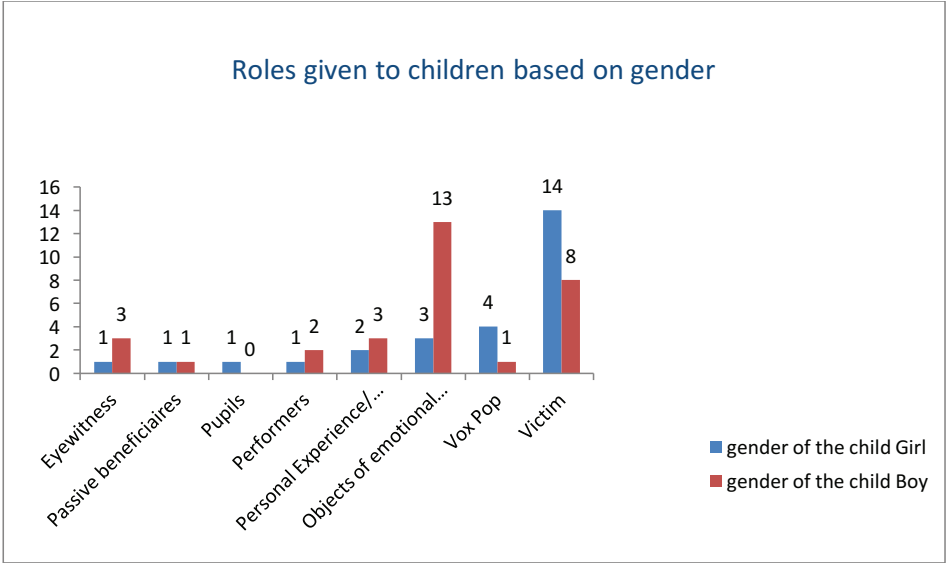
5.4.2. In which roles/functions are children portrayed in the news? (RQ2)

The results show that news media mostly see children in limited roles, either as objects of emotional appeal or as victims. These two roles combined accounted for 48.7% of all items. The first category, children as objects of emotional appeal, refers to the news items where children appear, but they do not take any actions or do not have any say about the issue that is being discussed. In this category, the news is constructed around an adult figure. The second category, children as victims, refers to news items where children are portrayed as victims of their own actions and actions undertaken by other people or in cases of natural disasters. In addition to these two categories, children are also given roles as performers⁴⁹ (14.3%) and passive beneficiaries⁵⁰ (13%).

⁴⁹ Refers to news items where children are featured in performances like dancing, reciting and fashion parades.

⁵⁰ Refers to news items where children are featured as beneficiaries of actions undertaken by other people, the government, political actors, celebrities or charity initiatives.

News items where children are portrayed as victims have titles that aim at eliciting viewers’ emotions. “Sexual scandal with the orphans. The prosecution to start investigations” and “Librazhd, the infant dies in crèche” are two examples. A flagrant case of a title where children are portrayed as victims belongs to the news item, “ISIS massive shootings and killings. Men, women and children are executed” (2nd of November, Top Channel), which was part of the headlines of the news edition. Even though the title mentions children, in the news item, the quoted source specifically says that there were 50 men and women killed, but there were no children. When children were portrayed as victims, their full identity details (name, age, picture, gender, etc.) were given in three news items and only their pictures were given in 12 news items. Even though the Code of Broadcast in Albania



Graph 2.1. Roles given to children in news items based on gender.

(2014) clearly states that “when children are victims none of their identity details shall be revealed” (p. 9), this guidance is not respected.

An excellent example of the third category, children as performers, is the item “Halloween celebrated in Albania, adults wear masks, children parade” (TV Klan, 01 November). Here, images of children, girls and boys aged 5–8 years in fancy dresses and costumes, wearing

makeup and parading in front of an adult audience are used as a way to normalise ideas of children as performers (see Holland, 2006). Graph 2.1 shows that the roles given to children in the news differ by gender. Girls are mostly portrayed as victims (Girls, 37%; Boys, 21%). Boys are portrayed as objects of emotional appeal (Boys, 34%; Girls, 7%). This could be explained by the fact that “son preference” is still a distinctive feature in Albania. A report on sex selective abortion (UNFPA, 2012) confirmed that parents prefer to have boys at birth. They are perceived to be a source of protection and support for the family. From this perspective, boys are seen as objects, rather than subjects, as property of their own family and a successor of its values and are accordingly represented in the news media.

In an abounding number of news items, 108 out of 154 (70.1%), children are present with pictures and images. Journalists also include their images in news items that are not exclusively related to children. “The Mediterranean diet against obesity”⁵¹ (17 November 2014) and “Pristina coloured red and black for celebrations of the Independence Day” (28 November 2014)⁵² are just two of the many examples that were found. One news item that demonstrates how children are used as “just images” was the case of a five-year-old girl (Top Channel, 03 December 2014) who was kept in custody at a police station, longer than eight hours, while her mother was being interrogated. In this news item, a member of the opposition party is quoted accusing the Ministry of Interior of violating the child’s rights. While the response of the Ministry and the persistence of the opposition produced five other news items in the following days,⁵³ in all of them, the picture and the identity of the child were used to make accusations and counter-accusations by main political parties, while neither the child nor her mother were quoted or interviewed in any of these news items.

There is a preference for high-angle shots in news items where images of children appear (Graph 2.2). The decision over which camera angle to use is very important because it affects our response to the subject (Selby & Cowdery, 1995). This way of filming children connotes

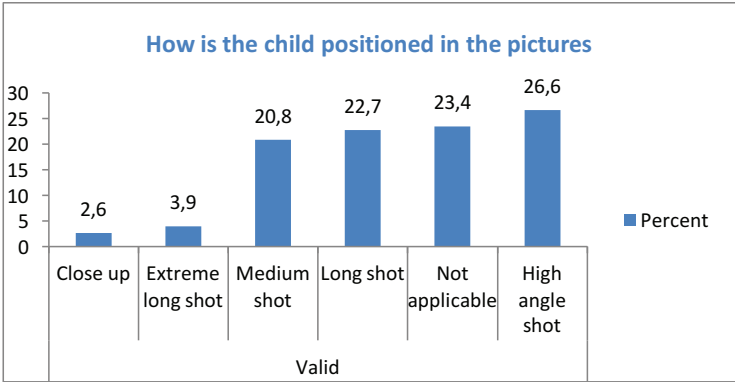
⁵¹ Images of an obese child while playing.

⁵² The camera focuses on twin boys around two years old, each of them wearing half a flag on his shirt, and they are put together in such a way as to create the whole flag.

⁵³ Top Channel, 03 December; TV Klan, 03 December; Top Channel, 04 December; TVSH, 03 December; and TVSH, 04 December.

vulnerability and being dominated: In a high-angle shot, the camera looks down at the subject which inevitably makes the viewer feel more powerful than the subject being shown, we feel like an adult looking down on a child. We may also feel pity for the subject depending on the nature of the context. (Selby & Cowdery, 1995: 51). Strangely enough, a high-angle shot camera is never used in news items featuring politicians or other public figures who have a stature similar to that of a 12-year old, as an example. Furthermore, the usage of high-angle shots is mostly combined with the setting in a way as to strengthen the idea of children as vulnerable and dependant. An example of that is a news item on child labour in which images of a child next to a pile of garbage are shown in a high-angle shot (Top Channel, 30 November 2014).

Overall, the presence of the adult gaze in news items is found in the choices of journalists to construct news items while having in mind an adult audience, which is reflected in the use of children’s images as a way to appeal to adults’ feelings. Children are used in this way to



Graph 2.2. The positioning of the camera/shot size when filming children.

influence the views of adults, taking into consideration that news items monitored for this research belong to the prime time news, which are mostly believed to address an adult audience.

Furthermore, the adult gaze is strengthened by the use of high-angle shots when filming children, which is the way adults see them in real life. Presenting to the audience views that

are closer to the ways they see things in life encourages them to relate better to that specific representation, which in turn enhances the chances for the news media to establish themselves as trustworthy sources of information.

5.4.3. Does news attribute agency to children? (Are their voices heard in news items?)(RQ3)

In the context of news items, Davies (2003) defines children's agency as "their ability to control the action." This could be traced in the communication processes, in particular in the interactions between different actors, journalists, children and adults participating in the events. An important factor to be highlighted here is the presence of children's voices in news items and their perspectives on the issues that are being presented.

In 70.1% ($N = 154$) of the news items, children were not central to the news items,⁵⁴ even though they appeared in them. By central, we refer to the content framing of the news item – aspects of the news items that are selected to be emphasised in the story (Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2009). The centrality of children in the news items is dependent on the variable "age" ($p = .04$). The more the age increases, the more that children become central to the news item. This means that they are considered more newsworthy as they approach adulthood.

The variable "this news item clearly sets adults as a standard from which to judge children" gets "agree" as an answer in 77.3% ($N = 154$) of cases. We measure this variable by noting down any reference made to children from an adult perspective. We put "agree" as an answer if the news item uses terms such as little and minor or other words indicative of children's status compared to adults. The word "minor" was used repeatedly in 34 news items ($N = 154$) to describe children. Used as an adjective, it refers to: (1) lesser, as in size, extent, or importance, or being or noting the lesser of two, (2) not serious, important, etc., (3) having low rank, status, position (Hornby & Turnbull, 2010).

Adults are quoted in 80.5% ($N = 154$) of the news items. Children are quoted in only 9.7% ($N = 154$). Two or more adults are quoted in 35.7% of the news items, whereas two or more

⁵⁴ We consider children central to the story if the issue is directly linked to children as main subjects and this is emphasised in the news item and/or if a child or group of children presents their own views on it.

children are quoted in only 3.9%. There is no significant difference among the three television channels with respect to quoting children ($p = .599$).

A specific case that elucidates the journalistic logic for including children in news is “Children in Yzberisht: We also sacrifice our lives for our country!”.⁵⁵ The interview goes as follows:

Journalist: What is more precious to you, your life or the country?

Child [boy, around nine years old]: The country!

Journalist: Why?

Child: I would give everything to protect it!

Based on the question that is being posed by the journalist – putting the child between two limited choices – it is easy to expect the answer that would better please the journalist or the public. In this case, we clearly see that even when children are quoted in news items, their voices are used to serve as a decorative element for enriching the idea that the journalist wants to get through, rather than having them express what they really feel.

Graph 3.1 describes the voices of adults that are most often found in the news items. The top five are governmental sources (14.9%), experts/specialists (11%), politicians (10.4%), institutional sources (7.8%) and vox pop (9%) ($N = 154$). In total, the number of political voices in the news, including the Prime Minister, comprises 29.2% ($N = 154$), outnumbering all other voices.

⁵⁵ This news item describes the celebrations on the Independence Day of Albania (28 November) and was part of the main news edition in the public broadcaster, TVSH.



Graph 3.1. Actors directly quoted in news items related to children.

A news item that sheds light on the ways adults, especially politicians, use children as part of their discourse, while attributing no agency to them, is “The young age of Albanians – a challenge. Trafficking children – a problem” (TVSH, 20 November 2014). The news is about a joint meeting of the Ministry of Education and Youth and UNICEF on the International Day of Children’s Rights. The motto of the meeting was “listen to the voice of children.” Both the minister and the representative of UNICEF are quoted as saying phrases on the importance of the voice of children being heard. No child is actually quoted in the news item; they just listen to the adults speaking.

The three categories discussed above: constructing news items around an adult figure, setting adults as a standard from which to judge children and bringing adults’ voices into news items related to children, all contribute to establishing an adult gaze regarding the ways in which children are represented in news items.

5.5. Conclusion

This article identified patterns in television news coverage of children and child-related issues in Albania. The focus here was on the role that television news plays in the ways children are

represented. Three particular media approaches have been identified in stories related to children. We introduced the term “adult gaze” as a way to delineate these approaches. First, news items related to children are constructed from an adult perspective, having in mind an adult audience and around an adult figure. Second, children are customarily filmed in a high-angle shot – as adults see them in real life. Third, stories related to children bring an adult voice to the issue that is being discussed, while leaving children in the background. All of these elements, when repeatedly used together in news items, contribute to a limited view of children and reinforce the dominant perspectives of adults on children as vulnerable and dependant (see Davies & Mosdell, 2005). Overall, we find that the representation of children in television news reinforces an adult gaze, which, to put it in Holland’s (2006, p. 10) words, has a dual nature of power and pleasure. When children are represented as victims or objects of emotional appeal, news media labels them as minor, unprotected and dependent, which points to power relations between children and adults.

When children are represented as performers, news media highlights their innocence and uncorrupted nature, pointing out the pleasure that adults receive when watching them. Based on our findings, politicians in Albania are the main actors in news items related to children. Our monitoring covered a non-election period, challenging the notion from previous research suggesting that these phenomena are more visible during election periods. This pressing issue is related specifically to the Albanian context in which there is an overwhelming presence of politics and political voices in the news as a result of strong political affiliations of media owners (Lani, 2013). This recurrent pattern clearly suggests that children become newsworthy as long as politicians celebrate special days with children or visit schools and kindergartens.

The number of news items where children are main actors and present their own views on the issue that is being discussed is very limited. Therefore, the ways in which children make sense of the reality surrounding them remain unknown. These findings are in line with previous research on representation of children in the news (ANDI, 2009; Carter, 2014; Goonasekera, 2001; Ponte & Aroldi, 2013; Rikhotso et al., 2014). They suggest that children are citizens-in-waiting. Once they enter the realm of adulthood, they are “legitimate” to have a voice or express their views on events happening around them. As Carter (2014) put it, “In positions of greater social, cultural, and economic power, adults have created a society in which children are largely dependent upon adults to meet their needs. Adults therefore tend to occupy powerful positions in relation to children” (p. 1984). Such a view on children reinforces the

power imbalances between them and adults, making children more vulnerable, while denying them full participation in public life.

Critical perspectives on the portrayal of children in news media inspire debates on the ways they are encouraged to participate in public life, while offering children a voice of their own. Media professionals could influence debates on children's rights, public policies and children's positioning in society. As a result, this would contribute to the strengthening of children's sense of belonging in society and the role of media as agents in promoting democratic values and citizenship.

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Chapter 6

Journalists' and news editors' views on children as news subjects in Albanian media

Exploring issues of newsworthiness and self-censorship

The second article focuses on journalists' and news editors' views on children. The aim is to further explore the role that media professionals play in shaping the ways in which ideas and beliefs on children are constructed by television news outlets. Even though this article does not explore the news production process as such, accounting for the views of journalists and news editors on children and exploring the decision-making processes in newsrooms, provides valuable insights on important aspects of the production process. Furthermore, findings from this article have to be understood in relation to the context of the news media in Albania, which was thoroughly explained in chapter 4.

Investigating media professionals' views on children serves two purposes: First, to reveal how dominant ideologies on children in society underpin the views and practices of media professionals related to children. Second, to consider more precisely how these views (in turn) impact, transform and reproduce specific representations [of children] in the news media (see Howarth 2011; Hall 1997). Additionally, by investigating the views of media professionals on children, I want to further elaborate on the concept of the 'adult gaze' as presented in the preceding chapter. The quality of children's coverage in media (chapter 5) is taken as an indicator of the socially determined beliefs on children as social actors that are also shared among media professionals that want to see their work disseminated. In fact, the notions of children as being ineffectually newsworthy or untrustworthy stand-alone sources when compared to adults, was reflected in the opinions of most journalists and news editors. I argue that these views on children confirm the existence of the 'adult gaze' among news media

professionals. According to this concept, journalists and news editors set adults as the standard by which to judge children. As a result, children are prevented from meaningfully participating in news media coverage. Hence, the second research question of this dissertation, regarding the role media professionals play in shaping the ways children are portrayed in television news, is addressed.

By investigating the views of media professionals, this article explores the representation of children in television news coverage from a complementary angle to that of news content – as employed in the preceding study. As such the findings presented in this article contribute to a further understanding on the role of the news media in the social construction of childhood.

For an overview of the interview guides, list of interviewees and the transcripts of the interviews (in Albanian), please refer to Appendix 2⁵⁶.

Reference

Kaziaj, E. (2016c). Journalists' and news editors' views on children as news subjects in Albanian media. Exploring issues of newsworthiness and self-censorship. (*In revision*), *Journal of Applied Journalism and Media Studies*.

⁵⁶ This is a full version of the article as submitted to Journal of Applied Journalism and Media Studies. No changes have been made.

Journalists' and news editors' views on children as news subjects in Albanian media

Exploring issues of newsworthiness and self-censorship

Abstract

This article explores the views of journalists and news editors on children in Albania, through a series of interviews with noted media professionals. This study finds that stories about children are not considered as newsworthy and children are mostly seen as unreliable stand-alone sources. As a mechanism to mitigate the risks of being refused by their editors, journalists increase the newsworthiness of children-focused news items by directing the story towards adults (mostly politicians) and by quoting them. Considering children's perspectives in news coverage is essential, as it contributes to a social order that acknowledges children's agency.

Keywords: journalists, television news, children, self-censorship, Albania, newsworthiness

6.1. Introduction

The premise that journalists play a significant role in the ways different issues are presented to the public was identified early on by many scholars researching the role of journalistic practices in the social construction of reality. According to Fishman, 'news stories, if they reflect anything, reflect the practices of journalists' (1997: 211). More recently in their book *Gatekeeping theory*, Shoemaker & Vos (2009) classified journalists as the first category of gatekeeping in their levels of analysis. According to them 'a journalist who deems the event sufficiently newsworthy, allows it to pass the first gate by creating or directing the creation of a message that begins its way through the media organization' (p.23). Consequently, it is assumed that stories that are not considered to be newsworthy by journalists will be absent from media coverage and will not receive the public's attention. Perfect examples of this are

children and the issues affecting them. Children are often absent from news coverage and there are very few stories about them (Fullertone 2004). One of the findings that appears often in research on children and news coverage is that children are rarely given a voice of their own, and their views have little importance (Ponte & Aroldi 2013; Carter et al., 2009). As a result, little is known regarding the ways in which children make sense of the events happening around them.

This article explores the views of journalists and news editors in Albania, on children and the issues affecting them, respectively as news subjects and topics. The goal is to explore these views as they are articulated by media professionals and investigate how they are embedded in journalistic practices. The term ‘children’ is used to refer to the age group 0–18 years, following the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1989). This study is part of a bigger research project titled *Children in television news: A multi-method research of the portrayal and reception of children in Albanian television news*. A previous study conducted in this framework monitored the portrayal of children in three national television channels in Albania. Findings from the previous study (see Kaziaj, 2016) showed that stories about children comprised only 3.4 per cent of the total news items broadcast during a three month-period on three national television channels. Additionally, three particular media patterns were identified in news items related to children. First, news items were constructed around an adult figure and from an adult perspective while keeping an adult audience in mind. Second, children were customarily filmed in a high-angle shot; as adults see them in real life. Third, journalists mostly chose to quote adults in stories related to children. All these elements, when repeatedly used together in news items, contribute to a patronizing view on children and reinforce the dominant adult perspective of children being dependent and in need of protection. The term ‘adult gaze’ was used as a way to delineate these approaches and it will be further investigated in this article.

Taking this context into consideration, our focus for this article will be to explore journalistic views and practices that prevent children, and the issues affecting them, from being covered in the news media. By presenting these views, debate on the role of media in constructing a social reality, which is inclusive to all actors and voices, can be incited. Focusing on children as one of the vulnerable groups in Albania society, and calling for more media attention is crucial, while keeping in mind that media outlets are the central agents in the advancement of children’s rights and in fostering their well-being in democratic societies (Carter 2014).

First, the context of media realities in Albania will be presented in order to demonstrate how the specificities of this context have an impact on reporting choices that involve the coverage of children, a discussion that informs the findings of the study. Subsequently, studies on the views of journalists on children are examined, aiming to exploring how these views influence the quality of children's coverage in news. Finally, findings from the interviews with journalists and news editors are presented.

6.2. Current Albanian (news) media context

Albania has developed a rich media context in the last years. According to data published from the Albanian Media Authority, in the country of a little more than 2.8 million inhabitants, there are 71 private local television channels, two private national television channels, and one public broadcaster (TVSH) currently operating. Eight of these are news channels⁵⁷ (Kevin et al., 2013), all of which are privately owned and freely available in most of the country's territory. Most of the other television channels have regular news editions. Albania is second in Europe in terms of the number of news channels offered, behind Turkey who is in first place. This is an impressive ranking, especially when taking into consideration the population of Turkey, which is 26 times larger than the population of Albania. Other neighbouring countries, such as Macedonia and Kosovo, each have one news channel.

With this abundance of outlets, one would expect a wide range of topics to be covered in news and other programs, and for the media to reflect the diverse voices of its society, however this is not the case. Reports monitoring Albanian media outlets confirm that political issues are the main subjects covered in the news, eclipsing all social issues (Lani 2013; Londo 2005). This is related to the fact that Albanian media is largely defined by the nature of its media owners, who in most cases, are the only financial source allowing for these media outlets to exist (Marku 2012). As such, they establish and influence the editorial policy of their own media and use it to advance their own interests, which are often related to politics. Some media owners have become rich, mainly through privileges obtained by the government in the processes of tenders and the privatization of different public assets. This collection of riches results in media owners who are indebted to the government or political parties, and

⁵⁷ TV "Ora", ABC news, A1 report, News 24, UTV Education, TV Scan, Channel 1, Neser TV.

thus willing to wield their media outlets for political influence (Stefani 2012). As a result, the agenda of news outlets, its ordering, selection and sourcing, is very close to the agenda of the government or politics in general (Londo 2005). This leaves less space for topics of social relevance, particularly issues covering children.

Furthermore, newsroom-staff members are often organized in such a way as to reflect the favouritism towards politics in Albanian media. Journalists that were interviewed for this study revealed that in the newsrooms where they work, at least four journalists are assigned to cover only politics, which comprises news from the prime minister's office, the main opposition party, parliament and different ministries, while the task of covering social issues – which is an umbrella term for issues related to education, health and social services, including those of children – is usually delegated to only one reporter.

There is no estimation of the total number of journalists working for television channels in Albania due to the lack of formal contracts in many media outlets (Union of Albanian Journalists 2012). A latest report on Albania published by the Balkan Investigative Report Network (BIRN), states that the combination of 'the economic and political interests of media owners,' 'lack of physical security' and 'lack of job security' are the main factors that push journalists toward self-censorship, which is a widespread phenomenon among media professionals in Albania (Halo et al., 2015).

6.3. Literature review

The literature on children and news shows that children are mostly considered as newsworthy in stories triggered by a tragic element (Carter 2014; Holland 2006; Davies 2003; Goonasekera 2001; Moeller 1999). Within this dominant frame of the vulnerable victim they are included in discourses of (distant) suffering (Joye 2009; Chouliaraki 2008, 2006; Moeller 2002) as 'the image of an endangered child is the perfect 'grabber' (Moeller 2002, 39). Hence, most research on journalists and children is concentrated around general ethical obligations of journalists while reporting on children (Mackay 2008; Fullertone 2004; Goddard & Saunders 2000; Moeller 1999). This has also been the case for the scarce research studies conducted in Albania that have mostly dealt with the 'misuse' of children in print media (see Sulce 2014; UNICEF 2008,2010). However few studies, which will be extensively

discussed below, have specifically examined journalists' decision-making processes for considering children as news subjects or news sources. This body of research is mainly carried out in North America while in Europe, research is framed in the context of children and media in general and does not focus specifically on the role of journalists (*see* Carter 2014; Buckingham 2011; Livingstone 2009; Ponte 2007). The same can be concluded for research on children and news media conducted in Africa (Rikhotso et al., 2014) and Asia (Goonasekera 2001).

Few studies were found when reviewing the empirical research on journalists' decision-making processes for including children in the news. Coleman (2011), for instance, used a controlled experiment to examine the decision-making process of 99 professional journalists in the United States, and investigated if they held different attitudes, made different decisions, and used different levels of moral judgment for stories that involved children compared to stories that involved adults. Additionally, Fullerton (2004) drew on several Canadian cases and used in-depth interviews with journalists to explore if *Journalists are Guilty of Exploiting Children*. Likewise, Mackay (2008) and Slopen et al. (2007) focused on newspaper coverage of children, with particular emphasis on the privacy, accuracy and elements of responsible journalism⁵⁸. Finally, Stone (1999) and Tompkins (1999) studied children as interviewees in live footage or breaking news events and provided guidelines for journalists on how to deal with children under these circumstances.

Findings from these studies are somewhat contradictory. The study of Coleman (2010) on *Journalists' Moral Judgment About Children* found that although journalists believed they were protecting children from harm, they did not carry through with those beliefs, i.e. they did not display significantly higher levels of moral judgment for children than adults, nor did they withhold children's photographs more often than those of adults. On the contrary, the study on the newspaper coverage of mental illness (Slopen et al., 2007) found that articles related to children were more likely to incorporate elements of responsible journalism, while articles related to adults were significantly more likely to use stigmatizing terminology. Drawing on interviews with journalists, Fullerton (2004) concluded that even though journalists confessed that they treated children differently from adults, there were no real guidelines or protocols in

⁵⁸The term 'responsible journalism' is used to indicate the presence of perspectives from experts, statistics related to the topic, referrals to additional sources and avoidance of slang terminology.

place to ensure this. On the other hand, Mackay (2008) argued in his findings that reporters compromised the privacy of children by merely naming them in the media.

One explanation for the contradictory findings of these studies could be the sample taken into consideration. While Coleman (2010) considers all children aged 0-18, the study by Slopen et al. (2007) only takes into account articles related to children who suffer from mental illnesses. Differences also emerge from the focus on two different mediums, either television or print media. This is the case for Mackay (2008), whose research focuses on the privacy of children in newspapers. If children quoted in television news are considered reliable sources because of the visual characteristics that this medium displays, 'newspaper journalists may feel more pressure to assure readers that the children in their stories are real, not fakes or composites, by naming them and showing their pictures' (Coleman 2010, 267).

Despite the contradictory findings, these studies build their arguments upon common ground, namely the power irregularities between children and adults in news coverage. Adults are considered trusted sources and are attributed more individual responsibility than children. As a result, adults are quoted more often and featured in more news items (Carter 2014; Fullertone 2010). Furthermore, these studies highlight the important role that journalists' decision-making processes play in the ways children are included in news items or quoted as news sources. As such they provide a valuable ground in confirming the choices for conducting in-person interviews with media professionals as a way to explore their views on children. However, all these studies put the emphasis on journalists' moral judgment as individuals and fail to investigate this role in the context of media organizations. The influence that journalistic practices or the decision-making processes in newsrooms have on the ways children are covered in news media, remain unexplored. The current study responds to this need through a series of interviews with journalists and news editors, thus revealing the views and opinions of media professionals on children, and the practices of newsgathering and the decision-making processes in newsrooms, which can play an important role in the ways children are covered and represented in news coverage.

6.4. Methodology

Eight professional journalists and news editors from leading television channels in Albania participated (see Appendixes), following a criterion sampling (Creswell 2007). Journalists who cover issues related to children were invited, with a primary focus on interviewing journalists who work for national television channels (TVSH, TV Klan and Top Channel) and news channels (Ora News, News 24, A1 Report). Furthermore, journalists with considerable experience in covering social issues in the news media were interviewed. Despite the limited number of people who participated in this study- due to the limited availability of journalists who cover social issues in Albanian television news, the in-depth semi-structured interviews provided sufficient information that allowed for theoretical saturation (Lindlof & Taylor 2010). The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to two hours, based on journalists' and news editors' experience and willingness to share their opinions.

The interview guide was based on a partially standardized template with open-ended questions. It was partially standardized in the sense that several topics of discussion relevant to this study were selected prior to the interview. They remain open-ended in that they did not require the interviewee to reply within a restricted frame. The aim is not only to provide qualitative data on the accounts of journalists and news editors on children, but more precisely to consider how these accounts are established and how they impact, transform and reproduce specific representations [of children] in the news media (see Howarth 2011; Hall 1997).

The interviews with news editors mostly focused on organizational practices, codes of ethics and the news selection criteria. The main focus of the interviews with journalists was their views on children as news topics or subjects, aspects of news-gathering practices, organizational challenges and their take on deontological issues related to the representation of children in news coverage. All interviews were digitally recorded, manually transcribed *ad verbum* and shared with the interviewees for their prior consent.

Grounded theory, more specifically constant comparative approach, was employed as an analytical strategy (Boeije 2002; Glaser 1992). Firstly, open-coding was conducted, i.e. reading the interviews several times and creating tentative labels. Secondly, axial coding was performed to identify relationships among the open codes (Tracy 2013). We identified a

central phenomenon, namely, self-censorship, the context wherein this phenomenon emerges, intervening conditions, and consequences. Thirdly, the axial codes were analysed and several main themes were developed. The main themes emerging from the interviews were related to the newsworthiness of children, journalists' consideration of children as news sources and factors that prevent journalists in Albania from covering children more in the news. All these themes will be extensively discussed in the following section.

Findings from a previous monitoring study (Kaziaj, 2016) will be used to contextualize the findings from the interviews. Findings from this study showed that stories on children barely reached 3% of total news items. This is a very low figure taking into consideration that children of age 0-18 comprise 25% of the entire population.⁵⁹ The category politics/government was the most present in news items related to children. It included all news items in which the focus is political issues, government decisions, elections, and speeches of political actors addressing children's issues or politicians' attendance at events with children. Additionally, children were quoted in only 9.7% (N=154) of the total news items related to them, while adults counted for being quoted in 80.5% of the same sample. Furthermore, results showed that news media mostly see children in limited roles, either as objects of emotional appeal or as victims. Specific findings from this research will be presented throughout this article, in order to establish a context on the representation of children in the news media in Albania. This enables checking for what journalists and news editors think of children as news subjects and how these beliefs are carried through and reflected in the actual news content.

6.5. Results

6.5.1. A child as a victim is 'good' news!

Journalists admitted that children are not being given enough coverage in the news. Kapo (Top Channel) stated, 'the portrayal of children in television news is meagre and erroneous while their real problems are not being covered'. On the same lines, the news director, Tare (Ora News) added that it comes as a result of the limited capacity of human resources in newsrooms:

⁵⁹ <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/popullsia.aspx?tab=tabs-5>.

I have tried to give coverage to children who are facing problems, as well as children that have a positive example to give; meaning a talented child. But this is not enough! In our newsrooms the capacity, as well as the rhythm with which things function, doesn't allow us to have a person appointed to children's issues.

Hence, journalists have to be selective when covering news stories about children. Based on their experience, there is a type of news item that appears most often in news coverage: children as victims. Interviewees admit that media outlets look for the ghoulish news stories, which arouses people's sentiments. According to Kapo (Top channel) 'journalists still relate news with an element of sadness and if a child is added to this equation it has double effects'. Moreover, one of our interviewees (Cami, TV Klan) attributed her choice to portray children as victims to the expectations of news editors:

The perception still exists that the value of a news item on children, is the sad and the macabre, and they [the editors] don't pay much attention to other news topics. In our morning meeting, if I report that I am planning to work on a news item about children in a school or kindergarten organizing a cultural activity, I am afraid that my editor will answer: And so what? Why is that important?

When news editors were asked about the newsworthiness of children, they confirmed that 'children as victims' is seen as more newsworthy than other topics. 'There is no doubt that negative news on children always comes up on headlines. Media outlets are still 'thirsty' for this kind of news' (Gjata, Top Channel). Nevertheless, they also add that the tendency for Albanian media outlets to cover children in a victim-related context is not only a matter of editorial choice, but also a reflection of the many problems that children face as part of a marginalized group. Tare (news director, Ora News) mentions domestic abuse as one of the biggest problems, but also problems with education or health. As an example she refers to a recent news item about the lack of heating facilities in classrooms where, 'children were filmed while they were shyly sitting in cold classrooms wearing heavy jackets'.

Journalists were asked if they remember any case when their editors refused a news item on children, and all of them confirmed that it has never happened. In other words, journalists appear to have cultivated a behaviour of self-censorship when producing news on children by conforming to what they perceive as their editor's expectations and producing more news items featuring children as victims.

Results from the media monitoring process (Kaziaj, 2016) showed that children are mostly portrayed as either victims, or objects of emotional appeal. These two roles combined accounted for 48.7 per cent of all items. The combination of beliefs that a child as a victim is more newsworthy and that journalists are reflecting children's realities as they exist in Albania, as articulated by journalists and news editors, explain the dominant portrayal of children as victims in Albanian news.

Portraying children as victims has several implications, as it can contribute to stances and reactive social policies that promote control and surveillance (Altheide 2002), while imposing certain constructs on children as being naive, dependent and in need of protection (Carter 2014). However, only one journalist was able to reflect on the possible consequences that such a portrayal could have on the way children are seen:

By portraying children as victims, we reinforce several stereotypes of children as being vulnerable, or in need of protection; and we deny them a meaningful participation in society. We – including us journalists – see children as minors, fragile, not real humans but mostly as breathing objects that we can put wherever we think is best. I know it's not ethical to call children that, but that's how we actually see them (Cami, TV Klan).

Furthermore, portraying children as victims in news coverage has several ethical implications for the media outlets themselves (see Kitzinger 2004; Carter 2003). There is a special section [Section 5] dedicated to children in the Code of Broadcast in Albania, (Nr. 01/2014, p. 9) that provides detailed instructions to all audio-visual media outlets on how children should be treated as news topics and news sources. It highlights that 'every child has the right to receive appropriate information, the right to freedom of expression and participation in the media. The application of media rules and norms in favour of children's best interests is crucial'. Nevertheless, only one journalist knew about the existence of such a code. On the other hand, the Albanian Media Authority (AMA) currently monitors only the presence of different political actors and political parties in the main news editions of the three national television channels. There is no monitoring regarding children's portrayal in the news, as foreseen in the Code of Broadcast and the Law on Audio-visual Media in Albania (Nr 97/2013,p.6).

The interviewees stated that there is no written ethical code in their newsrooms, but there is a common understanding among journalists when it comes to issues of children. Rules are

usually learned in their journalism studies, and further informed by newsroom editors. Asked about the work of the media monitoring body in Albania (AMA), almost all news editors and journalists confess that they are not aware of any protocols or codes compiled by AMA on the portrayal of children. There was one interesting case, presented as clear evidence for the lack of communication between a news editor and a journalist of the same television channel. The editor said:

AMA [the official monitoring body] has never functioned properly. Every day, there are examples of the misuse of children in media and no reactions at all from AMA. Minors are being shown in television programs after midnight, in the same studio with striptease dancers (Gjata, Top Channel).

Contrarily, the journalist answered:

AMA has a clear and well-developed ethical code on the portrayal of children in television programs and news coverage, which is continuously being monitored and actions are taken against those who don't abide by the law. AMA also developed a very good law on broadcasting, which was passed last year in the parliament and contains different articles on the portrayal of children in the news media (Kapo, Top channel).

As it is shown here, the lack of clear rules and guidelines on the coverage of children in newsrooms and the lack of awareness on the existing rules and guidelines in the Code of Broadcast, have created a general confusion among media professionals on how to cover issues related to children and specifically those related to children as victims. Furthermore, this situation is encouraged by the absence of regular media monitoring processes and reports by the Albanian Media Authority. In cases where some measures were taken against some media outlets they were mostly seen as biased and unfair due to the low level of trust among media outlets in Albania regarding the legitimacy of the media monitoring authority.

6.5.2. Children as news sources

Journalists and news editors were asked about their views on children as news sources. They listed several reasons for not quoting children regularly in news items. First, they justified

their absence through references of 'professional criteria'. 'Interviewing children is difficult because there are ethical implications. You need signed agreements from parents and it takes longer' (Kapo, Top Channel). Justifying the lack of children's voices in the news media by referring to 'professional criteria', has been a predominant finding in research on the representation of children in news coverage (Carter et al., 2009; Goonasekera 2001).

Second, according to some journalists, children are not interesting subjects to be quoted in the news:

It is very hard to find a child with good communication skills that is interesting for the audience. To give an example, in a news item about the broken heating systems in kindergartens, you can ask a child if he/she is cold and they will answer simply: Yes! (Hasa, Ora News).

News editors went a step further by pointing out the deficiencies of children as news sources in comparison to adults, and by limiting their opportunities to get quoted to only some special events that are mostly seen as related to children. According to Gjata (Top channel):

Children as minors do not possess the sufficient knowledge to be quoted in news. You can't give a protagonist role to children as you can do with a head teacher. There are special days when children get quoted, for example on the 7th of March – celebrated as the National Teachers Day – it makes sense to ask children on that day 'what kind of present are you giving to your teacher'?' (Gjata, Top Channel).

Third, according to our interviewees, children are usually given the chance to be quoted in news items but they refuse to do so:

They answer that their parents don't approve it, or that they are afraid to be exposed in news items that discuss negative behaviours. They don't understand that the news item is not about them but the phenomenon, as such. Maybe it is also difficult for a child to handle a decent interview (Tare, Ora News).

Furthermore she explains that the lack of children's voice in the news comes as a result of them being somehow not interested in what she calls 'the adult's world' or 'life outside of them'.

In the above quotes we see that the views of journalists and news editors on children as news sources are complementary. While journalists point to certain practices that prevent them from quoting children, such as signing parental consent, news editors focused the discussion on children's communicative abilities when compared to adults. These views are a strong demonstration of what has been introduced earlier in this article as 'the adult gaze', according to which, children's opinions are seen as unsatisfactory and their viewpoints limited when compared to the opinions of adults. As a result, they are quoted less in news items.

Empirical data from the monitoring process (Kaziaj, 2016) showed that news items where 'two or more adults' are quoted count for 35.7%, compared to only 3.9% of cases where 'two or more children' are quoted. No significant differences among television channels were found when quoting children in news items. Neither the television channels that were monitored, nor the media authority in Albania, provide data on children's appearance in news coverage or children as news sources. As such, the findings presented here and the insights from interviews with journalists and news editors are the only basis on which to account for the views of journalists and news editors on children as news sources.

Journalists and news editors confirmed the finding that politicians are among the most quoted sources in news items related to children⁶⁰. There was one story that was brought up in all interviews. The journalist of the Public Broadcaster (Mlloja, TVSH), described the story this way:

Two months ago, there was a big debate on the misuse of children in the news when an item about the leader of the opposition party, Lulzim Basha, was broadcast. A girl [around 9 years old] was featured heavily crying while describing the horror she witnessed when police officers violently entered her house. The politician was seen in his attempts to cover the camera with his hand as a way to hide the child's identity. This news item was shot and distributed to all television channels by his staff. I don't think I would cut out of the video the tears of the child, but maybe I wouldn't have taken it so far. The best is to blur the face of the child but not the message. We all have the right to know what the child is thinking and feeling in those moments.

⁶⁰ In total, the number of political voices, including the Prime Minister, comprised 29 per cent (N=154), outnumbering all other actors.

As a matter of fact, all television channels that were monitored (including the Public Broadcaster) reported this news item with an identical image, narrative and collection of quotes (TV Klan; Top Channel; TVSH, 15 November 2014). None of the media outlets edited the part where the child was seen crying – including the journalist who was just quoted above by saying that she would do otherwise. This is a violation of The Code of Broadcast for audio-visual media outlets, which clearly states (article 5.2): ‘News media shall not reveal the identity of a child or interview him/her if the child has been the witness of a troublesome event in his family or outside of it’. When asked why they decided to broadcast this news item, the editors explained that the decision was not theirs, but they were being told so ‘by people who stand higher in the hierarchy’.

Previous research conducted on the news media in Albania highlights the fact that media owners play a significant role in the editorial decision-making process in newsrooms. As this example clearly shows, journalists’ and news editors’ views on children are not the only factors that influence the presence (or not) of children’s voices in news items, or their ethical coverage. The strong affiliation of media owners with political parties plays a significant role in this respect. Furthermore, media owners in most of the cases are not media professionals, but people with interests in politics as a way to protect or expand their businesses. As such they are not aware of the journalistic practices or the importance of ethically covering children in news stories, and they are not interested in pushing for the more meaningful inclusion of children in media coverage.

In general, interviews with journalists and news editors revealed their lack of consideration for children when compared to adults. Only one journalist reflected on the power relationship between children and adults as an important factor that influences the lack of children’s agency⁶¹ in the news media:

We judge children as being too small to provide the ‘big thought’ that we need in our news items. Failing to find a child who can articulate well, we cut it short and quote only school directors or teachers. Usually it is these adults that discriminate children by not informing them on what is happening around them. As a result, children are not able to speak about these issues (Cami, Tv Klan).

⁶¹ Davies (2003) defines children’s agency in the context of news media as “their ability to control the action”.

Nevertheless, this belief was not translated into better coverage of children in news stories because of the reasons explained above.

As this section showed, journalists' and news editors' views and opinions on children as unreliable sources and the influence of media owners in the decision-making process in newsrooms, play an essential role in providing (or denying) a platform for children's voices to be heard, their agency to be acknowledged and for the ethical coverage of children as news sources.

6.5.3. Self-censorship as safe mode

In the previous section, the overwhelming presence of news coverage on politics and political actors in Albanian media outlets was touched upon, which is also one of the main themes that emerged in our interviews with news editors and journalists. As one of the journalists noted:

We dedicate most of the coverage to politics, and this is breath-taking because we just transmit that x-politician said this and x-politician said that. This is just propaganda whereas all real issues concerning children shall be put first. (Kapo, Top Channel)

The interviews provided a deeper explanation of the tangled nature of news and politics in Albania. Two factors were identified from journalists and news editors as influencing the news content and in turn having an impact on the coverage of issues related to children. First, the government and different political parties are increasingly offering ready-made news items, which leave less space for covering other topics. Tare (Ora News) puts it this way:

There is a compromise that media sticks to, based on an economic logic. On one side there are ready-made news items offered by political actors that come as a 'package' and on the other side there are issues related to children that require a commitment to investigate, data to support the news, or expert sources. Based on the nature of news, which is based on fast daily consumption, they choose to go for the easiest way.

A former news editor supports this view by saying:

It is easier for us to cover five events of different political actors in Tirana [where their offices are based] than produce five news items on different social issues from other parts of the country (Kolka, News 24).

Journalists confess that as part of their daily routine, they participate in conferences or meetings organized by political parties or the government. Two journalists and a news editor used the word *qoka* – which in English could be translated as *payback* – to describe the real reasons behind attending these meetings. In Albanian, this word is used to describe a tradition that is still strong, explicitly, you have to be present at the events of your relatives or friends and contribute [financially] in case they did the same for you⁶². In the context of media and politics, it implies that journalists have to attend these meetings as a way to pay back the favours that the media outlet has profited from. As it was stated earlier in this article (see the section Current Albanian (news) media context) some media owners have become rich mainly through the privileges obtained by the government in the process of receiving tenders and the privatization of different public assets. Moreover, in the last parliamentary elections of June 2013, two owners of media outlets became members of the Parliament.

The second challenge that comes as a derivative of the first, pertains to the blurred lines of what could be considered as the topic of a news item. The biggest struggle for journalists covering social issues – including those of children – is to find the ‘social aspect’ of a news item where politicians are present. Based on the monitoring analysis, a large sample of news items on children, 37 cases out of a total of 154, feature politicians in events with children. These news items have titles such as: ‘Basha [Tirana’s mayor] inaugurates Christmas tree, together with orphan children’ (TVSH, 06 December), ‘Rama [Prime minister], supports children of police officers killed on duty’, (TV Klan, 24 December). These news stories are constructed around politicians, and they are the ones quoted in these news items. Children are simply used as a decoration. Nonetheless, all these news items were reported as ‘Social Issues’ in prime-time news. Journalists express the difficulties that they face while having to produce these kinds of news items:

Usually there is just one sentence that can be seen as a social element in this event. But then they go on making political promises such as ‘we will build 40 kindergartens’ and stuff like that in front of children. Of course this is purely political and only

⁶² Most often, in celebrative or grief occasions, the host keeps a list of all participants and their financial contribution to the event.

contributes to them taking credit or gaining public trust for the next elections (Cami, TV Klan).

Additionally, they referred to what their editors would prefer to hear or in some cases what politicians expect from them:

In most cases, news coverage is about politicians, while children are there just as objects. The thing is that when you don't quote politicians, you can expect a phone call from their staff complaining about why you did not do so (Hasa, Ora News).

The strong influence of politicians in shaping news events can be traced in the following quote:

When a political figure is seen at an event with children, none of the media coverage focuses on the activity anymore, but the news item starts and ends with what the politician says. It is not that journalists covering social issues don't recognize this, but this is what we are told to do (Cami, TV Klan).

On the other hand, news editors, when asked for the rationale behind including these news items in the social section of the news broadcasts, answered:

We are usually in a dilemma to decide in which section a certain news item belongs, for example the political or social news section. This decision becomes more difficult in a context like ours where political protagonism is to be found everywhere, in all kinds of events covered by the media (Gjata, Top Channel).

Journalists were asked if they ever tried to cover a news item of this type by not focusing the story on the politician but on the children. Cami (TV Klan) stated that:

I never tried to bring this up to my editor. But on the other hand, they literally guided me to go to that event because politician X would be there. They don't mention children. When they say that, there is no space to argue.

While both journalists and news editors acknowledge the overwhelming presence of politics and its toll on the representation of social issues in Albania, none of them clearly articulates the real reasons for such a setting. As Schudson (1995) points out, 'news is then produced by people who operate often unwittingly within a cultural system, a reservoir of stored cultural meanings and patterns of discourse'. The influence that media owners play in the decision-

making processes in newsrooms, which is stated in all reports on media freedom in Albania, is the main element that could explain why there is an overwhelming presence of news coverage on politics and political actors. Their influence leads to the creation of self-censorship among media professionals covering issues related to children. This behaviour could be described as a two-step process. First, journalists frame their coverage based on what they assume is considered newsworthy by their editors, and as a result produce news items related to children that conform to the already existing patterns, i.e. representing children as the ideal victim. Second, based on what they perceive as favouritism towards politics in Albanian media [from media owners], they include political actors in the news items related to children as a way to increase newsworthiness and mitigate the risks of being refused by their editors.

Self-censorship, as a phenomenon that exists among journalists in Albania, has already been stated in reports on media freedom in Albania (Halo et al., 2015; Kronholm 2013). Nonetheless, these studies mostly refer to self-censorship as a phenomenon to be found exclusively among journalists that cover political issues. As our findings show, the relationship between media and politics in Albania has an impact on journalists covering social issues as well. The prominence of politicians in news items related to children is clear evidence of the existence of such a phenomenon. Furthermore, the existence of self-censorship can be traced to what all journalists and news editors said when asked, ‘what changes would you like to see in the news media?’. All their answers came down to ‘less politics and more *real* issues’.

6.6. Conclusion

Through a series of in-depth interviews with journalists and news editors of television channels in Albania, this study explored their views on children. The notion that children are not newsworthy subjects or trustworthy stand-alone sources when compared to adults, was reflected in the opinions of most journalists and news editors, which points to power asymmetries between children and adults. Such views on children suggest the existence of what we have called ‘the adult gaze’ among news media professionals. According to this view, journalists and news editors set adults as the standard from which to judge children. As a consequence, children are prevented from having agency of their own. Furthermore,

previous research attributes the absence of children in news coverage to general ethical issues (Carter 2014; Rikhotso et al., 2014; Goonasekera 2001). As this study showed, journalists' assumptions of what their editors would like them to cover prevents them from quoting children or even considering children-focused stories. Journalists framed this behaviour as avoiding the 'So what?' question from their editors.

A crucial phenomenon identified by journalists and news editors that influences the coverage of children in the news media, is the intertwined relationship between media coverage and politics in Albania. News outlets in Albania compromise their content, due to limited resources, by mainly providing coverage of political actors and their events, which are packaged as 'ready-made' news. Reports on press freedom in Albania show that government influence and various political parties have the tendency to privilege certain media outlets that support their views through processes of bidding for advertising acquisition. This vicious cycle between politicians and media owners in Albania takes its toll on quality coverage and the representation of other issues not related to politics. Journalists covering children find themselves squeezed into this cycle every day. On the one hand they adhere to what they think their editors value as newsworthy, on the other they must perform along the perceived political affiliation of the media owner in which they work.

Journalists who cover issues related to children displayed an understanding of the need and importance of covering children and their issues in the news media. They share a common understanding of the importance of child protection in news stories. Nonetheless, their beliefs and good will are not reflected in their work. Children are not being recognized as active agents who can have their own say in the news media. As a result, this article framed the phenomenon as 'self-censorship' among journalists, which is further strengthened by the economic insecurities due to lack of formal contracts for journalists and delays in the payment of salaries for roughly 92 per cent of media outlets (Union of Albanian Journalists 2012).

Journalists who studied journalism, or have been trained on how to cover children in the news, showed a better understanding of the importance of children's participation in news coverage and expressed a stronger will to acknowledge children's agency. A detail that drew our attention during the interview process was the surprise that all interviewees showed when explained the topic of research. All participants confessed that this was the first time they had been contacted to express their views on such a topic. This points to the negligibility of

children among researchers, children's rights activists and news media professionals, in Albania.

As this research showed, journalists' beliefs and views on children as news subjects play an important role in bringing their stories to the public's attention, or making their voices heard. If news outlets would consider children's accounts as much as they consider adults' (especially politicians), they would provide recognition for their agency and help raise children's social status. Keeping in mind the current situation of children in Albania, who are mostly seen as vulnerable and distanced from public life, this is very vital. In the end, if told accordingly, stories about children could help understand the ways children make sense of and contribute to the reality that surrounds them. The Albanian media would, in this way, exercise their role as it is foreseen by the Law on Audio-visual Media in the Republic of Albania (Nr 97/2013: 6), 'with a special focus on the rights, interests, moral and legal demands of children'.

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Chapter 7

The Ignored Audience

A multi-method reception study on children and television news in Albania

In the preceding empirical articles, I revealed how ideas and beliefs on children are constructed in television news coverage by focusing on news content and the views of media professionals. The concluding portion of the empirical section is a reception study that aims to further cement the findings of the previous studies by focusing on the audiences; i.e. children and adults. This study addresses the third research question of this dissertation, which asks how audiences perceive the representation of children in television news. Since the focus of this dissertation is on children and the news media, special attention was paid to the responses of the 64 children, ages 10 to 15, who participated in six focus groups.

This reception study was the last to be conducted for the purpose of this dissertation. As such, I made use of findings from the preceding studies when selecting news items that were discussed during focus groups. I made sure to select news items from the three most prominent categories identified during media monitoring process (chapter 5). Furthermore, insights from media professionals' views on children's interest in news (chapter 6) were incorporated as questions in the drop-off questionnaire used for the focus groups.

Even though the concept of the 'adult gaze' is not explicitly stated in this article, the ways in which children and adults articulate their opinions on television news points to the existence of such a concept. While adults articulate expressions that assume a child's lack of critical thinking to make sense of the news, children on the other hand reveal a prevailing desire to discuss news items, particularly those related to politics and political actors in Albania. Furthermore, they mention several cases of corruption of well-known politicians that were featured in news coverage and express their opinions on how such actions could have implications for the country's economy. I argue that children's discussions concerning political matters can be seen as a way to earn legitimacy from adults by showing their

‘maturity’ in discussing topics that they perceive as belonging to adults. Hence they try to refuse the ‘adult gaze’, which is imposed on them by the news media every day and enforces a lack of agency.

This last study contributes to complete the picture of how issues related to children are constructed, represented and consumed in television news by presenting the missing piece of the puzzle, namely audience responses.

For an overview of the focus groups, the transcripts of the focus group interviews (in Albanian) and the materials used for the custom designed activities, please refer to Appendix 3.⁶³

Reference

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⁶³ This is a full version of the article as submitted to *Childhood*. No changes have been made.

The Ignored Audience

A multi-method reception study on children and television news in Albania

Abstract

Children are not considered to be an appropriate audience for news coverage based on their presumed lack of emotional maturity, critical thinking and proper knowledge. This article challenges these views by presenting the opinions of children aged 10-15, who report having watched broadcast news nearly every day and contest to the ways they are being portrayed by the news media. The views of adults aged 25-62, on the same topic were investigated to account for differences among the two groups. This article further examines how children's discussions of news coverage in Albania, demonstrates their need to be considered as active participants in the public sphere, which is presented by the news media as an exclusive domain for adults.

Keywords: Television news, children, Albania, reception, political socialization

7.1. Introduction

News has generally been perceived as a genre that is not appropriate or even dangerous for children (Gunter, Furnahm and Griffiths, 2000). They are usually considered to lack the emotional maturity, critical thinking skills or the proper knowledge for making sense of the news. These views on children are aligned with the development psychology approach (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969), which classifies childhood in terms of "ages and stages", and as a linear progression towards entry into adulthood. According to James, Jenks and Prout (1998) within this tradition, children are understood as "becoming adults", as incomplete and incompetent social actors with respect to adults. As a result, Buckingham (2000) argues that children are prevented from engaging and contributing to society in a meaningful way. On the other hand, the genre of news is considered to be an essential source of information that acts as a teacher of values, ideologies, and beliefs, while providing images to interpret the

world (van Dijk, 2008). It informs citizens on central issues and enables them to develop attitudes and beliefs. The same applies to children. The lack of a presence of children among general news coverage brings into question the potential of the media to facilitate the ways children connect with society. When news coverage is produced with children's civic development in mind, it has the potential to enable them as citizens (Carter and Davies, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to hear from children what they think about television news and their own portrayal. Albania is of particular interest, keeping in mind that the country of only 2.8 million people is home to a disproportionately high number of television channels. In addition to the public broadcaster (RTSH), there are two private national television channels, 71 private local television channels, and 83 private cable television channels currently operating in Albania (AMA, 2014). Furthermore, eight television channels broadcast only news (Kevin, Pellicano and Scheenberger, 2013). All news channels are privately owned and freely available in most of the country's territory. A monitoring report from the media authority in Albania underlines that: "the ubiquitous presence of news and current affairs programs has resulted in a certain uniformity in terms of content, allowing only for a limited choice" (AMA, 2010:29). It is difficult to assess the opportunities for news consumption in Albania, as there is no credible or systematic audience research publicly available.

Notwithstanding, a study conducted with the support of the EU (Nelaj, 2014) found that 73% of the Albanian population placed their highest level of trust in television news outlets when compared to other media. While no study currently exists on children's consumption of the news, it may be due to the fact no news service targeted towards children is offered by any of the television channels currently operating in Albania. The way in which children see themselves represented in news coverage is still unknown. Taking this context into consideration, researching the views of children aged 10-15 on television news, becomes a prerequisite to exploring how the news media addresses this particular group.

In this article, the term 'children' is used to refer to the age group 0-18 years, following the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). Research on children as a news audience has typically examined children aged 15-18, due to the positioning of this specific age group on the boundaries of becoming 'citizens' (see Meijer 2007). When a younger age group is considered, such as 10-15 (see Carter et al., 2009; Buckingham, 2000) it has mostly been researched in relation to children's television news

format, while in most countries such programs do not exist. Therefore the views of children aged 10-15 on news media, still remain unexplored. This study addresses this age gap.

The present study acknowledges children as active participants in social life and as actors with potential for having agency of their own (Prout and James, 1997). In the context of news coverage, this means that children are capable of forming and articulating their own opinions regarding the news in general, and particularly their own portrayal. The views of adults on the same topic were investigated, with the study's aim being to check for differences in news consumption and comprehension between these two groups. In the following section we will examine existing literature on children as a news audience. Ultimately we focus our findings on three major themes: children's exposure to television news; their understanding of the news media; and the role of television news in the political socialization of children. Since news is positively related to civic engagement (see Carter, 2014) it is fruitful to examine how children in Albania see themselves portrayed in news coverage. Therefore results could be drawn on how children connect with society. Furthermore, insights can be provided on the positioning of children in the social order, as presented in news coverage and the role that television news is playing in that respect.

7.2. Children as an audience for news

The existing research on children as a news audience has mainly focused on three areas: children's attitudes towards the news media (exposure, recall and comprehension of news items), children's emotional reactions to news coverage, and the role of news in political socialization and the civic engagement of children (see Lemish and Alon-Tirosh, 2014).

Research conducted on the attitudes of children towards the news media, challenges the existing perceptions that "children... regard the news as 'boring', and refuse to read newspapers, tune into television or radio news, or search out news on the internet (Carter, 2013:255). Lemish and Alon –Tirosh's (2014) study with children (aged 8-15) and youths (aged 16-18) in Israel found that they expressed a desire to be informed on core national issues, but asked for a positive framing that removed the scary and gory elements. Moreover, previous research carried out with kindergarten children in the US and Israel (Lemish, 1998)

found that the participants were interested in the news and this interest was closely related either to the socio-political context of the country (the case of Israeli children), or to parental mediation (the case of children in the US). Additionally, Carter, Davies, Allan, Mendes, Milani, and Wass (2009) found that the majority of children aged 8-15 surveyed in the UK, considered the news to be interesting (96.8%) and more than half of the sample – 112 children – mentioned TV as their ‘favorite place for news’. Furthermore, Ponte (2008) by interviewing 500 children of different ages, concluded that they showed great enthusiasm on following both adult and children’s news.

The second body of research on children as a news audience focuses on children’s emotional reactions towards news content. Within these studies, there is a diverse body of knowledge that attempt to explore such reactions. Some studies (Eron, 1963; Huesmann and Eron, 1986), employ a psychological perspective and make use of experiments as a method for research. This kind of research dates back to the 60s and 70s due to the prevailing discourses in that period on television’s negative influences on children. Likewise, Adoni & Cohen (1980) documented that children show fear or anxiety when exposed to news items related to the coverage of war, which was a prevailing topic of research in the following years (Cantor and Nathanson, 1993; Walma van der Molen et al., 2002; Smith and Wilson, 2002; Blankenmeyer, Walker and Svitak, 2004). Other studies have mostly explored children’s reactions towards news media by taking a social approach which acknowledges children’s agency in their use and consumption of television news and has used qualitative methods as a tool for research. These studies show that children are able to engage in a more critical way with the news media if news is constructed with children as an audience in mind (Carter, 2014; Lemish and Alon –Tirosh, 2014, Lemish and Gotz, 2007). Recently, there is a growing body of research that makes a combination of both approaches, by exploring children’s fright reactions to news media from a psychological approach and by making use of qualitative techniques (see Riddle, 2012; Riddle et al., 2012).

The ways in which children engage with the news media brings us to the third group of research: the role of the news media in introducing children to civic engagement. According to Patterson (2007:5), “there is evidence that news habits developed early in life effect later use that appeal[s] to civic virtue”. Earlier studies have suggested that children who watched the news more frequently, were more knowledgeable about the political world, demonstrated greater curiosity towards the news, and were more motivated to actively pursue additional information (Atkin and Gantz, 1987). Recent studies have documented that viewing

both traditional forms of news and non-traditional sources of political information (late-night comedy shows) increases children's internal political efficacy, which in turn positively predicts their civic participation (Hoffman and Thomson, 2009). Additionally, authors have sought to research the news media's perception of children's place in the world and how it shapes their understanding of citizenship (Livingstone, 2002; Buckingham, 2000). If the news media became more accessible to children, their participation in the public sphere would be enhanced.

This body of research is mostly carried out in countries where children's news is offered as an alternative to traditional 'adult' news services. In Albania, no news service for children currently exists in the country, and furthermore, no research has focused on exploring children's views on the news media. This study aims to explore children's views on their representation in television news in Albania, in their own words. Additionally, the perspectives of adults on the representation of children are explored. While research has shown that children see themselves as being excluded from the typically adult-centered news outlets and that their perspectives are not taken into consideration (Ponte & Aroldi, 2013; Carter et al., 2009), there has been no research conducted which relates to the views of adults on how children are being represented in the news. Keeping in mind the news media's ability to strengthen civic participation, exploring the views of children and adults as it pertains to the Albanian news media is crucial.

7.3. Methodology

This study included a multi-method exploration of children's and adults' views on the television news media in Albania, with a special focus on the portrayal of children. Using questionnaires, focus group interviews and custom-designed activities, this study explored news consumption and news comprehension among children and adults. In total there were 118 participants, including 64 children (aged 10-15) and 54 adults (aged 26-62), who were interviewed in 12 focus groups, 6 for children and 6 for adults, with 8-12 participants each. I collaborated with the Education projects' team of World Vision Albania and Kosova (WVA&K)- an international children's rights organization that is active in the country - to

conduct the focus groups.⁶⁴ The approach of the organization is to build and empower community groups that are then engaged in the implementation of several development projects. I made use of the routine meetings of these community groups to conduct the focus groups. Parental consent was required for all children who participated. Children's groups were balanced (50% boys and 50% girls), while a bigger participation among women (74.1%), was noted in the adult interview groups. This could be explained by the higher availability of women to participate in activities of this type when compared to men, due to a higher unemployment rate among this group in Albania (Rusi and Mustafaj, 2013). 12 of the participants in the adults focus groups were teachers (N=54). Nonetheless all participants in the focus group were asked to reflect on the topic of discussion in their position as parents or adults- in case they had no parenting experience. Most of the participants (N=21) were unemployed, while the other participants had professions like hairdresser (N=4), psychologist (N=4), or finance officer (N= 4). In two of the groups – one for adults and one for children – representatives from cultural minorities, including Roma and Egyptians, participated. The focus groups took place in five regions of Albania: Durrës, Tirane, Elbasan, Shkoder and Lezhe, from May to June 2015. The decision to have separate groups for children and adults comes as a reflection on the fact that children's perspectives may be different from adults' accounts and thus should be elicited directly from children, while minimizing the risk for adults' intervention (see Balen et al., 2006; Eder & Fingerson, 2002). While the decision of recruiting participants who are already accustomed to each other was a reflection on the assumption that this is important factor to take into consideration when conducting focus groups as the social environment impacts the ability for people to express themselves (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). The meetings lasted approximately two hours and were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

All focus groups started with the drop-off questionnaire as a way to get some demographic data on the participants and their exposure to television news. On the same time it served as a warm up exercise, having in mind that the other activities planned for the group discussions required active participation. Because of the considerably small number of participants in each group, the researcher read all questions carefully and articulated additional details in case of misunderstandings. Additionally all participants were invited to

⁶⁴ I was part of this organization before starting my PhD studies, from 2009-2013, first working as the National Education coordinator and afterwards, as Advocacy Manager.

address any misconception to the researcher individually. All participants confirmed to have understood all questions before filling in the questionnaire.

Two slightly different questionnaires were developed for children and adults. The adults' questionnaire comprised several additional questions on parents involvement with children in news consumption. Parents were asked on television programs that they followed more with their children, and the extent to which they encouraged children to follow news. On the other hand the questionnaires of children posed additional questions on the quality of children's portrayal in television news and the extent to which children felt represented in such portrayals. In addition, both children and adults were asked to recall and write down a news item on children that they recently watched on television.

Additionally, participants were presented with two activities that were custom-designed for the study. In the first activity, participants were introduced to 10 pictures, five of which showed newscasters, and were then asked to identify the newscasters and provide additional details for each of them. In the second activity, the participants were presented with a list of 11 news items taken from actual news broadcasts, including two news items related to children. Participants were first asked to list the news items as they would appear in an actual news broadcast and then asked list the news items as the group members would like to see them broadcasted – starting from what they considered as the most important. These activities had two purposes. First, they aimed to explore the participants' exposure and familiarity with television news. Second, they aimed to explore their views on the importance of news exposure on children.

Using creative techniques, especially research with children, is a method that is being encouraged in social science research (see O'Cane, 2000). Consequently, it generates insights into children's perspectives, while empowering them for a fuller participation.

Subsequently, participants watched three news items related to children, taken from actual news broadcasts from national television channels. These items were chosen based on an extensive media monitoring process conducted earlier by the author (see Kaziaj, 2016). They belonged to the three topics where children appeared to be more present in television news in Albania: Children as victims, as objects of emotional appeal and children as performers. After each item, the researcher asked children and adults their opinions of the news item in general (Is the topic clear? Is it interesting?) and the portrayal of children in particular (How does this news item make you feel? Is it representative of children? What

consequences do you think it has for the realities where children live in? What is missing? Why?). Notes from the discussions served as the main data for the analysis, complemented by data from the questionnaires and meticulous expressions and results from the card activities.

This study belongs to what Jensen (2011) assesses as the third group of reception studies, whose concern is to investigate how concretely the media is integrated into both everyday life and various institutionalized practices. Discursive elements on news stories related to children are taken as the basis to trace the presence of particular themes and their reproduction by the audience. These discourses provided further insights on the role of news as a social action. Analysis of the responses from the focus group discussions supplemented with qualitative data from the card activities were subjected to a grounded analysis of emerging themes, using qualitative content analysis procedures (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). Additionally quantitative findings from the questionnaires served as complementary to qualitative findings, to provide additional information on the characteristics of both groups.

7.4. Results

7.4.1. News consumption and recall

The most dominant finding from the discussions with children and adults was that both groups are exposed to television news, almost every day. Regardless of the fact that adults reported actually watching the news more often than children, the two card-activities that were conducted with children and adults revealed additional aspects. In the first activity, in which children and adults were asked to identify the newscasters based the photographs provided; all groups of children were able to distinguish the newscasters from the non-newscasters. Furthermore, children were able to provide additional details on the newscasters, such as the television channel that they work for and in some cases the names of the newscasters. Surprisingly, none of the adult groups were able to identify all of the newscasters. Most of them were able to identify only two out of five newscasters and in most cases they confused actors, or political analysts with newscasters. Furthermore none of the adult groups were able to name any of the newscasters. These findings could be explained by the fact that children in general show a better ability than adults to recall visual information

related to television news (Walma van der Molen and van der Voort, 2000). Additionally, when children and adults were asked to write a news item on children that they recently watched on television, only 37,5 % (N= 64) of children answered that ‘they don’t remember any news item’ while the percentage of adults that could not remember a news item was significantly higher, 53.5 % (N=54). The high percentage of children and adults that could not recall a news item related to children is related to the fact that news items on children are difficult to find on television news outlets in Albania (AMA, 2014). Nonetheless, 84.4% of children and 85.2% of adults reported that they would be interested in watching more news items related to children. These finding is in alignment with previous studies conducted on the same topic which contradict the belief that children are not interested in television news (Alan- Tirosh & Lemish, 2014; Carter et. al, 2009).

In the focus groups, adults reported instances of news items that had become vigorous topics of discussion in the past. One teacher said:

“I remember one morning entering the class and the pupils immediately asked if I had seen the news of the previous day about two sisters that were kept in chains by their parents. I immediately checked for it in the newspapers when the lesson was over⁶⁵. ”
(man, Lezhe, 31).

Another teacher said that for several days children discussed a news item about a pupil being spanked by his teacher⁶⁶:

“I could see them watch the video on their mobile phones and comment it with each other” (woman, Lezhe, 45).

Children from the Shkoder focus groups brought up this case. When asked about their choice to discuss this particular item, they said:

“Because that teacher was in our school” (Boy, 10 years, Shkoder) and *“ because we are curious to know why would someone do such a thing as abusing a child”* (Girl, 13, Shkoder).

⁶⁵ News item broadcasted, Oct 28, 2009.

⁶⁶ News item broadcasted, Oct 16, 2015.

The discussion about the video opened up a debate in the group concerning whether the video should or should not have been broadcast by the news media. One girl was against the broadcast of this video:

“I think it was not right that the media broadcast the video because the teacher was filmed inappropriately. The teacher is ‘a second parent’ and she just used different methods to educate that child. I am sure that she had a reason for doing that and didn’t do it just for fun.” (girl, 12, Shkoder).

On the other hand, one of her classmates contested her by saying:

“I think it was right that the news media broadcast the video because the child goes to school to [receive] an education and not to be abused. If the child doesn’t behave well, then the teacher can call his parents, but not abuse him.” (boy, 12, Shkoder).

Significantly, the girl and the boy in the above descriptions take two oppositional stands, which not only questions the ethical ways in which teachers should behave, but also spells out their knowledge of what is ethical and not ethical in the news coverage. By justifying the behavior of her teacher, the female participant clearly tries to show to the group and the interviewer her position as a child who is obedient to an adult’s rules and acknowledges them as an unquestioned authority in her life. Her choice of words ‘the teacher is a second parent’ is a phrase that was frequently used in poetry about teachers during the communist era (before the 90s). The boy on the other hand, refuses to take the role of the ‘obedient child’ in relation to teachers as it might be socially expected from his peer, but still positions himself under adult supervision, which in his case is parents. Even though both children have different opinions on the ethical behavior of news media, they both share the same opinion related to their positioning as children towards adults namely, adults have the right to use all measures that they see as appropriate in educating children. This is in coherence with the news media’s representation of children which reinforces an adult perspective on children.

It is interesting to note that several examples were mentioned during discussions between both groups, children and adults, which related to children as victims. One explanation could be that news items on crime and violence are more often found in Albania’s television news media when compared to other topics (Kazaj, 2016). Furthermore, in both cases we can see that proximity (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) plays an important role in news

items that children choose to discuss. According to Lemish and Alon-Tirosh (2014), research shows that children express anxiety over more concrete threats to themselves and their loved ones. This points to the importance of the ethical coverage of children in news and the need to avoid scary elements or unjustified details on the victims, redundantly used in news media.

7.4.2. Children's presence and voice in the news

This study explored television news with a special focus on news items related to children. On these grounds, children and adults were asked about their perception of the broadcast frequency of news items related to children. The majority of children 56.3 % (N=64), answered that 'there is less than one news item on children per week'. A considerable percentage of children, 32.8 % (N=64) believed that 'there is at least one news item on children per week'. Three children or 4.6% (N=64) believed that 'there are no news items on children at all on television'. In general adults reported similar perceptions, but the percentage of adults who believed 'there are no news items on children at all on television' was 18.5 % (N=54), a much higher percentage than children. International research findings on the representation of children in news confirms that children are often absent from news coverage (Carter, 2014; Ponte, 2008). Studies conducted in Albania on the representation of children in the news media also support this view (Kaziaj, 2016).

Focus group discussions provided a deeper understanding on the motives for the lack of children's presence in television news coverage. When children were asked 'why do you think there are fewer news items about children' some responded:

"Because news [outlets] deal more with politics, and children are of no special interest to the news" (girl, 11, Durrës). *"News [outlets] care only about politics and they don't focus on the real problems that people in general are facing"*. (girl, 13, Elbasan)

"I think news [stories] are organized only for the people who have influence. If we organize an activity in our school, nobody cares about it, but if a politician or someone famous joins the activity, then the news media will for sure broadcast the activity". (boy, 12, Shkodër)

Children attributed their lack of presence in news coverage to the fact that news media outlets in Albania offer an overwhelming amount of attention to politics and political actors. As such, children are not considered to be interesting news subjects. The three quotes above suggest that children recognize the existence of a hierarchy of news values (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001) in Albanian television news. They see themselves as being positioned at the bottom of this hierarchy and they acknowledge their powerlessness in comparison to adults.

Adults shared the same opinions for the lack of children's presence in the news media:

"Once, a journalist came to our school for the celebrations for the 1st of June⁶⁷, and started asking questions about local elections". (woman, 40, Durres)

"I have never seen a news item with just children celebrating. There must be either the presence of a politician, or a foreign ambassador, mostly the American ambassador, so that the news media reports on that activity!" (man, 33, Tirane).

Reports on media in Albania highlight the disproportionate presence of political actors as a serious issue that can harm the independence of the news media. As a monitoring report from the Balkan Media Barometer (Lani, 2013) states, 'media outlets in Albania are increasingly becoming similar to political parties'. This perception questions the role of the news media in Albania to provide a platform for citizen-participation, particularly their encouragement of the participation of children.

Furthermore, adults argue that there is a hierarchy in news items related to children. News coverage mostly features activities related to children in the capital of Tirana, or news items on children from cultural minorities, such as Roma or Egyptian, which mostly cover topics of poverty or trafficking. According to adults, children from rural areas are rarely present in television news:

"Children from rural areas organize lots of activities, but they don't appear in television news [broadcasts]. The news media is not interested in children from rural areas, they are abandoned" (woman, 47, Elbasan).

This perception is confirmed by recent findings from an Albanian television news monitoring process, where only seven news items out of 157 focused on children from rural

⁶⁷ Celebrated as 'The Children's Day' in all schools in the country.

areas, while 94 news items from the same sample focused on children or events taking place in Tirana, the capital (Kaziaj, 2016).

Furthermore, children and adults report that they rarely see children being quoted in television news coverage. One of the girls, who was once interviewed for a news event, described her experience by saying:

“I was interviewed for an activity that we organized with other schools in Tirana. When I went to school the next day I was famous. It is one of the best experiences of my life” (girl, 11 Durres).

This statement clearly shows the significance of such an event, and illustrates the impact it can have on the life of a child. None of the other children present had anything to add after the girl shared her experience. It seemed as if the fact that she had been interviewed for television news gave her a special status among her peers and she took a leading role in the discussions. This points to the need and importance of the news media to provide a voice for children and to influence the ways they see themselves being involved in activities that are happening around them. As previous research has found, children use the news media as one of the strategies for understanding the world around them and their place in the world (Carter and Alan, 2005; Livingstone, 2002; Buckingham, 2000).

7.4.3. Children, news and politics

In order to grasp a holistic understanding of children’s and adult’s opinions on the quality of children’s portrayal in television news, participants were presented with three news items where children appeared as subjects and were invited to share their thoughts on how the children were being portrayed.

Among participants, children stated that news coverage enforces the idea that only children who live in the capital are active and engaged in activities occurring in schools or communities. Further, the participants stated that, other children are quite invisible and journalists are not interested in their stories. According to a girl:

“The only case when journalists came to my town was when a newly married girl killed her mother- in law” (girl, 14, Tirane⁶⁸).

Additionally, children stated that the media generalizes certain phenomena related to their age group. According to them, media coverage often portrays older children (14 and up) as being abusive of alcohol and drugs, or in engaging in promiscuous sexual relationships. As one boy participating in the focus groups in Tirana said:

“This is wrong, as this judgment is based only on what journalists perceive” (boy, 15, Tirane).

Furthermore, children were able to assess how their portrayal in the news affects the ways adults think of them. A boy that participated in the focus group discussions in Tirana, where some of the participants belonged to the Roma community, said:

“When we see Roma children begging in the news, people think, ‘well it is always like this with Roma children as they have nothing better to do’. But this happens because there is no other news items on Roma children rather than begging” (boy,13, Tirane) .

According to the children:

“The news media aims to attract people’s attention and that is why they come up with emotional news” (girl, 11,Shkoder).

“The News media targets an adult audience and by portraying children as victims they try to appeal to their parents and not to the children themselves” (boy, 15, Tirane).

As the above examples show, most children evaluate their portrayal in television news coverage as negative. This was the case for a previous study conducted in Albania with older children aged, 13-18 (Nelaj, 2014) in which they assessed their portrayal in the media as negative, namely: disorganized, intolerant and violent. Although this study did not consider children’s portrayal in news coverage, but within the media in general, it still provides some insights into how children in Albania see themselves being included in media’s content. It can be said that the ways in which news coverage represents children, is harmonized with the ways children are included in the overall content of the media in Albania.

⁶⁸ The case that the girl recalls happened in Peshkopi, her home town.

When the children were asked ‘which topics are more likely to include children?’ a difference was noted in the answers provided by boys and girls. Most girls mentioned topics that can be considered hard news, such as crime, violence, or accidents, while boys mentioned topics that can be considered soft news, such as celebrations, or arts and culture. This apparently surprising finding is supported by results from a 2016 monitoring study (Kaziaj, 2016), which found that boys were mostly portrayed as objects of emotional appeal in television news coverage in Albania, while girls were mostly portrayed as victims. Consequently, when girls and boys were asked to recall news items on children, they focused more on news items that they perceived to be directly related to them. In a way it can be said that they have internalized the ways in which the news media portrays them.

After reviewing the transcripts from the focus group discussions, we noted a clear-cut difference on the topics that children and adults recalled discussing more often with each other. When asked ‘which news items did you discuss recently with your children?’, most parents took a moralizing, educative or patronizing stand to the question. They used expressions such as:

“I discussed the exams with my child, as it is really important to make them understand that their future relies on their success in exams”, or “Even though I don’t like football myself I always discuss the football news with my son because I know that he likes it a lot”, “I discussed a news item about ISIS, as I felt that my child was scared”.

In all these expressions there is an underlying assumption that parents carry through in their answers, namely that children lack the critical thinking skills to make sense of the news. On the other hand, children answered quite differently to the question ‘which news items did you discuss recently with your parents?’. Most of them recalled news items that dealt with politics (elections, corruption, politicians):

“I discussed a news item about some politicians that were accused of providing packages of flour to some people in remote areas in order to get their votes in the coming elections” (boy, 14, Shkoder).

Children frequently mentioned politics as a topic of discussion. They used the word politics as a way to refer to the actions of politicians. Furthermore, they were able to mention

several cases of corruption of well-known politicians that were featured in news coverage and expressed their opinions on how such actions could have implications for the economy of the country. Such views present the argument that refutes the perspective that children are not interested in politics or political matters (Rideout, Foehr and Roberts, 2010). As Buckingham (1999:178) states, ‘young people’s cynicism about politics should be interpreted as a result of exclusion and disenfranchisement, rather than ignorance or immaturity’. The prevailing presence of politics in discussions among children might be influenced by the overwhelming presence of political actors in Albanian news coverage (Lani, 2013). Nevertheless, politics was not mentioned in the adult group discussions to the same extent that it was mentioned during the children’s group discussions. Furthermore, children began talking about politics when asked to report on the news items they discuss more often with their parents. In the words of Buckingham (2000), this can be seen as a sign of children being urged to be ‘mature’ and constantly reminded that they are not free from the adult’s prohibitions and controls. Children’s discussions concerning political matters can be seen as a way of acquiring legitimacy from adults, by showing their ‘maturity’ in discussing topics that they perceive as belonging to adults. Children try to enter the public sphere, which is portrayed by the news media as being exclusively an adult domain, from which children are excluded. In doing so they ask for more consideration from media professionals in presenting their realities. As one of children participating in the discussions stated:

“We know that journalists choose certain news items on children because they want to grab the attention of their viewers, but by doing so they miss some very important aspects of ‘what life is like for a child today in Albania’. It is not only about the negative phenomenon or the other extreme, celebrations, it is also about how we live our routines, what we think of it, what is missing in our lives and what can be improved!” (girl, 12, Elbasan).

7.5. Conclusion

Results from the present study shed light on children’s consumption and views on television news coverage in Albania, with a special focus on their own portrayal. By putting children’s views next to adults’, this study explored differences among these two groups in

terms of news consumption and news comprehension. There are no news services for children in Albania, therefore they are exposed to the same news programs as adults on a regular basis, as this study found. Findings suggest that both groups – children (aged 10-15) and adults (25-65) – have a considerable preference for watching television news, which they consider a very important source of information on political, social or cultural problems. Nonetheless, both groups acknowledge the indifference of news media towards children. The vast majority of the participants in both groups had difficulties recalling a news item on children that they had recently seen on television. Nonetheless, an ample percentage of children and adults reported that they would be interested in watching more news items related to children. While the interest of adults in news coverage is taken for granted due to the belief that adults are main targets for news outlets, the noticeable interest of children in television news is hidden. Seeking information on issues related to politics is seen as a way of understanding one's place in society and a way of expressing a desire for civic engagement. These sentiments were further strengthened by the selection of news topics that children reported discussing more often with their parents, which were related to politics, corruption or elections.

Children reported that they do not see themselves being represented in news coverage. According to them two categories are mostly found on news broadcasts: children from Roma or Egyptian communities; who are mostly portrayed as victims, or children living in the center of Tirana; who are mostly portrayed in celebrative events. Children who participated in this study rejected these portrayals as being representative of their realities. Furthermore, they point to the consequences that such portrayals can have to their positioning in society. They express an urgency for news to be related more to their realities and to avoid generalizations. This finding lends support to other research studies, which argue that news coverage portrays children in limited frames, and does not take their perspectives into consideration (Carter, 2014; Lemish and Alon-Tirosh, 2014; Ponte & Aroldi, 2013). These findings need to be related to the context of the news media in Albania, which is reportedly squeezed in between the political and business interests of a bunch of media tycoons (Halo, Hyseni, Matlija and Aleksandridis, 2015). As such, the news media is centered around politics and political actors rather than serving as a source of information for its citizens and being inclusive to their voices. Nevertheless, research conducted in other countries has also found that children and their issues are almost invisible in news media coverage, and that media outlets do not

provide a platform for children to participate (Carter, 2014, Ponte, 2007, Fullertone, 2004). As such, findings from this study could appeal to media professionals to begin considering children both as an audience and subjects for their daily work. Being inclusive to children's perspectives would enhance their civic engagement, while diversifying sources of news coverage for a larger audience. Additionally, children's views on the news media and their attitudes towards such a medium could be used by researchers, policy-makers or children's rights activists to seek more consideration of children's' perspectives as a way of fulfilling their right to participation and facilitating their presence in the public sphere, as a fundamental right for democratic societies.

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CONCLUSION

General Conclusions

Throughout this dissertation it was demonstrated how television news represents children and the role this representations play in constructing and reinforcing certain ideas and beliefs about children, which shape their social experiences. Therefore, this dissertation contributes to the understandings of ‘what kinds of childhoods’ are being constructed in and through television news. Drawing on the articulations of television news broadcasts, the views and practices of media professionals and the views of the audience on the portrayal of children in television news, this dissertation presented a thorough account of the hegemonic discourses on children which rectify the ways children’s realities are represented and understood in Albania. Within this dissertation two concepts have driven the theoretical and empirical explorations of the representation between children and the news media: the role of news in the social construction of reality (see Tuchman, 1978, 2002) and childhood as a social construction (Prout & James, 1997). Throughout this thesis the aim was to further advance the theoretical and empirical understanding of these concepts by focusing on the (still) very popular medium of television (Kevin et, al, 2013; McNair, 2009). As such, I hope to have made a significant contribution to the fields of childhood studies (see Kehily, 2008), cultural and media studies (see Allan, 2004) and to the body of research on the relationship between children and television news (see Carter, 2013) in particular.

In what follows, an account of the research questions that were developed for this study and the multi-methodological approaches that were used to investigate them empirically will be presented. The theoretical arguments that were discussed in chapters 1 and 2 will be tied to the empirical findings that were presented in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. Thus, I am in a better position to present an enveloping conclusion on the role of the television news media in the social construction of childhood in Albania. A critical approach was employed, with the aim being to produce a significant research output that can be used to make a relevant social contribution to the improvement of the representational practices of children in Albanian media. Therefore, in the penultimate section of this chapter, a number of recommendations addressed to policy-makers, media professionals and children’s rights organizations will be presented. Lastly, taking into account the limitations that were presented during the theoretical and empirical inquiry, some ideas on possible directions that research in the future could pursue will be shared.

The theoretical inquiry defined four important approaches when accounting for the role of the news media in constructing social reality, and more specifically childhood. I have identified how social systems, media professionals, media representations and audiences, are significant to the ways in which dominant ideas on children are constructed and represented in television news, and how they are reinforced and disseminated in society. All these actors, actions and processes are therefore involved in contributing and producing meaning in society on ideas related to children. Previous studies on children and the news have considered these approaches and processes separately (see 1.1). A number of studies have emphasized the role of social systems (see Lemish & Goetz, 2007) or media professionals' views and practices related to children in the news (see Coleman, 2011; Slopen et al., 2007; Fullertone, 2004; Davies, 2003; Goddard & Saunders, 2000). Additionally, a great deal of studies have analyzed media texts to account for hegemonic representations of children in the news media and their role in shaping our views on children and their place in society (Carter, 2014; Kitzinger, 2004; Goonasekera, 2001; Moeller, 1999). Lastly, some studies have explored how the social realities of children are presented by the news media, and how they are meaningful to children themselves by signifying their social practices (Alon- Tirosh & Lemish, 2014; Ponte, 2008; Gunter, B., Furnham, A., & Griffiths, S, 2000; Lemish, 1998).

Rather than focusing on only one of these approaches, this dissertation investigated the topic of children and the news media from three different angles: by exploring the representations of children in television news, the views of media professionals on children and the views of the audience, both children and adults. Therefore, this dissertation has contributed to the establishment of a more thorough view on how issues related to children are constructed, represented and consumed in television news. Theoretically, this work has responded to the call for a reconsideration of the complementarity of the different approaches in studying news (Tuchman, 2002). By taking a meta-theoretical look at the complementarity of approaches in news production, news content and news consumption – all of which explore the production of meaning in society – this dissertation provided a complete view on the *how's* and the *why's* of the relationship between children and television news. Additionally, following the suggestion of Livingstone (2005) that argues for a combined exploration of audiences and texts, audience views on children's representations in television news were taken into consideration. By linking how the social realities of children are constructed by the news media, and how they are meaningful to social actors – i.e. adults and children – this

dissertation accounts for a thorough exploration of the role of television news in the social construction of childhood. Thus, theoretically the focus of this dissertation is the exploration of the processes of news production, news representations and news consumption, and how they can be conceptualized and studied in a complementary nature.

The empirical chapters have further reinforced this proposition by clearly showing that none of these processes can be understood completely on their own, instead insights from each empirical study are needed in order to get an integrated view on the subject. More specifically, when accounting for the representations of children in television news (chapter 5), the journalistic choices of media professionals and the dominant ideologies on children in Albania were taken into consideration in order to better comprehend such representations. Additionally, when accounting for the views of media professionals in Albania (chapter 6), several intrinsic factors to media organizations such as advertising, government policies, and ethical considerations on children in society were carefully considered for a better understanding of these views. Finally, when accounting for the views of children and adults on the representation of children in television news (chapter 7), several elements from the social system, i.e. ideas and beliefs on children in society and media professional's views and routines related to children, were seen as significant in shaping the ways in which the audience consumes and comprehends news items about children. Thus, the idea to dedicate an empirical chapter to each approach on the relationship of children and television news stems from the fact that there are sufficiently unique attributes in each level to justify studying them separately. But, as argued throughout these chapters, they are interdependent and complementary and have to be considered as part of the larger whole, as this dissertation has tried to do. This was crucial in presenting a clear interpretation of how ideas and beliefs on children are constructed by the news media and how they signify the ways children engage with society.

In addition to a theoretical contribution, this dissertation focused on making an empirical inquiry into the relationship of children and television news. The empirical chapters were constructed around four research questions, which were further investigated to account for the potential of television news in the social construction of childhood. The first research question asked how children are represented in Albanian television news. I began by employing the theoretical perspective of the new sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1997), which defines childhood as “a variable and changing entity, which varies across history and culture,

and is open to change, both intended and unintended.” The purpose was to investigate the role of the news media in defining childhood in a specific context such as Albania. For media scholars such as van Dijk (2008), news media outlets are considered to be an important source of information that, while informing citizens on central issues, enables them to develop attitudes and beliefs. For other scholars interested in media and children, such as Carter (2014), Livingstone (2009), Ponte (2007) and Buckingham (2000) the news media can play a powerful role in constructing an image of children and their positioning in society, through the redundant use of certain concepts and images. Therefore, these scholars argue that while exposing the dominant ideologies on children as presented by the news media, it is crucial to understand the dominant beliefs and ideas related to children in a specific society and the ways they underpin the social experiences of children. To reveal these articulations on children in television news, I used a combination of qualitative and quantitative media content analysis to explore the patterns and characteristics of the representation of children, used as a way to measure the number of favorable and unfavorable characteristics attributed to children, taken to indicate the beliefs held by the producers, the audience or their common culture (Krippendorff, 2004). Three particular media approaches were identified in stories related to children. I introduced the term ‘adult gaze’ as a way to delineate these approaches. First, news items related to children were constructed from an adult perspective, while keeping in mind an adult audience and an adult figure. Second, children were customarily filmed in a high-angle shot—as adults see them in real life. Third, stories related to children brought an adult voice to the issue that was being discussed, while leaving children in the background. As such, I argued that all of these elements, when repeatedly used together in news items, contribute to a limited view of children and reinforce the dominant perspectives of adults, which as a consequence makes children more vulnerable and denies them full participation in the public sphere. The concept of the ‘adult gaze’ as it is presented in this dissertation, further advances the theoretical and empirical inquiry on the representation of children by the news media. While the concept of *perspective* has been used previously in media theory when studying frames and framing effects (see Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999), the ways in which power relations between the producer (and hence also the viewer) and the represented subject (in our case children) are enacted and the means through which they are articulated in news media, remain unexplored. In this context, integrating the concept of ‘the gaze’ as an indicator of a relationship of power (see Mulvey, 1975) between the producer and the represented participant in news media broadcasts allowed for an exploration of media mechanisms

through which the power imbalances are articulated, maintained and reproduced. Additionally, by introducing the concept of the 'adult gaze' in this dissertation, concrete ways to account for an empirical exploration of this concept are provided. I identified three particular patterns in television news media (see above), which provide empirical evidence on the presence of the 'adult gaze' and the ways television news represents children.

However, to comprehend how television news constructs ideas and beliefs about children, a more thorough investigation on the role of media professionals is required. Therefore, the second research question focused on how do news media professionals shape the ways children, and issues affecting them, are presented in television news. The quality of children's coverage in media (chapter 5) was taken as an indicator of the socially determined beliefs of children as social actors that are also shared among media professionals that want to see their work disseminated. Therefore, investigating media professionals' views on children served two purposes: 1) to reveal how dominant ideologies on children in society underpin the views and practices of media professionals related to children, 2) to consider more precisely how these views (in turn) impact, transform and reproduce specific representations [of children] in the news media (see Howarth 2011; Hall 1997). Based on a series of in-depth interviews with media professionals in Albania, it was argued that the notions of children as being ineffectually newsworthy or untrustworthy stand-alone sources when compared to adults, was reflected in the opinions of most journalists and news editors. I agreed that these views on children confirm the existence of the 'adult gaze', among news media professionals. According to this concept, journalists and news editors set adults as the standard by which to judge children. I argued that such views on children held by media professionals prevent children and the issues affecting them, from being covered in the news media. However, I tried to avoid presenting a simplistic account concerning the views of media professionals on children. Rather, these views and accounts have to be explored and understood in combination with other influences on news media content, such as the complex interplay between media owners, advertisers and political influences from the government or different political parties, as presented in Albania where the news media is reportedly squeezed between the political and business interests of several different media tycoons (Halo, et al., 2015). Therefore, by taking all these elements into account, this study argued that journalists who cover children (as part of covering social issues in the media) find themselves in a continually vicious circle. On the one hand they adhere to what they think their editors value as newsworthy in news

items related to children, and on the other they must perform along the perceived political affiliation of the media owner and report accordingly. Even though journalists displayed a solid understanding of the need and importance of covering children and their issues in the news media, their beliefs and good will were not reflected in their work. Considering that most research on journalists and children is concentrated around the general ethical obligations of journalists while reporting on children (see Mackay, 2008; Fullertone, 2004; Goddard & Saunders, 2000; Moeller, 1999) or journalists' decision-making processes for including children in news coverage (see Coleman, 2010) – this investigation examines the views of media professionals by considering other influences on journalistic practices, which is the central contribution that this empirical study adds to existing studies on the relationship between media professionals and children.

In addition to the empirical inquiry on media representations and media professionals' views on children, the last empirical chapter was dedicated to audience responses on the representations of children in television news. This study was seen as complementary to the preceding studies (Kazaj, 2016a; Kazaj, 2016c) by providing insights on the representations of children in television news broadcasts, how these representations are perceived by children themselves, and what is the role of television news in inciting the participation of children in society. Furthermore, the study explored the representation of children in television news and how it is perceived by adults as shaping the ways children engage with society. A cultural studies approach was employed and children were acknowledged as active participants in social life and as actors with potential for having agency of their own (Prout & James, 1997). Accordingly, in the context of this dissertation, children are considered as capable of forming and articulating their own opinions regarding the news in general, and their own portrayal in particular. By making use of a series of focus group discussions with children and adults in Albania, this study found that both groups – children (ages 10-15) and adults (ages 25-65) – have a considerable preference for watching television news, which they acknowledge as a very important source of information on political, social or cultural issues. Nonetheless, both categories acknowledge the indifference of news media towards children. Therefore, these findings challenged the generally accepted belief that children regard news as boring, and that they refuse to engage with the news media (see also Carter, 2013; Gunter, Furnham & Griffiths, 2000), thus lending support to previous findings on children as a news audience which suggests that news outlets do not take children's perspectives into consideration

(Carter, 2014; Alon-Tirosh & Lemish, 2014; Ponte, 2013). As a consequence, I first argued that the lack children's coverage among general news coverage questions the news media's potential to facilitate the ways children connect with society. Furthermore, focus group discussions revealed a prevailing desire among children to discuss news items related to politics and political actors in Albania. The noticeable level of children's interest in political issues – which was not present to the same extent in the focus groups with adults – was seen as a way of understanding one's place in society and a way of expressing an aspiration for civic engagement. In the words of Buckingham (2000), this can be seen as a sign of children being urged to be 'mature' while given constant reminders that they are not free from adult prohibitions and controls.

As such, I argue that children's opinions concerning television news coverage in Albania should be perceived as an attempt to obtain legitimacy from adults to enter the public sphere, which is portrayed by the news media as being exclusively an adult domain. Research on children as a news audience has typically examined children aged 15-18, due to the positioning of this specific age group on the boundaries of becoming 'citizens' (see Meijer 2007). When a younger age group is considered, such as 10-15 (see Carter et al., 2009; Buckingham, 2000) it has mostly been researched in relation to children's television news format, while in most countries such programs do not exist. Therefore the views of children aged 10-15 on news media, still remain unexplored. This study addresses this age gap. On the other hand, the results accounted for the views of adults on the representation of children in television news, which is a topic of research that is lacking in the existing literature on children and news. It was noted that in the adult focus groups, articulations on children and news were constructed around moralizing, educative or patronizing aspects. Most of them were quoted saying expressions such as: "I discuss the news on exams with my child, as it is really important to make them understand that their future relies on their success in exams" (woman, 38, FG Elbasan), or "Even though I don't like football myself, I always discuss news about football with my son because I know that he likes it a lot" (man, 41, FG, Lezhe), "I discussed a news item about ISIS, as I felt that my child was scared" (woman, 47, FG Lezhe). In all these expressions there is an underlying assumption that parents apply in their answers, namely that children lack the critical thinking skills to make sense of the news. This assumption was also reflected in the limited representations of children in television news in Albania, either as victims, objects of emotional appeal, or passive subjects revealed through

media monitoring and presented in chapter 5. Furthermore, the ideas of parents on children are consistent with the views of media professionals on children, which considered them as not newsworthy subjects or untrustworthy stand-alone sources when compared to adults due to their assumptions that children lack critical thinking skills or what some of them called, lack of interest in the “adult world” (see chapter 6). I argue that these articulations on children could be seen as a reflection of the common culture shared by media professionals and audiences, which in this case includes only adults. As a conclusion, I argue for more consideration of children’s perspectives in news coverage as a way of fulfilling a child’s right to participate and their presence in the public sphere, which are both fundamental guarantees in democratic societies.

Having drawn separate conclusions after each empirical study, I will formulate an overarching conclusion in regard to the role of television news in shaping the social construction of childhood. Based on the findings from the multi-methodological study presented in this dissertation, I can say that children’s representations in television news are related to specific ideologies on children in culture and society, which on the one hand is brought to the audience as a reflection of their own beliefs and on the other is reinforced through the practices of media professionals and the redundant use of certain images and concepts on children in the news media. In turn, children are made to conform to the adult monopoly of knowledge and are not given an opportunity to voice their views on what happens around them, and as a consequence they are being denied any active participation in society. As Holland (2004:205) has noted:

“Of all social groups, children have been the least able to explore their views of themselves in the public domain. They have found themselves trapped by received definitions, which are underpinned by powerful adult emotions. Yet, where they have gained greater access to a public voice they have been able to make a significant contribution to the broad sweep of social meanings. The result has been not a more ‘childish’ set of images, but a more diverse one.”

Accounting for an increased and qualitative participation of children in Albanian media: Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in the empirical chapters, I wish to formulate a number of general recommendations and concerns addressed to policy-makers, media professionals and non-governmental institutions that are working in the field of children's rights and/or media. As the theoretical portion of this dissertation suggested, when talking about the news media from a social constructionist perspective, one implies a considerate number of actors, actions and processes, all involved in contributing and producing meaning in society. In the case of children and the news media, all these actors and processes play a role not only in reinforcing dominant beliefs on children in society, but also in creating a space for children to have a say and engage with society in meaningful ways. Therefore it is crucial to inspire debates on the ways children are encouraged to participate in public life, while offering a number of concrete ideas for intervention that stem from my critical engagement with research on children and the news media.

First, media professionals more than any other actor, could contribute to the debate on children's rights, public policy and children's positioning in society. Based on our findings, the views and routines of media professionals as they are being presented in the Albanian news media, contribute to the lack of children's presence in news media coverage. Therefore, journalists can increase children's participation in news coverage by considering children as viable news subjects or topics. This requires effort to challenge the dominant beliefs about children, which imply that they are "citizens in the making" (Buckingham, 2000) that lack critical thinking or proper knowledge. This notion was embedded in media professionals' views, and as a consequence it has affected their decision-making processes related to the coverage of children. As previous research has shown (Davies & Carter, 2005) and as found in the empirical section of this dissertation, if given the chance for more participation in news coverage, children have the potential to provide a valuable contribution, not only in diversifying news topics and news sources but also in providing valuable insights on the society we live in. Furthermore, as shown in the last empirical chapter of this dissertation, children are interested in news (at least) to the same extent as adults, and this fact continues to be ignored by news media professionals. Acknowledging children as an audience for news would imply, on the one hand, a greater responsibility for media professionals to be more

inclusive to certain social issues and actors, such as children, while on the other hand providing bigger opportunities for news outlets to enforce their role as an important source of information among bigger audiences, including children. Furthermore, acknowledging children as a news audience creates opportunities for news outlets to enhance children's civic engagement by providing information that is fair and accurate and that helps citizens make political decisions in an informed manner. As a result, this would contribute to building a greater sense of societal belonging among children while encouraging the role of the media to act as agents in promoting democratic values and citizenship.

More specifically, based on the findings from the media monitoring process, journalists have to avoid using clichés regarding children in television news coverage. Several clichés used as descriptive words for children such as *minor*, *unprotected*, *defenseless*, *infantile*, *immature*, etc. in news coverage, point to children's lack of agency and puts them in more vulnerable positions. Furthermore, journalists have to avoid cliché camera angles such as the redundant use of the high angle shot when filming children, which was highlighted in the empirical inquiry of this dissertation. Additionally, the use of such camera angles was often combined with a setting that reinforced ideas on children as victims, dependent and in need of protection, such as filming children while sitting on the streets, begging, or collecting garbage. Decisions on the ways images of children are used by the news media should be part of a written code of ethics concerning the portrayal of children in media. From our interviews with media professionals it was revealed that written ethical codes do not exist for either the national or private television channels. The Media Authority in Albania (AMA), which is the responsible body for monitoring media broadcasts for all operators, has compiled a Law on Audio-visual Broadcasting in the Republic of Albania (nr. 97/2013) and a Code of Broadcast (Nr. 01/2014) which provides detailed instructions and recommendations to all audio-visual media outlets on how children's issues should be portrayed in news coverage and throughout the media broadcast. Only one journalist out of eight that were interviewed for the purpose of this research project knew about the existence of a Code on Broadcasting. Additionally, there is no regular monitoring regarding children's portrayals in the news, as foreseen in the Code of Broadcast and the Law on Audio-visual Media in Albania (Nr 97/2013,p.6). The finding that media outlets do not have detailed protocols in place about how to interact with children, does not relate only to the Albanian context but is a worldwide phenomenon, with some sporadic exceptions (see Fullertone, 2004).

Currently, the ministry of Social Welfare and Youth in Albania is revising the Law on Child Rights Protection (Nr.10 347) that was passed in 2010. According to an interview⁶⁹ with the minister of Social Welfare and Youth, Blendi Klosi, the aim of the revised law is to avoid focusing all the attention on issues of child protection and violence – as was the case in previous years – but to assure a broader view on child participation in society. For this reason, according to the minister the new law will change its title from The law on Child Rights Protection to The law on Child Rights and Protection. As this dissertation has shown, news media in Albania can play a significant role in constructing and reinforcing certain ideas and beliefs on children's positioning in society. Furthermore, the news media can play a role in advancing children's participation in society and civic engagement, which is the focus of new policies from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. Therefore, I argue that this ministry, as well as other governmental institutions working on issues of children's rights, can play a more active role in pushing for further consideration of children's participation in the media. Furthermore, 118 non-governmental organizations offer services and implement projects related to children's rights⁷⁰ in Albania. Very few of them have been working on children's representation or participation in media coverage (see 2.2). Even when children and media outlets have been considered as a field for intervention, such initiatives have mostly been focused on issues of ethics in a narrow sense, such as cases where the identity details of children as victims have been published in news media. I argue that encouraging projects on children's participation in media coverage as part of current projects that children's rights NGOs are implementing in the country, will increase the possibilities for children to have a say on issues and events happening around them. Such interventions will have a positive impact on the social inclusion of children in Albania, which is one of the goals of the ministry of Welfare and Youth, stated in their Development Strategy for 2015-2020⁷¹. Focusing on the news media as one of the important social institutions in Albania in terms of public trust and as a channel of information (see chapter 4) is an important step in addressing children's rights for participation and information, as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which Albania ratified in 1992 and which serves as a foundation for a number of policies on children's rights. As a final note, I am aware that all of the aforementioned

⁶⁹ See interview given to TemaTV, date 14.06.2016, in this link:

<http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2016/06/14/blendi-klosi-ne-mikroskop-demonon-punen-ne-te-zeze/>.

⁷⁰ See complete list here: <http://femijet.gov.al/al/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/OJF-q%C3%AB-ofrojn%C3%AB-sh%C3%ABrime-p%C3%ABr-f%C3%ABmij%C3%AB.pdf>

⁷¹ <http://www.sociale.gov.al/al/program/konsultimi-strategjise-kombetare-per-zhvillim-dhe-integrim-2015-2020>.

recommendations, even if well-coordinated and implemented in Albania, will not change the situation of children's representation in media within a day. Nonetheless, they present a good basis to begin challenging the beliefs related to children that have been cemented in Albanian society for a long time (see 1.3.2), and which prevents children from participating in the public sphere.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

There are several limitations to this research project due to the complexities of studying the role of news media in society (see Allan, 2010) and several pragmatic choices that had to be made regarding the time given to complete the project (September 2013- August, 2016). In this section I will discuss some of the limitations, while offering suggestions on how to further research and tackle such issues.

First, the empirical research attached to this dissertation focused exclusively on television news. This decision was closely related to the Albanian context where it was argued that there is an overwhelming presence of television news when compared to other media genres, and that the news media was found to be the most trustworthy media in the country (see chapter 4). Nonetheless, there is a need to explore the representation of children in media coverage as it relates to other genres and programs, rather than news, by accounting for the concept of 'adult gaze' as it was coined in this dissertation, in addition to arguing for the implications it presents on the positioning of children in society. Furthermore, with the rise of children as users and consumers of new media (see Livingstone & Bulger, 2013) debates on the relationship between children and media outlets should explore the opportunities that the digital age presents for children's participation in society. These debates have mostly focused on the online risks related to children's Internet usage (see Livingstone, 2016). The decision to focus the debate on new media and children in terms of risk – a topic that has prevailed among media scholars and children's rights activists – is reminiscent of earlier debates on the role of television in children's lives, when television was first introduced as a new medium. These debates also focused on the risks that this 'new' medium presented for children (see Eron, 1963; Huesmann & Eron, 1986; Adoni & Cohen, 1980). It is my hope that the lessons learned from the academic engagement and progression of research on the relationship

between children and the media in mediums such as television, radio or newspapers, will be taken into consideration when accounting for the relationship between new media and children, the field in which research on children and media is mostly focusing.

Second, when addressing the production side of news on children (chapters, 4 and 6), this project relied on a series of interviews with journalists and news editors in Albania and a considerable number of secondary sources on the Albanian media landscape. Although these chapters provide a very good account of the views of media professionals, professionals who are considered to be important gatekeepers in the production process (see Shoemaker and Reese, 2014), these views do not present a thorough exploration of the production process of news items on children. Some attempts have already been made to explore the production process of news items on children (see Matthews, 2010, 2003), but they have mostly considered news programs targeting children, such as the BBC's Newsround. As argued earlier in this dissertation, such programs are missing in many countries. Therefore, investigating news production processes on items related to children would reveal additional aspects on why children are not considered as important news topics by media outlets, as this dissertation – as well as previous studies (Fullertone, 2014; Carter, 2014, Ponte, 2007) – showed, and may aid in drafting policies and interventions targeting media organizations and media professionals.

Finally, the reception study in this dissertation was constructed around several focus group discussions where 118 participants, including children and adults, shared their views on television news. Even though the results from the focus groups provided some valuable insights on the views of children and adults on the representation of children in the news, they cannot be generalized for all children and adults in Albania. Nonetheless, several studies (Nelaj, 2014; Kevin et al, 2013) indicate that the number of adults in Albania who are regularly exposed and trust news coverage is immense. Yet no study has provided representative data for children and their exposure to news in Albania. I argue that a large-scale survey would better serve this purpose. Revealing information concerning children's exposure to and views on news media, contributes to the advancement of discussions regarding the role that the news media plays in enhancing children's participation in society.

Additionally, the reception study in this dissertation only considered children ages 10-15, as a way to address a gap in the existing literature. Another suggestion would be to include younger ages as well. Findings on the interests and views of children concerning news media

coverage could serve to incite debate on the need to consider children as an audience for news, which has been strongly argued in the final section of this dissertation. Moreover, being inclusive to children's views would provide a platform to listen to their voices and thus empower children to speak about issues that are important to them while also providing an original contribution to research on children and media.

As noted in the literature review, most of the research on the relationship between children and news outlets has been conducted in so-called, (economically) developed countries, such as European Union members, the United States of America or Canada. I would like to make a call for more longitudinal and comparative research related to the representation of children in the news media in countries that are not considered to be (economically) developed countries, but in countries that struggle to advance children's right to participate in their societies⁷².

In this light, I hope that through the academic contribution provided in this dissertation, I have presented convincing arguments on the need to consider the representation of children in news coverage, the importance of the field, and the need for further attention as a prerequisite for advancing children's participation in society.

I want to end by repeating the quote from one of the children who participated in a focus group (chapter 7):

We know that journalists choose certain news items on children because they want to grab the attention of their viewers, but by doing so they miss some very important aspects of 'what life is like for a child today in Albania'. It is not only about the negative phenomenon or the other extreme, celebrations, it is also about how we live our routines, what we think of, what is missing in our lives and what can be improved!' (girl, 12, FG Elbasan).

⁷² A latest ranking on the Kidrights index, can be found at this link: <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>.

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APPENDIXES

Appendixes are included in the CD-R attached to this book. Due to the large amount of data, the SPSS databases are not included in the appendixes but are available upon request from the researcher. The appendixes include:

Appendix 1: Media monitoring (chapter 5)

- Codebook for media monitoring on the Representation of Children in Television News
- Registration form for media monitoring
- SPSS outputs for the main categories
- Screen shots of pictures of children in news items used for analysis

Appendix 2: Interviews with media professionals (chapter 6)

- Interview guides with journalists
- Interview guides with news Editors
- Overview of interviewees
- Transcribed interviews (in Albanian)

Appendix 3: Focus group interviews with children and adults (chapter 7)

- Interview guides with children
- Interview guides with adults
- Overview of the focus groups
- Custom designed activities' materials
- Videos of the three news items discussed during the focus groups

Dutch summary- Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Kinderen in het televisienieuws: Een multi-methodisch onderzoek naar de representatie en receptie van kinderen in het Albanese televisienieuws

Nieuwsmedia hebben een enorm potentieel als verhalenvertellers over kinderen. Door hun gebruik van narratieve constructies en specifieke beelden levert televisienieuws een niet te onderschatten bijdrage aan de culturele betekenisgeving rond kinderen. Deze verhalen “[...] *“...make it possible for daily lives to continue and meaningful actions to be undertaken, as we half-consciously refer to them for guidance on behavior and relationships [with children].”* (Holland, 2004:3).

Het Verdrag van de Verenigde Naties inzake de Rechten van het Kind spoorde in 1989 alle landen die het Verdrag ondertekenden (of binnen afzienbare tijd zouden ondertekenen) de “belangrijke functie van de massamedia” te onderkennen. Het doel was om te verzekeren dat “het kind toegang krijgt tot een diversiteit van nationale en internationale bronnen – in het bijzonder tot die media die investeren in de promotie van het sociale, spirituele, morele, mentale en fysieke welzijn van het kind – voor zijn of haar informatieverstrekking en zelfontplooiing”. Sindsdien is de representatie van kinderen in media een belangrijk uitgangspunt geworden voor onderzoek naar de rol van media in de uitbouw van de rechten van het kind (zie Carter, 2013; Ponte, 2007, 2009; Goonasekera, 2001; Children Now, 1994, 1999). Academische debatten over de relatie tussen kinderen en nieuwsmedia hebben zich echter voornamelijk toegespitst op de verschillende ethische vraagstukken die hieraan verbonden zijn (Fullertone, 2004; Goddard & Saunders, 2000; Moeller, 1999). Hierdoor heeft het onderzoek voornamelijk geleid tot wetswijzigingen en praktijken die gerelateerd zijn aan de bescherming van kinderen (zie Kitzinger, 2004). Misbruik is evenwel “slechts één van de veelheid aan representaties van de kindertijd die door hedendaagse massamedia verspreid worden” (Prout, 2004:7), terwijl we zouden moeten ingaan op “hoe verschillende discursieve praktijken verschillende waarheden over de kindertijd produceren, die in hun eigen waarheidsregime ‘de realiteit’ vormen” (Prout & James, 1997:25).

Gezien de potentiële macht van nieuwsmedia in beeldvorming is het van belang om, naast de traditionele focus op kindermisbruik en de ethische dimensies van de relatie tussen kinderen en media, ook ruimere mogelijke constructies van een kindertijd in nieuws te onderzoeken. Met de *representatie van kinderen in het Albanese televisienieuws* komt deze dissertatie hieraan tegemoet. Albanië als case biedt een uitgelezen kans om rol van nieuwsmedia in relatie tot de sociale omstandigheden van gemarginaliseerde groepen - zoals kinderen - te bestuderen. Dit niet alleen vanwege het ruime aanbod aan en sterke invloed van nieuwsmedia (Kevin, Pellicano, & Scheenberger, 2013), maar bovenal omdat sociale uitsluiting één van de kernproblemen is waarmee Albanese kinderen te maken krijgen. In een postcommunistisch land als Albanië is het verbeteren van de rechten van deze gemarginaliseerde groepen cruciaal voor het opbouwen van een democratisch waardensysteem.

Om de diverse elementen inzake de representatie van kinderen in het Albanese televisienieuws te verkennen, baseert deze studie zich op vier centrale onderzoeksvragen: (1) Hoe worden kinderen gerepresenteerd in televisienieuws? (2) Op welke manier geven mediaprofessionals vorm aan de representaties van kinderen? (3a) Hoe staan kinderen zelf tegenover de representatie van kinderen in het televisienieuws? (3b) Hoe staan volwassenen hier tegenover? De eerste onderzoeksvraag wil nagaan op welke manier de representaties van kinderen in televisienieuws bijdragen tot de sociale constructie van specifieke ideeën en normen inzake kinderen en de kindertijd. De tweede onderzoeksvraag gaat in op de rol van journalisten en andere mediaprofessionals in het representeren van kinderen binnen hun nieuwsmedia. De tweeledige derde onderzoeksvraag (3a en 3b), tot slot, richt zich op hoe nieuwsmedia kinderen al dan niet stimuleren om te participeren in de samenleving. Deze centrale onderzoeksvragen helpen om de rol van televisienieuws te bestuderen in het opbouwen, definiëren en naturaliseren van onze ideeën over kinderen en de kindertijd. Dit leidt uiteindelijk tot een dieper inzicht in de maatschappelijke positionering van kinderen. Zoals Jenkins (2005: 53) het formuleert “a state of being, such as childhood, should be formulated through the ‘analytic gaze’ within a particular epoch must tell us as much about the condition of our society as it does about our children”.

Theoretisch en methodologisch situeert dit onderzoeksproject zich in de traditie van de *Cultural Studies*, wat omschreven kan worden als een “a multifaceted intellectual area that explores the ideological connections among media, political economy and practices of individuals in a cultural system” (Miller, 2005: 75). Voor dit onderzoek concreet worden

ideeën rond kinderen die door nieuwsmedia verspreid worden gezien als een proces van betekenisgeving. Dit proces wordt vervolgens in verband gebracht met andere betekenisssystemen die worden verspreid en bestendigd in de samenleving (zie Lemish, 2006).

In deze dissertatie staan twee concepten centraal: de rol van nieuwsberichtgeving in de sociale constructie van de realiteit (zie Tuchman, 1978; 2002) en de kindertijd zelf als een sociale constructie ((Prout & James, 1997). Door de nadruk op het (nog steeds) erg populaire medium televisie te leggen (Kevin et, al, 2013; McNair, 2009), hebben we met deze dissertatie bijgedragen een theoretische en empirische verruiming van deze twee kernconcepten. Daarnaast hebben we met onze studie bijgedragen aan zowel het ontluikende veld van *childhood studies* (zie Kehily, 2009) als aan culturele mediastudies in het algemeen (zie Allan, 2004). Tot slot kan deze studie worden gekaderd in het groeiende corpus van onderzoek dat zich toelegt op de relaties tussen kinderen en televisienieuws (zie Carter, 2013).

Deze dissertatie bevat zeven hoofdstukken en is opgedeeld in twee luiken, waarvan de twee theoretische hoofdstukken het eerste luik vormen en de laatste vijf het empirische luik. Het eerste hoofdstuk vormt een overzicht van de belangrijkste theoretische inzichten inzake de rol van nieuwsmedia in de sociale constructie van de werkelijkheid, met een bijzondere focus op de betekenisgeving rond de kindertijd. Hierbij breng ik verschillende benaderingen uit onderzoek naar de rol van nieuwsmedia expliciet in verband met studies over kinderen en nieuwsverslaggeving. Verder gaat het hoofdstuk ook in op courante methodologische praktijken en empirische aandachtspunten, en beargumenteert het de specifieke combinatie van theoretische en methodologische tradities die in deze dissertatie gebruikt worden. Daarnaast wordt er ook dieper ingegaan op het idee van de kindertijd als een sociale constructie, en biedt het een kort historisch overzicht van de veranderende betekenis die aan de kindertijd wordt gegeven. Meer specifiek gaat het hoofdstuk ook kort in op de geschiedenis van de betekenis van de kindertijd in Albanië. De conclusie van het hoofdstuk gaat ten slotte in op de rol en het belang van media in het construeren van ideeën rond kind en kindertijd.

Het tweede hoofdstuk geeft in eerste instantie een grondig overzicht van de literatuur over kinderen en nieuwsmedia en identificeert hierbinnen drie belangrijke thema's: onderzoek naar de representatie van kinderen in het nieuws; onderzoek naar hoe mediaprofessionals naar kinderen kijken; en studies over kinderen als publiek van nieuwsmedia. Tot op heden hebben studies zich tot één van deze drie afzonderlijke thema's beperkt (zie Alon Tirosh & Lemish, 2014; Carter, 2014; Ponte, 2008; Fullertone, 2004; Goonasekera, 2001). Deze dissertatie zal

door onderzoek naar de productie, inhoud en receptie van nieuwsmedia deze drie tradities combineren om tot diepere inzichten te komen over de manier waarop ideeën over kinderen en de kindertijd geproduceerd, gedeeld, gepresenteerd en geconsumeerd worden. Dit multi-methodische perspectief gecombineerd met de toepassing ervan op een concrete case, Albanië, vormt de belangrijkste bijdrage van deze dissertatie aan het bestaande onderzoek naar kinderen en nieuwsmedia.

Het empirische luik begint met een hoofdstuk (hoofdstuk 3) waarin we het onderzoeksdesign en de gebruikte methodologieën bespreken. Concreet gaan we in op inhoudsanalyse, diepte-interviews en focusgroepen. De daaropvolgende hoofdstukken zijn elk een empirische studie die een antwoord formuleert op een van de vooropgestelde onderzoeksvragen.

De eerste studie (hoofdstuk 4) schetst een overzicht van de Albanese mediacontext (Kazaj, 2016b), een toont aan hoe de specifieke politieke en economische context in Albanië een belangrijke factor zijn in de manier waarop sociale thema's, en kinderen in het bijzonder, in nieuwsmedia gerepresenteerd worden. Dit hoofdstuk biedt de lezer dus een essentiële context voor de andere onderzoeken (zie Tabel 1.1).

De laatste drie studies leggen zich toe op de representatie van kinderen in het Albanese televisienieuws (hoofdstuk 5); de betekenisgeving door professionals aan mediarepresentaties van kinderen in televisienieuws (hoofdstuk 6) en de betekenisgeving van kinderen en volwassenen ten aanzien van de representatie van kinderen in televisienieuws (hoofdstuk 7). Deze hoofdstukken hebben de vorm van wetenschappelijke artikels en zijn reeds gepubliceerd dan wel ingediend en *in review* in internationale peer-reviewed tijdschriften.

“The adult gaze”: exploring the representation of children in television news in Albania” (Kazaj, 2016a), als eerste artikel, is gebaseerd op de analyse van 4416 nieuwsitems van drie nationale Albanese televisiezenders. 154 van deze nieuwsitems bevatten kinderen als onderwerp en werden zowel kwalitatief als kwantitatief onderzocht aan de hand van een inhoudsanalyse. Het artikel toont aan dat televisienieuws gebruik maakt van duidelijk identificeerbare mediapatronen voor de representatie van kinderen op een manier dat het ‘volwassenen-perspectief’ op kinderen bestendigt. In het hoofdstuk wordt de term “adult gaze” naar voren geschoven om deze verbeeldingsstrategieën kenbaar te maken. Aan de hand van dit concept beargumenteren we dat deze macht gerelateerde praktijken en -perspectieven de participatie van kinderen in de samenleving tegenwerkt en zelfs kinderen hun

maatschappelijke positie verzwakt. Hierdoor levert de term “adult gaze” een belangrijke bijdrage aan theoretisch en empirisch onderzoek naar de representatie van kinderen in nieuwsmedia. Voorheen werd immers vooral gebruik gemaakt van de minder gepolitiseerde term *perspectief* (zie Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999), waardoor de inherente machtsrelaties tussen de producent en het gerepresenteerde subject (en bijgevolg ook de kijker) onder de radar bleven. De introductie van het gepolitiseerde concept “the gaze”, die deze machtsrelatie wel blootlegt (zie ook Mulvey, 1975), biedt dan ook de mogelijkheid om de mediamechanismen te onderzoeken die deze machtsrelaties opbouwen, bestendigen en reproduceren. Op basis van deze theoretische insteek biedt het hoofdstuk uiteindelijk een antwoord op de eerste onderzoeksvraag: hoe worden kinderen gerepresenteerd in televisienieuws?

Het tweede artikel, “*Journalists’ and news editors’ views on children as news subjects in Albanian media: Exploring issues of newsworthiness and self-censorship*” (Kaziaj, 2016c), heeft als uitgangspunt dat journalisten een belangrijke rol hebben in hoe verscheidene sociale issues al dan niet aan het publiek gepresenteerd worden. We gebruiken diepte-interviews om na te gaan hoe journalisten hun visie, op zowel kinderen als het in beeld brengen van die kinderen in nieuwsmedia, een rol speelt in hoe kinderen gerepresenteerd worden en of kinderen al dan niet een stem krijgen in die representatie. Aan de hand van een vergelijkende analyse geeft dit artikel een antwoord op de tweede onderzoeksvraag: hoe vormen professionals uit de nieuwsmedia de manier waarop kinderen gerepresenteerd worden in televisienieuws?

In “*The Ignored Audience: A multi-method reception study on children and television news in Albania*” (Kaziaj & Van Bauwel, 2016) bespreken we de resultaten van 12 focusgroepen met kinderen en volwassenen over journaaluitzendingen in het algemeen, en kinderen als onderwerpen van televisienieuws in het bijzonder. Het artikel toont op basis van discussies gevoerd door de kinderen zelf aan dat ze nood hebben om deel uit te maken van de publieke sfeer, maar dat nieuwsmedia deze representeren als een domein dat exclusief aan volwassenen toebehoort. Daarnaast illustreert het onderzoek ook hoe volwassenen kinderen percipiëren op een manier die ingegeven is door een dominantie ideologie die kinderen afschildert alsof ze noch kritisch noch geïnformeerd genoeg zijn om het nieuws te begrijpen. Daarom besluiten we in dit artikel dat ondanks het feit dat de interesse van volwassenen- als doelgroep van het nieuws- als een vanzelfsprekendheid gezien wordt, de aantoonbare interesse van kinderen in

journaaluitzending grotendeels onzichtbaar blijft. Daaruit volgend werden de vragen ‘hoe percipiëren kinderen de representatie van de kindertijd in televisienieuws’ en ‘hoe percipiëren volwassenen de representatie van kinderen in televisienieuws’ aan het artikel toegevoegd.

In de conclusie van deze dissertatie gaan we in op de rol van nieuwsmedia in de sociale constructie van de kindertijd(en) in Albanië. Op basis van dit multi-methodologische onderzoek komen een aantal omvattende conclusies aan de oppervlakte. De representatie van kinderen en de kindertijd zijn ingeschreven in specifieke ideologieën over kinderen die opereren in de socio-culturele dimensie van de samenleving. Aan de ene kant worden deze ideologieën aan het publiek gepresenteerd als een reflectie van hun eigen overtuigingen en waarden inzake de kindertijd en aan de andere kant worden ze versterkt door de geïnternaliseerde praktijken van media professionals in nieuwsmedia. Kinderen worden door deze dominante ideologieën onderworpen aan het ‘monopolie’ van volwassenen op kennis over de kindertijd terwijl hun mogelijkheden tot het geven van hun eigen mening en visie over hun ervaringen gereduceerd wordt. Deze dynamiek heeft als uiteindelijk gevolg dat kinderen, in al hun verscheidenheid, niet actief deel kunnen nemen aan de publieke sfeer.