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- Jorida RUSTEMI • Erion KRISTO • Valbona BANKA
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WOMEN IN THE LEADERSHIP AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WRITTEN ALBANIAN PRESS 1848-2024

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ABSTRACT¹

During the 19th century National Awakening, visionary intellectuals, most notably Sami Frashëri, conceptualized women's education as a fundamental catalyst for national emancipation and social modernization. Despite this early advocacy, the active integration of women into the public sphere and the professional press was long stifled by restrictive historical contingencies and traditional socio-cultural structures. This study provides a critical analysis of the evolution of women's roles within the Albanian press, grounded in an extensive longitudinal documentary analysis. Utilizing the Registry of the Written Albanian Press (1848-2024) as its primary empirical framework, the research examines the transition of women from peripheral contributors to central editorial leaders. The analysis is structured across four transformative epochs: the foundational years pre-1912, post-independence, the socialist era (1945-1990), and the contemporary democratic period (1991-2024). A primary focus of this paper is the institutional "turning point"

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following the Declaration of Independence. Specifically, it highlights the pioneering leadership of Parashqevi Qiriazi and the establishment of “Ylli i Mëngjesit” (The Morning Star), the first periodical in the Albanian language to be both founded and directed by women. The study further explores the paradox of the socialist period, where numerical participation increased under state mandated gender quotas while remaining ideologically constrained, and concludes with an examination of the post-1991 democratic period, where women emerged as autonomous founders and executives of independent media outlets within Albania, Kosovo, and the diaspora. By synthesizing these historical stages, the paper reveals that overall, only 4.0% of all Albanian periodicals were founded or directed by women (1848–2024), underscoring a pervasive model of structural gender exclusion from media leadership.

Keywords: *Women leadership; Albanian press; Media history; Albanian diaspora; Gender disparity.*

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Introduction

The integration of women into the founding and editorial leadership of the written Albanian press has not followed a linear trajectory. Rather, it has evolved from total exclusion during the National Awakening to an active pioneering role post-independence—exemplified by figures such as Parashqevi Qiriazi and the periodical *Ylli i Mëngjesit*. This progressed into a broader, albeit state-conditioned, participation during the socialist era, ultimately culminating in a more autonomous and authoritative presence within the post-1990 media landscape. Nevertheless, despite this historical evolution, enduring structural and cultural challenges continue to constrain women’s representation and executive decision-making capabilities within the Albanian press.

This article examines the role of women in establishing and directing the

written Albanian press across an expansive historical timeline, tracing the origins of Albanian journalism to the contemporary era. It is grounded in a comprehensive documentary analysis of the Albanian press corpus, encompassing publications within both ethnic Albanian territories and the diaspora.

Historically, the Albanian press has functioned as a primary catalyst for shaping national identity and cultivating social consciousness. Within this framework, women’s contributions were long marginalized and undervalued; however, their role has undergone profound transformations over time.

This study is structured around a systematic chronological analysis of the Albanian press, categorized into four defining historical epochs: 1848-1912, 1913-1944, 1945–1990, and 1991–2024.

This analysis seeks to determine if women were restricted to subordinate editorial roles, or if they successfully

occupied positions as founders and executive directors within the media landscape.

Methodology

This study examining the role and participation of women in the founding and editorial leadership of the written Albanian press serves as an extended summary of a longitudinal research project published in the *Registry of the Written Albanian Press 1848–2024* (Gjeloshi, 2025). Grounded in a comprehensive bibliography of diverse authors and primary periodical sources from both Albanian territories and the diaspora, this registry supplies exhaustive data on periodical titles, publication timelines, founding and directing personnel, and publication frequency. Although the broader registry yields extensive multi-variable data, the scope of the current presentation is strictly delimited to analyzing women's roles in the establishment and executive management of the press across this historical timeframe.

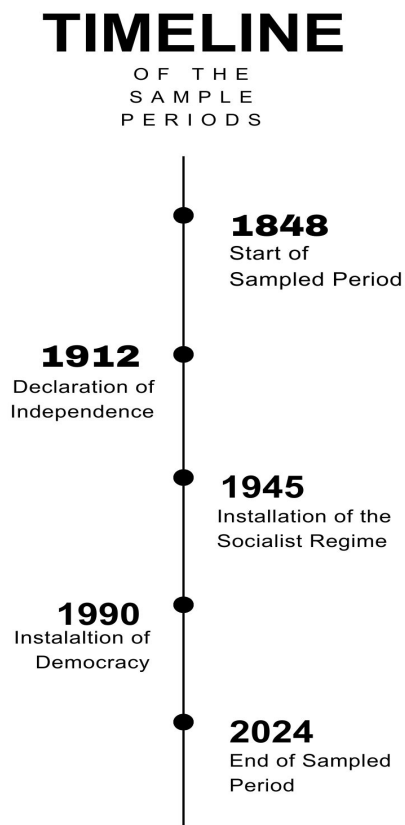
Results and Discussion

For the purposes of this study, drawing upon historical data from the written Albanian press, we have chronologically segmented women's contributions into four distinct periods as shown in figure.

The first period from 1848 when the first Albanian-language newspaper was published up to 1912 when the Independence of Albania was declared

A characteristic of this period is male dominance in the press, though the first female figures began to appear in education and journalism. Women's presence in the press in only a very limited capacity, but the ideological and educational foundation for

Figure: *Timeline of the periods analyzed*



their future participation was established. During the National Awakening period, the role of women in the written press was limited. However, this period is significant for creating the ideological and educational base that would later enable their participation. The figures of the Albanian National Awakening, including Sami Frashëri (Frashëri, 2024), emphasized the importance of educating women as a crucial factor for social progress. In this phase, up until the declaration of independence, women were not yet press directors, but they started to engage in educational and cultural life, setting the stage for subsequent developments.

The second period between 1913-1944 when the communist regime was established

Following independence, the first active female figures emerged, such as Parashqevi Qiriazi with *Ylli i Mëngjesit* (The Morning Star) in the diaspora, published in Boston, USA, in 1917. For Qiriazi, executive leadership in the press was not an isolated endeavor, but rather an extension of the national pedagogical project. She utilized her publication as a strategic platform to champion female literacy and the institutionalization of Albanian-language schools, directly responding to the profound political, social, and structural challenges of building an independent educational system during this highly volatile era (Nathanaili, 2016). This was followed by Margo Pozzio with the newspaper *Shpresa Kombëtare* (National Hope), published in Vlora in 1921, which ran for 6 issues. The most prominent example is the magazine *Java* (The Week), a socio-economic and literary publication founded in Tirana in 1937. This magazine ran for 75 issues until 1939 and was founded and directed by the journalist Ikbal Çika.

For this specific period, these are the three women, the first and only ones, who stood out in the history of Albanian journalism, both within Albania and its ethnic territories, as well as in the Diaspora (Daka, 1974; Gjeloši, 2025).

*The third period -**The Socialist Era (1945–1990)*

During this period, there was a slight numerical increase in participation, but a total absence of autonomy in press leadership. This was because the press was centralized in both Albania and Kosovo, while in Macedonia, Montenegro, and the Diaspora, no women directed a

periodical, newspaper, or magazine during these years. In the socialist period, women's participation in the media grew slightly in numerical and institutional terms. However, this growth was not always accompanied by real editorial autonomy, as the press functioned within a controlled ideological system. Thus, women were more present in media structures but faced clear limitations in decision-making and independent leadership (Gjeloši, 2025).

In Albania, during the communist era, women led only two magazines for a long time: *Fatosi*, a magazine for children in the early grades of eight-year school, and the magazine *Shqiptarja e Re* (The New Albanian Woman), a magazine for women. For the former, Shpresa Vreto served as editor-in-chief for an extended period. For the latter, the successive editors-in-chief were Ballkize Halili, Lavdie Leka (the longest-serving editor-in-chief), and finally Valentina Leskaj, and for some time the magazine “Shkenca dhe Jeta”. This period also includes the editors-in-chief of two local newspapers from 1985 to 1990: Violeta Gudha at the newspaper *Pararoja* (The Vanguard), an organ of the Labor Party Committee of the Gjirokastrë district, who led this newspaper from 1985 to 1990; and Nadja Xheblati, who directed the newspaper *Tirana*, a local organ of the Labor Party Committee of the Tirana district, from its first issue in 1987 until 1990 (Tribuna e gazetarit, 1990).

In Kosovo, the only periodical directed by women was the monthly magazine *Kosovarja*, and the editor-in-chief who led it for 20 years, from 1975 to 1995, was Sanije Gashi. Meanwhile, in Macedonia, Montenegro, and the Diaspora during this period, no periodicals were directed by women (Gjeloši, 2025).

The Contemporary Fourth Period (1991–2024)

The establishment of political and media pluralism following the systemic shifts of 1990 catalyzed a profound transformation within the structural dynamics of the Albanian media landscape. This epoch marks a definitive transition from conditional participation to comprehensive professional and institutional integration. Women emerged not merely as contributors, but as media founders, editorial directors, and autonomous stakeholders within a competitive media market. In stark contrast to both the foundational and socialist periods, the proliferation of Albanian-language periodicals established or led by women experienced a significant and measurable expansion.

Regional Analysis of the Fourth Period

Empirical data from the pan-Albanian space within ethnic territories reveals distinct patterns of female media leadership (Gjeloshi, 2025):

- **Albania:** Research identifies over 55 national and local magazines and newspapers featuring approximately 62 women in founding or directorial roles. Several prominent periodicals continue to shape the contemporary market, including: *NewsBomb.al* (monthly magazine), founded and directed by Anila Basha; *Psikologjia* (monthly magazine), founded by Fabjola Hysenbelliu; *Bordo*, directed by Ilda Lumani; *Living*, Directed by Ridvana Dulaku; *Monitor*, directed by Ornela Liperi; *Paloma*, founded by Aulona Musta; *Tellalli*, founded by Arta Agolli; *Art dhe Trashëgimi*, founded by Ilda Mara.
- **Kosovo:** Between 1991 and 2024, 14 periodicals were published under female leadership. A pivotal figure is

Margarita Kadriu, who directed three distinct organs: the monthly *Elita* (1998), the award-winning *Kosova Sot* (2001), and the monthly *OK KIDS*. Additionally, veteran journalist Sanije Gashi, former head of *Kosovarja*, established and directed the women's magazine *Tenta*.

- **North Macedonia:** Four female journalists directed three periodicals. These include the monthly *Magazina familjare* in Struga (directed by Kujtime Kica), *Doright* (led by Biljana Domovska in 2009), and the University of Tetovo's periodical *Përtej* (directed collaboratively by Albulena Zulbehari and Lugina Ajro).
- **Montenegro:** Two magazines are documented under female leadership: *Nora*, the state's first women's magazine, directed by Shefika Gjoni, and the school-focused *Yjet e detit*, directed by Sahibe Hoxha.

The Albanian Diaspora in the Fourth Period

In the Albanian Diaspora, specifically across the USA, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, and Italy, eight periodicals were published under the direction of eight women during this contemporary period (Gjeloshi, 2025). Key diaspora milestones include:

- **USA:** In 1999, the magazine *Shpresa* was published in New York by the Albanian-American Women's Organization "Motrat Qiriazi," featuring Lumnije Boriçi as editor-in-chief. Later, in 2016, Afërdita Delaj founded and directed the monthly *Votra*.
- **Austria:** Kozeta Dragoj published *Tinguj malli* in 2005.
- **Belgium:** Poet Elona Zhana published the newspaper *Albania* in 2009,

recognized by media historians as the “second series” of Faik Konica’s historic publication.

- **Denmark:** A collective of young Albanian women founded and directed an Albanian-language culinary magazine active between 1999 and 2003.
- **Greece:** Two independent weeklies were established in Athens: *Tribuna* (2004), founded by Diana Goro, and *Plus Gazeta e Athinës* (2011), led by Ira Londo, recognized as the largest publication for Albanian immigrants in the country.
- **Italy:** In 2018, Eltona Lakuriqi published the bilingual cultural magazine *Alternativa*, printed in both Albanian and Italian.

Crucially, the data reveals a total absence of female directors in several countries with a historically high volume of Albanian-language publications, namely Romania (33 periodicals), Switzerland (26), Turkey (15), Bulgaria (10), and the Arbëresh regions of Italy (40).

The remarkably low figures, particularly the 2.2% leadership rate in the diaspora and 4.5% in the territories, do not merely represent a numerical deficiency; they provide empirical evidence of the structural exclusion of women from decision-making positions within public communication. Historically, the press functioned as a vital instrument for articulating national identity and political-cultural discourse. The near-total male dominance in executive leadership suggests that the production and control of these public narratives were fundamentally masculinized. Consequently, women’s participation, even when present at the level of authorship, rarely equated to commensurate executive access.

To conceptualize why the transition to democracy post-1990 did not precipitate immediate gender parity in leadership, one must examine the sociology of post-socialist transitions. As Tlostanova (2015) elucidates, the “top-down” gender equality mandated during the communist era often “lost its way in translation” during the shift to democratic pluralism. In many post-Soviet and post-socialist spaces, this systemic transition inadvertently catalyzed a resurgence of traditionalism and patriarchal norms, utilized as a mechanism to reclaim perceived national “roots” (Tlostanova, 2015). This theoretical framework effectively explains the structural continuity of gender inequalities within the contemporary media landscape.

A comparative examination of the diaspora and the territories comprising the pan-Albanian ethnic space (Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and the Presevo Valley) indicates a structural continuity rather than a fundamental shift in gender dynamics. Although the proportion of women-led press organs in the ethnic territories (4.5%) marginally exceeds that of the diaspora (2.2%), the empirical data essentially reaffirms a pervasive model of structural gender exclusion from media leadership.

This numerical variance, while statistically observable, does not denote a structural turning point. In both socio-geographical contexts, women remain acutely underrepresented in the executive control of the written Albanian press. Consequently, both the diaspora and the ethnic territories emerge as environments wherein the production and strategic direction of public discourse have been historically monopolized by men. This dynamic actively reflects and reproduces the broader systemic gender inequalities

embedded within Albanian society. Analytically, the marginal increase from 2.2% to 4.5% operates within the same overarching logic of exclusion, albeit at a slightly mitigated frequency.

Conclusions

In totality, encompassing both the ethnic Albanian territories and the global diaspora, 2,202 periodicals have been published and circulated throughout history. Of this extensive corpus, a mere 89 periodicals were founded or directed by women, constituting just 4.0% of the entire historical media landscape in all territories. The aggregate of the statistical synthesis is shown in table.

When situated within a global theoretical framework, this localized data highlights severe representational deficits. The 2020 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) report indicated that, despite

incremental growth in general female media presence, women still appear as subject matter experts in only 24% of global media coverage (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2020). Furthermore, comprehensive industry research has documented that women hold approximately 27% of top-tier management and executive positions within the global media sector (Byerly, 2011).

When contrasted against these international benchmarks, the 4.0% executive leadership rate identified in the Albanian press suggests the existence of a particularly rigid and entrenched “glass ceiling” (Byerly, 2011; Ross, 2014). This severe disparity underscores a distinct localized manifestation of gender exclusion that significantly trails global averages, signaling an urgent need for targeted policy interventions, structural reforms within domestic media organizations, and a deeper interrogation of the systemic barriers perpetuating this institutional inertia.

Table: *Women’s Leadership in the Albanian Press (1848–2024) by Territory*

Region	Total Periodicals	Periodicals Directed by Women	% of Total
Albania	1,454	>60	4.1%
Kosovo	256	15	5.8%
North Macedonia	65	3	4.6%
Montenegro	22	2	9.0%
Ethnic Territories Subtotal	1,797	80	4.5%
Diaspora	405	9	2.2%
Pan-Albanian Grand Total	2,202	89	4.0%

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