



The representation of the literary corpus and figure of Ismail Kadare, the most famous Albanian writer, in the pages of Spanish media. (El País and ABC)

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ABSTRACT

The widely known Albanian writer, Ismail Kadare, is the most important representative of the Albanian literature and culture in Spain. El País and ABC, dedicated to Kadare almost all the articles in total, which are related to cultural news on Albania during two decades, 1990-2010. Usually Kadare appears on both newspapers whenever his books are published or republished in Spanish. Both newspapers consider him as “eternal candidate of the Nobel Prize in Literature”, “a living genius”, “one of the greatest names of the contemporary world literature”, “master of prose”, similar to Kafka and Borges. Kadare’s example shows how an important writer makes known and helps create a profile for his country through the international media.

Keywords: Ismail Kadare, literature, Albania, newspaper, El País, ABC

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article I will focus on how El País and ABC have handled the literary corpus of Ismail Kadare, the most widely known Albanian writer. I will also report comments by Spanish media on the Albanian writer from the moment he left the country in 1990, just as the communist period was about to end, and afterwards, when he settled in France where he sought the political asylum. Taking into account that El País is a left-wing newspaper, while

ABC a right-wing one, I will try to identify differences, if any, in the way Spanish newspapers presented the Albanian writer and his literary work. I will focus upon Albania's image in the Spanish press, as presented by Kadare.

I used the online archives of the above-mentioned newspapers, El País and ABC, during the period of 1990-2010. I have selected them because they are two of three daily national general newspapers. El País is the leader of the Spanish press and reference of information in Spanish language in the world. Given that articles in Albanian appearing in the Spanish press are relatively rare I have extended the period under investigation during a time span of two decades.

During the period 1990-2010, El País and ABC wrote about Ismail Kadare 47 of 51 articles in total focused on Albanian culture overall. Most of the attention to the Albanian writer was given by ABC newspaper with 35 articles, while El País published on its front page of June 25th, 2009, a news about the Albanian writer being awarded the prestigious literary prize of *Príncipe de Asturias de las Letras*. El País literary supplement, *Babelia*, wrote about Kadare in its front page of October 9th, 2009, associating his photo with the title: "El enigma Kadare", with the subtitle "The Albanian writer, *Príncipe de Asturias* Prize renovates political literature".

Kadare's books have contributed for the Spanish readership to know Albania. This is confirmed also by the words of the Peruvian Nobel Prize winner, Mario Vargas Llosa, who wrote in an opinion published by El País that "I have never been in Albania, but I know this country by the good works of Ismail Kadare".¹

He is considered as "eternal candidate of Nobel Prize in Literature", "a living genius", "one of the greatest names of world literature today", "the most universal of the regionalist writers", "the most reputed Albanian writer", who has an "unique sense of humor", "ambassador of the national pride", etc.

Usually Kadare appears on the pages of these two newspapers whenever his work is published or republished in Spanish. About 30 Kadare's books have been published in Spanish, most of them by the gifted Spanish translator Ramón Sánchez Lizarralde, winner of the "National Translation Prize" in 1993, for his translation of Kadare's novel "The concert".

¹Llosa, Mario Vargas. *El país de las águilas*. El País. 23.03.1997.
https://elpais.com/diario/1997/03/23/opinion/859071603_850215.html

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2009 was the year in which news on Kadare, - whose work has been translated in more than 40 languages around the world, - were published most frequently with 13 articles. This is due to the award of the most prestigious literature prize in Spain, “Príncipe de Asturias de las Letras”.

Besides his career as a writer, these Spanish newspapers have reported on other moments of his life, like his escape from Albania in 1990 and his settling in Paris, as well as his staunch defense of the rights of Albanians in Kosovo, oppressed by the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic in the bloody conflict of 1999.

1.1 Presentation of the literary work

Albania still remains an enigmatic country for the Spanish and this is true of her literature, too. In Spain, Albanian literature is entirely represented to readers by Ismail Kadare, the winner of numerous international prestigious prizes, including Man Booker Prize in 2005, the most prestigious in the Anglo-Saxon world.

With time, the reputation of Kadare has increasingly grown up, to such an extent that he is permanently a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

In an interview with Kadare, entitled “Ya no pienso en el Nobel, désenlo a Albania” (I do not think about the Nobel Prize, give it to Albania), the ABC journalist Ramiro Villapadierna writes about the Albanian writer as “an eternal candidate of the Nobel Prize” and as “the voice of the internal exile during the repressive dictatorship of Hoxha”.²

On the occasion of the publication in Spanish of his novel “The concert” in 1992, the ABC journalist Beatriz Hernanz wrote that “... this gorgeous narrative only, very well written, would suffice for Kadare to deserve his place among the most important European writers of the current literary scene”.³

² Villapadierna, Ramiro, *Ya no pienso en el Nobel, désenlo a Albania*, ABC, 13.05.1994, p.16-17.
<http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/cultural/1994/05/13/017.html>

³ Hernanz, Beatriz. *El Concierto*, ABC, 26.03. 1992.
<http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/cultural/1993/03/26/013.html>

His Spanish translator, Ramón Sánchez Lizarralde, said that for him is a privilege to translate Kadare, whom he considers “to be a living genius, that gave up everything just to devote himself to literature”.⁴

Both newspapers underline the fact that Kadare wrote most of his works during the communist period (1944-1991), which he denounced using literary figures such as symbols, parallels, metaphors, etc. On the other hand, by doing so he managed to avoid the censorship and potential punishments by Enver Hoxha’s communist regime, who turned Albania into the most isolated country in Europe. “Kadare was not a dissident, but he is a great writer who lived and wrote in an isolated country, closely controlled by an obsessed communist regime”, declares Lizarralde to ABC.⁵

Due to his high quality literature, which also served as publicity for socialist Albania abroad, Kadare was praised by the communist dictator Enver Hoxha and was member of various state institutions of the communist regime, with which he had an ambiguous relationship. Because of his reputation he was able not to apply dogmatically in his literary works the ideological schemes of the regime, and by doing so he refused to become a spoke-person of the regime, unlike the majority of the Albanian writers of social realism.⁶ “His international prestige was a source of incredible pride for the dictator and also a kind of a shield that helped him from purges and banishment”.⁷

Considering him as “the most famous writer of his country”, Spanish newspapers point out that most of the works of Kadare were dedicated to important periods of the country’s history, such as the Ottoman period, the fascist-nazi occupation of the country during the World War II, the split between communist Albania and Nikita Khrushchev’s Soviet Union in 1960 and the later rupture with China in 1978.

⁴ Lizarralde, Ramón Sánchez, *Un genio vivo que renunció a todo*, ABC. 25.06.2009.
http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-25-06-2009/abc/Opinion/un-genio-vivo-que-renuncio-a-todo_922012182053.html

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ López de la Paz, Francisco. *Dictadura de la ignorancia*. ABC. 10.10.2009.
http://sevilla.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-10-10-2009/sevilla/Opinion/dictadura-de-la-ignorancia_103540311580.html

⁷ Galán, Lola, *Kadare, el sobreviviente*, El País, 03.10.2009.
https://elpais.com/diario/2009/10/03/babelia/1254528735_850215.html

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Unlike the Czech writer and dissident Vaclav Havel, they also refer to the fact that Kadare has repeatedly refused to be actively engaged in politics, and has insisted to continue with his profession as a writer.

In an interview to El País in Paris, in 1991, Kadare declared: “I am interested in literature. I will help democracy as a writer and not as a politician”.⁸

In both newspapers, Kadare is presented as a master in using myths, popular legends and ballads, like in the novels “The Ghost Rider”, “The General of the Dead Army”, “Twilight of the Eastern Gods”, “The Palace of Dreams”, “The traitor’s Niche”, “The Monster”, etc.

Two of the most cited Kadare’s myths are the coming back of the dead and the blood-vengeance.

Weaving thousand-year-old legends about historical realities, mixing dream and epic, Kadare looks like a Gorky who sang in the manner of old Homer and who also had a sense of tragic fatality as Aeschylus, that eternal loser to whom he dedicated a remarkable essay.⁹

In his novels, reality, fantasy and history are intertwined with a certain magical Balkan realism, deviating from socialist realism. More than anyone else, Kadare knew how to raise to high levels a small country’s literature. Like other great writers, Kadare is able to trigger the curiosity of the readers even about the less important features of the characters of his books.

Kadare is compared to Franz Kafka because many of his novels are based upon the allegory of the loneliness and the powerlessness of the individual in front of the complex, absurd and heartless state machinery, and with Jorge Luis Borges for his unforgettable metaphorical spaces.¹⁰

While praising his style, which in most of the cases comes through black humor, Kadare is defined by both newspapers as a writer who deals with universal themes and most of all as a master of exploring the relationship of the individual with power, the operation of the state machinery in totalitarian regimes.

⁸Valenzuela, Javier, *El exilio como escándalo*, El País, 23.09.1991.
https://elpais.com/diario/1991/09/23/cultura/685576810_850215.html

⁹Clavel, Andre, *Ismail Kadare, profundamente albanés*. El País. 22.11.1990.
https://elpais.com/diario/1990/11/22/cultura/659228416_850215.html

¹⁰Vidal-Folch, Ignacio. *Un sabor inconfundible*. El País. 25.06.2009.
https://elpais.com/diario/2009/06/25/cultura/1245880803_850215.html

According to El País newspaper, “Palace of dreams” should be ranked as the Kadare’s best work, “a gigantic parody about the perversity of the totalitarian regime. A perversity of a kind that no other writer would be able to imagine: the manipulation of the dreams of people in order to subdue them also in their sleep”.¹¹

They also stress the intellectual love of Kadare for Miguel Cervantes, autor of “El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha” (1605), one of the masterpieces of world literature. “For Kadare, the Knight of Mancha and Prometheus are two characters of universal literature that have become a cultural heritage of humanity”.

1.2 Portrayal of a political asylum seeker

Taking advantage of a ceremony for the promotion of one of his books by the French Editing House “Fayard”, Kadare escaped from Albania in September 1990 and sought political asylum in France. In his letter sent to the last communist president of the country Ramiz Alia, Kadare explained that with his act he wanted to push forward the democratic transformation of the country, in a moment when Albania remained the last communist country in Eastern Europe, although the Berlin Wall had fallen in 1989.

The two Spanish newspapers reported this event in their pages. In the article entitled “Kadare left, Stalin remained”, El País stresses that Ismail Kadare, the Albanian national writer par excellence, requested political asylum in France, where he travelled to publicize his last work translated into French. El País presented Kadare as “a national hero, who in recent years has tried to push the regime towards reforms, but always without openly defying it”.¹²

An other article by El País, titled “Kadare’s escape shocked Albania”, says that “the request for political asylum in France by the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare has caused a serious shock in Albania. As soon as the news arrived in Tirana, the books of Kadare, which occupied the place of honor in bookshops were removed from the shelves”¹³.

¹¹Clavel, Andre. *Ismail Kadare, profundamente albanés*, El País, 22.11.1990.
https://elpais.com/diario/1990/11/22/cultura/659228416_850215.html

¹²Tertsch, Hermann. *Kadare se va, Stalin se queda*. El País,
https://elpais.com/diario/1990/10/26/internacional/656895609_850215.html

¹³Tertsch, Hermann, *La fuga de Kadare, conmociona Albania*, El País, 27.10.1990.
https://elpais.com/diario/1990/10/27/internacional/656982020_850215.html

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On its part, ABC newspaper writes that the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare has requested political asylum in France because “in Albania there is no chance to have a legal opposition”.¹⁴

The same newspaper writes about Kadare’s return to the country in May 1992, after his one-year and a half exile in Paris, and after the fall of the communist regime in Albania when an anti-communist party, Democratic Party, was already in power. Under the title: “Kadare comes back after a long winter to newly-started Albanian spring”, ABC reminds that the writer “kept his promise when he left to France: I will return one day, when democracy will win”.¹⁵

2. CONCLUSIONS

It comes out in this study, the first of its kind in Albania, that Spanish media, more specifically, El País and ABC, transmitted a positive image of the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare to their readers, whom they identify as “the eternal Nobel Prize candidate in Literature”. Almost all cultural news on Albania are connected with the figure of Kadare, considered to be “one of the greatest international names of the current literature” and “the most famous Albanian of the 20th century”. Living under severe conditions of a totalitarian regime, but with his enormous talent, Kadare managed to deal with universal themes and enabled the Albanian literature, which comes from a small country, to be internationally recognized and praised.

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¹⁴*El exilio de Kadare*. ABC. 03.11.1990.

<http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/1990/11/03/016.html>

¹⁵Villapadierna, Ramiro, *Kadare regresa, tras el gran invierno a la incipiente primavera albanesa*. ABC. 12.05.1992. pp.62. <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/1992/05/12/062.html>

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